



Issue 1, 2019

Thank you!

Your support is making a difference to kids like Mackenzie.

In this issue:

- Mackenzie continues to reach important milestones in her life.
- Xavier is shining a little brighter every day.
- Norma is finding her way in the world again - and loving it.





Ron Hooton,
CEO Vision Australia

Thank you! I'm proud to introduce you to some inspirational people who show that losing your vision does not mean you also have to lose your quality of life. And I hope you feel proud because you've played a huge role in helping them achieve their dreams.

Because of your support, children like Xavier and Mackenzie, as well as older Australians like Mary and Norma, have the help they urgently need. Your support is helping inspire people who are blind or have low vision to live with confidence and independence, achieving everything they set their minds to.

Xavier is only eight, but he is flourishing at school and is working hard to become a scientist one day. Mackenzie, who has just turned ten, is also coming along in leaps and bounds - not just in her studies but in horse-riding too!

Norma has a new lease on life - thanks to supporters like you. Her story will surely put a smile on your face.

You can be assured, you truly are changing lives. Thank you so much!

Zavier zooms through school

Like most eight-year olds, Xavier loves soccer, Australian animals and dinosaurs. Unlike many other eight-year olds, Xavier has Leber's Congenital Amaurosis. However, his severe loss of vision hasn't stopped him from going to school, making friends and playing sport.

When Xavier was diagnosed, his mum Stacey feared what his future would hold. But with supporters like you, and with Xavier's own determination, our little hero is amazing everyone with his incredible abilities.

One of Xavier's strengths is his mathematical brain, so it's no surprise that Xavier is excelling in class. Xavier enjoys the challenge of learning something new and there is so much he wants to do. It's because of your support that he can keep up with lessons and his energetic friends. He is becoming more and more confident in navigating the school grounds and is working hard to achieve his dream of becoming a scientist.

You and other generous Vision Australia supporters are helping Xavier to thrive. Thanks to kind people like you, professionals from Vision Australia were able to teach Xavier how to use a long white cane, visited his school to teach the other kids about Xavier's sight, made his home and school environment safer, and so much more.



Thank you for giving this young boy the opportunity to excel in all aspects of his life.

Just watch Mackenzie fly

Mackenzie captured our hearts with her inspiring story. She was diagnosed with a serious brain condition when she was just six weeks old. Mackenzie is blind, and has trouble speaking and walking.

But that hasn't stopped this determined, clever schoolgirl from achieving so much already.

Mackenzie has just turned ten, and her list of achievements is impressive by any standard.

'I'm really proud of how she's developing in all areas of her personal, school and social skill,' says Mackenzie's mum Tanya.

Incredibly, Mackenzie has become an amazing horse rider, showing great poise and composure. She made her family especially proud when she won first place at her first dressage competition. She had complete control of her horse as she guided it around the arena, listening out for the voice of her volunteer so she knew where to go.

Mackenzie is currently learning how to read braille and to use new digital devices to support her in her studies. She is also receiving support from her orientation specialist to learn how to travel and do things in a safe and independent manner. These are the types of skills that will allow her to live as independently as possible one day, and it's thanks to supporters like you that she has this wonderful opportunity.

One of Mackenzie's most remarkable talents is her brilliant memory. She loves asking people when their birthday is. Based on the month and date, she can then tell people what day their birthday is or will be on. She is just full of surprises! And just like any other kid, she loves telling knock-knock jokes and laughing at her own punchlines.

Every day is a challenge yet Mackenzie is full of curiosity to explore the world around her. In fact, Tanya and Mackenzie spent 6 months travelling in a caravan along the east coast of Australia. Inspired by their travels together,



Tanya captured their experiences in a beautiful children's book - the Adventures of Kenzie-Moo which can be purchased at <https://www.tanyasavva.com/the-adventures-of-kenzie-moo/>

Tanya asked me to pass on this message:

'Your support has directly impacted my child's development. Through extremely challenging times, we've been so supported by Vision Australia along our journey.'

Kenzie wouldn't be the girl she is if it weren't for the donations and support the community provides to Vision Australia.

'Thank you so much for helping my daughter flourish and gain independence so she can live a life full of joy.'

- Tanya





Paralympian and Vision Australia ambassador Matt Formston is good as gold

There's no such thing as barriers, only obstacles. You can go around obstacles, but you don't let them stop you. That's the ethos that Vision Australia ambassador Matt Formston lives by.

Matt conquers any challenge he sets his mind to – and anything people say he can't do. He represented Australia at the 2016 Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro, is a national Paracycling champion and also a World Champion surfer. He also juggles a successful career as a motivational speaker, and is a proud husband and father of three children.

Matt's life changed forever when, at the age of five, he lost his central vision and 95% of his peripheral vision. The doctor said he would never have an education or play sports.

But even as a child, Matt was determined to prove his naysayers wrong. This attitude has carried through to the present day.

'I know whenever anyone says that I can't do something, if I really choose to do that and it's in my heart, I probably can,' he stated.

It wasn't until Matt was in his mid-twenties that he accepted his disability, and truly pushed himself to be the best person he could be with the help of supporters like you.

