**White Balance B Logo that is shaped like a heart. 
**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2020 | 2021**



Rehabilitation services for people with sight loss.

We listen. We teach.

We support…the whole person.

From wherever you are in your journey, to wherever you may be going, we provide the services and programs you will need to get there.

**Inclusion**

**Respect**

**Trust**

**Independence**

**Empathy**



*“Anything that BALANCE has done, they have done with the utmost consideration for the blind community."*

Client response

2020 Client Feedback Survey

**Land Acknowledgement**

We at BALANCE for Blind Adults respectfully acknowledge that we operate, and are currently meeting on, the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. This land remains a home, gathering place and travel route for many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands. In a spirit of reconciliation and gratitude for those who first occupied these lands, we offer thanks for the histories, languages and traditions that influence us to this day.

BALANCE’s work with blind Canadians stems from a long history of marginalization and inequity and now hinges on core values of inclusion, respect, empathy, trust and independence. We share some of this history with, and extend all our values to, members of Canada's Indigenous communities. By living and practicing these values each day, we hope to both honour and forge new connections with all residents and creatures of Turtle Island and beyond.

**BALANCE Board of Directors 2020-21**

Michelle McQuigge Board Chair

Bob Stark Past Chair

Dr. Keith Gordon Vice Chair

Robin Dafoe Secretary

Anne (Hurka) MacPhee Treasurer

Dr. Virginia Duff Board Member

Joeita Gupta Board Member

Darren R. Harper Board Member

Stephen Ricci Board Member

Marcus M. Song Board Member

Meenakshi Venkatesan Board Member

Celena Lee Board Support

Emily Laevens Board Support

**BALANCE Staff & Contractors 2020/ 2021**

Dr. Deborah Gold Executive Director

Doug Poirier Assistive Technology Instructor

George Quarcoo Assistive Technology Instructor

Chloe Thibault Reception/ Groups Coordinator

Bill Phung Orientation and Mobility Instructor/ Data Specialist

Anita Laurnitus Orientation and Mobility Instructor/ Volunteer Coordinator

Cristina Lopes Community Engagement Services

Ann Park Wellness Team Member

Shaunelle Gregory Wellness Team Member

Troy Taylor Office Assistant

Naomi Hazlett Occupational Therapist

Lisa Derencinovic Counsellor/ MSW RSW

Kristyn Lee Occupational Therapy Assistant

Beverley Murray Grant Writer

Sandy Feldman Web Designer

Margrett Weldon Client Satisfaction Surveyor

Zainab Malek AT Apprentice

Michael Sidarose AT Apprentice

**Message from the Board Chair**

When I wrote my message last year, BALANCE for Blind Adults and the world at large were in the middle of adjusting to a life turned upside down by COVID-19. One year later, with signs that the worst of this pandemic may actually be behind us, I’m proud to once again sing the praises of BALANCE, its staff, its board and its work for Toronto’s blind community.

While COVID-19 made it necessary for BALANCE to provide most of its services virtually throughout the year, it’s been incredible to watch the organization create new ways to serve clients. Services have expanded and adapted to the current climate, and staff kept community members feeling connected during a time of increased isolation. Our Board is also proud of the organization’s efforts to ensure and support access to the COVID-19 vaccines. I have been both moved and impressed by BALANCE’s willingness to provide concrete, hands-on support to help keep our community safe.

The pandemic, of course, has not been the only challenge to navigate in 2020-21. At the 2020 Annual General Meeting (AGM), I made a promise of BALANCE’s commitment to denouncing and combatting racism, particularly as it affects members of our community. I’m pleased to say that this work has begun. The board is keen to ensure its membership reflects the diversity of Canada’s sight loss community and is actively pursuing increased training and awareness on related issues.

I’m also pleased to announce that the board has crafted BALANCE’s first Land Acknowledgement. We will be undertaking broader consultations to make sure the Land Acknowledgement represents a meaningful move towards reconciliation and inclusion.

Our strong and dynamic Board is a group of exceptionally intelligent and talented volunteers with a wide array of professional and personal perspectives. Our Board ensures that BALANCE is guided with knowledge and grace, ensuring the organization is always there for its clients. Board members, thank you. Thanks are also due to our Board Administrative Support volunteers Emily Johansen and Celena Li. The Board wants also to thank our Executive Director and her dedicated staff team, who truly make BALANCE the unique and valuable organization that it is.