Vision Australia was there for Matt when he wanted to learn how to use a long white cane. When he was growing up, he refused to have one, but as he got older he found himself needing it in busy places such as airports. Matt says,

'I went to Vision Australia who were able to give me a cane, and train me in how to use it. I don't use it all the time, but when I need that support, like when I am overseas, I pull it out and use it. It's been a game-changer for me.'

Determination and passion drive Matt every day to push the bar higher. He breaks boundaries and overcomes every challenge. He throws himself wholeheartedly into life, and doesn't let his vision loss hold him back. Drawing on his own passion, and the support from people like you, Matt is living his fullest life.

As a motivational speaker, he talks about resilience, and gives his audience the self-belief that they can do anything they want – to just try and not be afraid of failure, to keep going until you reach your goal. It's a remarkably fulfilling life.

'I've been able to live the life I choose and the reason I've been able to do that is because of the generosity of supporters who help provide urgently needed services for people like me.'

- Matt

Norma is getting her life back on track

For almost 30 years, Norma lived with the knowledge that she would lose her vision to glaucoma.

Norma was originally diagnosed in 1984, but her vision didn't start to seriously deteriorate until 2012. Today she is left with 90% vision in her left eye and only 5% in her right eye.

'I was living in a town house around the time that my vision really began to get worse. I had a couple of falls and that sort of thing. I rang a friend of mine and straight away she suggested Vision Australia,' Norma said.

It's thanks to supporters like you that she was able to receive help when she needed it most, so she could maintain living as independently as possible.

Vision Australia's Orientation and Mobility Specialists have made a huge difference to Norma, who struggled deeply with the loss of her self-reliance.

'Learning to use the white cane has really made a difference. I was reluctant about learning to use it at first because it made me feel a little vulnerable, but now I'm completely comfortable with it.'

'I'm just so much more confident when out and about these days and the cane is also great because it lets people know I have low vision. When people see it they're a bit more considerate.'

Because people like you support Vision Australia, Norma has been able to learn other strategies to cope with her severe vision loss.

'Learning how to use magnifiers has also helped me as well. I've got a small handheld one that I take everywhere with me. If I'm going shopping I use it to identify different products or if I'm catching the bus I use it to read the timetable. It also means I can read the menu if I'm at a cafe. If I don't have it with me these days I feel naked,' she stated.

Vision Australia's Occupational Therapy staff have also helped make adjustments around Norma's house which have enabled her to turn her life around, such as adding tactile features.

Norma is so grateful to Vision Australia supporters for making a huge difference to her life.



Vital Home Skills for Brothers Max and Harry

Melissa is one of Vision Australia's Paediatric Occupational Therapists. She teaches life skills to children like Max and Harry in their own home. Her regular, one-on-one visits help the boys understand the world around them, so that they can have the best chance of living independently as adults. She introduces them to new equipment, coaches them through task modification, and patiently helps them through practice. Below is a snapshot of a typical day with the boys.



It's incredibly important that the boys learn life skills so they can prepare for life as independent adults.



I provide one-on-one support to children like Max and Harry who are living with blindness or low vision. I work with kids and their families to achieve their goals, whatever they may be.



Some of these goals may be learning to do up buttons or zips, which Max is practising here, or learning how to read small print, or using assistive software so they can access a computer the same way their peers do.

Because of you, Vision Australia will continue to support Max and Harry into adulthood. Thank you so much for supporting children who are blind or have low vision. With you by their side, they can reach their full potential.



Blindness or low vision in children has a severe impact on their development. This is why it is essential to consider all aspects of support, from white cane training, to devices to help with studies, as well as critical support at home to learn vital life skills.



Max really wanted to learn how to do his shoelaces properly so he'd stop tripping in the playground. I was happy to teach him a few ways he could do it.



I usually work on the day to day activities - like handwriting, preparing meals, reading, typing and dressing skills.



Thank you for your valuable support that is helping therapists like me support kids like Max and Harry. I feel so fortunate to be a part of these kids' lives, in working with them to achieve their goals and aspirations. With best wishes,
Mel



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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

Your donation will help fund the services Vision Australia offers, helping people who are blind or have low vision to live the life they choose.

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.



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. Bringing stories to life in this way is an invaluable resource that helps with early literacy skills.

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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.

Thank you!

You truly make a world of difference to Australians who are living with blindness or low vision.

Mary, in her 80s, is legally blind having lost her central vision due to Macular Degeneration. And like anybody else, staying active, social and independent long into her golden years heavily depends on her sight. Without her vision, she says she *'fell into an emotional heap.'*

With the help of Vision Australia's Occupational Therapists, and supporters like you, Mary has been able to stay safely in the house she has called home for 40 years.

Mary has gained skills like knowing how to operate a stove safely and pour her own cup of tea. Thanks to supporters like you, she doesn't have to stop doing things she loves. And she also has a new social group that has made a huge difference to her mental health.

Thank you for believing that everyone, regardless of their age, deserves the opportunity and support to live independently.



Phone: 1800 42 20 77 Web: www.visionaustralia.org.au/donate
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Blindness. Low Vision. Opportunity.