The Board wishes to thank the Ministry of Health for our core funding, and all of our foundations, sponsors and donors for helping to make this another successful year of programming and service. And finally, thank you to all our clients. Your trust in BALANCE is why we’re here and drives our every decision. Thank you for your ongoing support, and please stay happy and healthy as we hopefully turn the page on this turbulent pandemic era.

Michelle McQuigge

*Board Chair 2019-2021*

***Pictured****: Michelle standing in a purple dress, gazing out a window to her left. A black guide dog is sitting at her feet.*



**Message from the Executive Director**

This past year has clearly demonstrated both our strength and our flexibility as an organization, and as a community. While there were numerous difficulties and challenges for us during this year, there were also many achievements and highlights.

I want to thank the staff team from the bottom of my heart for their hard work over an extraordinary year. Even while working across distances and alone from our homes, our team became closer as we had to problem solve together.

What characterized the “BALANCEd” approach?

We were available to help. In November 2020, we conducted a client survey concerning our COVID-19 response and the support we provided. Clients told us we were there for them early on and able to help them out right away. We also began to expand entertaining and fun online experiences and events for our community.

We responded to the holistic needs of our clients.

Throughout the year, we added services to support our clients’ mental health. One major highlight was our TeleSupport Team, which supported more than 150 clients with regular check-in phone calls throughout the year, and helped to reduce isolation and meet people’s needs for community resources.

We reached out to the wider community.

Throughout the year we offered a whopping 175 group sessions online. The number and variety of groups offered meant that we expanded our reach to participants who had never used our 1:1 services.

We also were able to provide meaningful group participation to people outside of Toronto because of technology. Our reach also grew through the new community partnerships we initiated, the launch of our very successful monthly podcast, the start up of the AT Apprenticeship Program, and our vaccine engagement work.

We broke a record.

The year ending March 31, 2021, BALANCE provided service to a record 197 individuals. This represents a 95% increase from 2016, when I joined the organization. COVID-19 has challenged us all, and also opened many new doors.

However, all of the service expansion of 2020-21, combined with the demand for virtual groups, indicates we have a very bright future, and we look forward to it with excitement and a renewed sense of purpose.

Deborah Gold

*Executive Director*

*****Pictured****: Deborah Gold standing against a white wall. She is smiling , and has glasses on. She is wearing a black cardigan and a grey shirt.*

**Selected Statistics**

**2020/21** 2019/20

New Intakes (Clients) **42**  67

Unique Individuals Served **197**  167

Total Visits **1,461** 1,279

Total Service Hours **1,520** 1,792.5

Face to Face Service (in hours) **226**

Telephone Service (in hours) **1,216**

Group Sessions **175**

Group Participations **769**

Clients Completed Service **131**

**Condensed Financial Statements**

**2020/21**  2019/20

**ASSETS**

Current Assets

Cash **104,040** 75,493

Investments **368,265**  319,585

Accounts receivable and prepaid expenses **24,398** 11,048

**496,703** 406,126

Capital Assets

**512,647**  406,126

**LIABILITIES**

Current Liabilities

Accounts Payable and accrued liabilities **55,854**  27,828

Due to Ministry of Health **62,959**  6,124

Deferred revenue **24,132** 8,731

**142,945**  42,683

Deferred capital contributions **15,944**

**158,889**  42,683

**NET ASSETS**

General Fund  **339,090**  348,086

Colin Haines Fund **14,668**  15,357

**353,758**  363,443

**$512,647**  $406,126

**Condensed Financial Statements Continued**

**2020/21**  2019/20

**Summary Statement of Revenues and Expenses**

**Year Ended March 31, 2021**

Revenues

Ministry of Health program funding **493,650**  532,458

Donations and fundraising **30,005** 47,669

Investment and sundry income **697**  5,084

Other grants/ projects **20,806**  58,567

**545,158**  643,776

Expenses

Salaries and Employee Benefits **408,559**  417,527

Occupancy **41,677** 40,103

Professional Fees **32,171** 40,103

General and Operating **22,039** 26,014

Communication **21,836** 31,508

Training Centre and other funded expenses **6,857** 7,160

Disbursement from Colin Haines fund **745**  731

Fundraising **153**  5,572

Other grants/ projects **20,806** 58,567

**554,843** 604,045

Excess (deficiency) of revenues over

Expenses for the year **$(9,685)**  $39,733

**Tom Dekker Assistive Technology Achievement**

*At our 2021 Annual General Meeting, we announced the recipients of the first annual Tom Dekker Assistive Technology Achievement Award. These awards were created by the BALANCE Board of Directors in December of 2020 to recognize the extraordinary efforts of two students in Assistive Technology. Awardees were selected by our Assistive Technology instructors at the time.*

Parnian Abdul Ghafoor

When asked about what she’s most proud of in her AT journey, Parnian said: “I feel very proud when I am preparing PowerPoint presentations, before I started my learning journey. I thought it was impossible, but I did learn it.”

Through her lessons, she has been able to use her phone more and more, accessing online banking, Zoom, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and email. She mentioned that she “enjoyed navigating the blackboard, when [her] classes were online, and learning Microsoft applications.”

She said that through her hard work and determination, and after a year and a half of learning, she was able to achieve all of her goals. She also wanted to thank BALANCE staff member Cristina Lopes for pushing her to learn all of these programs so that she could get a good job.

Anna Rago

Anna Rago said that when she first met George, she didn't even know how to turn an iPad on. She went on to say: "I had no knowledge of technology whatsoever. Now I can send messages. I can send emails. I do my own banking online... I am proud of the fact that I can do these things."

When asked what she enjoyed most about her newly acquired skills, she said: "What I really enjoy is being able to communicate with family and friends online. I enjoy FaceTime with my grandchildren, sending messages to my friends, and corresponding through email."

When asked if there was anything she disliked about her AT journey, she shared that Safari wasn't her favourite to navigate, but that she would keep trying and learning.

**Vaccine Rollout Support**

In February 2021, as plans for the vaccine rollout began in Toronto, BALANCE reached out to our clients to chat about the vaccines, provide up to date information and vaccination booking support if needed. In total, we called over 80 clients before the end of March, and then continued to support the roll-out in concrete ways in the beginning of the 2021-22 fiscal year.

We look forward to reporting Vaccine Engagement details in next year’s annual report, including: numbers supported; production of vaccine hesitancy videos; City of Toronto vaccine engagement partnership; Ambassador activity and City of Toronto Vaccine Accessibility Task Force membership. We have been busy!



**Pictured:**

Staff members Cristina Lopes and Bill Phung at the MTCC accessible vaccine clinic, with masks on and face shields. They are standing in front of a multi-coloured poster with text that reads "I Got My COVID-19 Vaccine."

**Thank you to our Volunteers!**

2020 was a year that challenged all of us. With a global pandemic, BALANCE for Blind Adults had to quickly pivot on how we provided services and unfortunately, all our in-person volunteer support had to come to an end. Most of our volunteers continued to commit their time to our virtual programs and we also saw a growth in numbers as people started to look for new ways to give back. Throughout the pandemic, 12 new volunteers were on-boarded to assist in virtual groups like Trivia Night, Coffee Connections and reading our weekly newsletter. When the whole world was staying in, our volunteers assisted in our virtual groups that connected our clients to each other and the outside world.

Anita Laurnitus

*BALANCE Volunteer Coordinator*

Volunteering for BALANCE has been both rewarding and exciting. I have been providing support to the Beyond Siri workshops, monthly Let’s Get Quizzical events, and weekly Coffee Connections. BALANCE has helped me to build my confidence, my professional experience, and a sense of community. I started volunteering during COVID which I found easier with the creation of virtual roles. The most rewarding part of the virtual roles is meeting new people from all parts of the country and hearing their different stories. It is very fulfilling to provide support regardless of the distance and to put a smile on faces. From my time volunteering, I have come to know people, their stories, their cultures and learned so much about the blind community. I am very excited to continue volunteering with BALANCE and I am looking forward for what the future holds.

Savina Nankoo

*BALANCE Volunteer*

**TeleSupport Team**

In March of 2020, BALANCE for Blind Adults repositioned staff who were unable to get out to meet clients and created the TeleSupport Team. The TeleSupport team followed up with clients to see what supports were needed throughout the sight loss community during the COVID-19 pandemic and isolation period, and we did our best to connect clients with those supports. During the December holidays, this led to a community food drive, and a partnership with Feed It Forward.

When staff returned to in-person services, volunteers continued to support BALANCE’s Community Engagement Services with follow-up calls to clients.

The TeleSupport Team provided support to a total of 165 BALANCE clients, providing resources, services and a listening ear. 568 calls were made, making up 264 staff hours. BALANCE is proud of the work we accomplished, and hope that our support was able to make a difference in the lives of our clients.

Cristina Lopes

*TeleSupport Lead*

**Pictured:** Deborah Gold and Cristina Lopes standing outside with their purple BALANCE masks on. They are standing in front of a car trunk with boxes of food from the Feed It Forward holiday food drive.

**Groups and Programs**

2020-2021 marked an exciting year for groups and events at BALANCE. Our pivot to the virtual world of Zoom opened up many opportunities; not just to diversify our offerings, but to extend our reach to participants across Canada.

This year, BALANCE ran a total of **27 groups and events** and served **approximately 700 people** in our groups**.**

As the pandemic took center stage in many of our lives, BALANCE first and foremost recognized the importance of addressing the wellbeing of our community by offering ongoing classes such as Yoga, Living with Uncertainty, Guided Movement and Meditation and our Sharing Space Support Group.

One-time events such as How to Assess Safety in the Home, and the COVID-19 Presentation from Toronto Public Health also helped support our clients with practical solutions and reliable information. The pivot to living virtually also meant that technology workshops and groups became a staple for staying in touch with the world. Our clients learned new skills with our Beyond Siri series, Let’s Talk Tech Computer workshops, CELA, and Microsoft Soundscape groups.

BALANCE was also able to be creative with some wonderful groups like Good Vibrations, Music Appreciation, our Creative Writing workshops, and the ever-popular Listening Stage Series delivered in partnership with Common Boots Theatre. We would also be remiss if we didn’t mention some of our other recreational groups: Let’s Get Quizzical, the Adventure Zone and Coffee Connections.

Thank you to our community partners and many volunteers for making our groups and event offerings this year so plentiful!

Chloe Thibault

*Groups and Events Coordinator*

**Funding Partners**

Thank you to the following groups and organizations for their support in the 2020-2021 fiscal year. The support of the following organizations allowed us to offer a variety of services and programs to our clients.

Accessible Media Inc. (AMI)

The Arthur and Audrey Cutten Foundation

Service Canada/ Canada Summer Jobs

Hawkey Family

J.P. Bickell Foundation

La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso

LIUNA Local 183

Ontario Ministry of Health

United Way Greater Toronto (ECSF)

**2020/ 2021 Community Partners**

**BALANCE is grateful to the following organizations for their partnership in our community and beyond.**

**We are stronger together.**

ABC Life Literacy

Adventures CCB

AEBC

CCB Toronto Visionaries

CCB National

Centennial College Occupational Therapy Assistant Program

Centre for Independent Living Toronto (CILT)

City of Toronto

CNIB

Common Boots Theatre

COSTI

Dalhousie University Master’s in Social Work Program

Davenport-Perth CHC

Feed it Forward

Fighting Blindness Canada (FBC)

Four Villages CHC

Opera Atelier

PACE Independent Living

Sprint Senior Care

St. Stephen's Community House

Storefront Humber

Toronto Public Health

Tropicana Employment Centre

University of Toronto Department of Occupational Science & Occupational Therapy

VHA Toronto

Vision Loss Rehabilitation Ontario and Canada

Volunteer Toronto

West Toronto OHT Collaborative

Woodgreen Housing Help Centre

York-Seneca Rehabilitation Services Certificate Program

**2020/ 2021 Donors**

BALANCE thanks our many individual donors for their contributions in the 2020/ 2021 year. Your gifts, whether small or large, have made a big difference for our clients during a very challenging year.

Jeanine Allot

Soren Antosz

Laura Barker

Robert Biggs

Julie Bot

Christy Brayley

Debbie Bryane

Janet Cane Roblin

Robin Dafoe

Dorothy de Val

Virginia Duff

Sandy Feldman

Judith Gabor

Sandra Gold

Sarah Hillyer

Terri-Lynn Hulett

Sylvia Jonas

Rahul Kaul

Mark Kim

Eleanor Lobo-Lee

Arlene Mawson

John McCleary

Beverley Murray

Mithila Pathmanathan

Cat Peever

Harvinder & Seema Puri

Christine Simpson

Jeff & Jonna Smith

Orysia Sozanski

Adam Struth

Peter Tsatsanis

Yang Wang

Anna Yin

& many Anonymous Donors

If you would like talk with us about ways you can support our organization, please call our office at 416-236-1796 extension 0, or email us at [info@balancefba.org](mailto:info@balancefba.org).



balancefba.org

info@balancefba.org

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