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LOOKING ON THE BRIGHT SIDE: EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS EXPERIENCED
BY EMPLOYED, TOTALLY BLIND NEW ZEALANDERS AND HOW THESE
WERE MINIMISED OR OVERCOME

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to discover what employment barriers exist for totally blind, employed New Zealanders, and reveal the factors which led to success for the 22 study participants. Chapter one introduces the topic of employment barriers experienced by people with disabilities, focusing on those with vision impairments in particular. The work programmes of a number of State and voluntary sector organisations is briefly reviewed, as these relate to the amelioration of barriers to education and employment. Two New Zealand studies relating to employment blindness issues, undertaken 21 years apart, are introduced, compared and contrasted. The purpose of research into employment barriers and the success factors important in redressing those barriers is outlined.

The majority of studies reviewed in chapter two are international. These examine employment barriers and success factors relating to people with a range of vision impairments: from partial to total vision loss. Chapter three outlines the methodology and methods used in the present study. The chapter includes information relating to research design and proceedings, major concepts and variables, setting and apparatus, ethical and political issues and analysis of research findings. Chapter four describes the results of the study in depth, exploring the barriers to employment for totally blind New Zealanders and postulating explanations for the phenomena associated with success. Finally, chapter five discusses the findings from the study (noting trends also evident in the literature), examines these in the light of contemporary vocational issues, makes recommendations based on research findings and recommends further research.

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List of Abbreviations

EEO: Equal Employment Opportunities

MSD: Ministry of Social Development

NGO: Non-Government Organisation

RNZFB: Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind

SSC: State Services Commission

VIEW: Visually Impaired Experienced Workers

Chapter One: Introduction

The topic of this thesis is: Employment barriers experienced by employed, totally blind New Zealanders and how these were minimised or overcome. The thesis is presented in five chapters. Chapter one introduces the research topic and the purpose of research. It provides an overview of important issues regarding employment barriers for people with disabilities in general and those without sight in particular. Chapter two reviews the literature relating to employment barriers. It also examines the success factors identified as being important components in reducing the impact of these barriers. Chapter three examines the methodology and methods used in this study in detail. Chapter four describes the results of the study in depth. It explores the barriers to employment for totally blind New Zealanders, and postulates explanations for the phenomena associated with success factors. Chapter five discusses the findings from the present study (noting trends also evident in the literature), examines these in the light of contemporary vocational issues, makes recommendations based on research findings and recommends further research.

The New Zealand Government has shown its commitment to employment for people with disabilities in a number of ways during the past decade, including policy statements and funding initiatives. Nevertheless studies show that people who experience blindness are still markedly underemployed (Beatson, 1981). In the present study, 22 employed, totally blind New Zealanders are asked to identify barriers to employment, and to indicate how these barriers have been minimised or overcome.

Importance of Work

Employment is very often viewed as the major defining measure of worth and social status in western society (Crudden & McBroom, 1999; Tillesley, 1997). Paid work is an important source of self-esteem and financial independence, for those allowed to participate (Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, 2000; Freedman & Fesko, 1995; Hunt, 2002; Walls and Fullmer, 1997). Almost the first question one can expect to be asked in New Zealand is: What do you do? Meaning: What work do you do? However, for people with disabilities the question often becomes: Do you work?

Employment Issues for People with Disabilities

Pathways to Inclusion: Ngā ara whakauru ki te iwi whānui (2001) notes that “People with disabilities have the same right to participate in their communities as other citizens, particularly through employment opportunities” (Department of Labour, 2001, p. 22). Objective four of the *New Zealand Disability Strategy* (2002) is to “Provide opportunities in employment and economic development for disabled people.” The strategy is achieved through the work programmes of a range of Government agencies. Among these, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) manages a Training and Job Support Fund developed jointly with the Department of Labour, to help overcome disability-related barriers to employment. Workbridge Incorporated administers the fund.

The Ministry of Education provides supplementary student grants to a number of educational institutions to assist tertiary students with disability related expenses to compete for employment. The Ministry of Health contracts Enable Services (formally

the Equipment Management Service) to provide adaptive equipment necessary for employment. The New Zealand Public Service provides specifically for the employment of people with disabilities on merit via Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) policy which is enshrined in the *State Sector Act 1988. Moving Forward: EEO for People with Disabilities in the Public Service* (State Services Commission, 2002), describes the provision of EEO disability as aiming to “identify and remove all aspects of policies, procedures, and other institutional barriers that create inequality for people with disabilities.”

Progress with EEO Disability has been slower than with some other groups. Progress reports published by the State Services Commission (SSC) between 1994 and 2001 illustrate that a diminishing number of people with disabilities have been appointed to Public Service positions during this time. The trend is for people with disabilities to leave, rather than join the Public Service. The percentage of people with disabilities working in Public Service positions was less than the percentage of people with disabilities in the New Zealand labour force, which was 14% in 2001. Just 8% of Public Service staff had a disability in 2001. This figure further decreased in 2002 to 7%.

As part of a commitment to increase the diversity of the State sector, the SSC Mainstream Programme facilitates the creation of two-year employment placements within a range of State sector organisations. These placements are made available to those with the most significant disadvantage in terms of the affects of disability. Placements are created to provide opportunities for people who would not otherwise gain employment on merit within the State sector.

Despite increasing business interest in the advantages of programmes promoting equal employment opportunities for groups such as women and Maori, people with disabilities, including those with vision impairments, are still greatly under-represented in regular private and public employment settings (Butler, Crudden, Sansing & LeJeune, 2002). Even where people with disabilities are employed, they are frequently subject to occupational segregation, usually working at basic grade casualised, and often part time jobs, for minimal remuneration, with few opportunities for upward mobility (Barnes, Thornton & Maynard Campbell, 1998; Beatson, 1981; Bennie, 1996; Mank, 1994; Szymanski, Johnston-Rodriguez, Millington, Rodriguez, & Lagergren, 1995; Walls & Fullmer, 1997). Just 40% of those identifying as having a disability were employed in 2001, as against 70% of people without disabilities (Statistics New Zealand, 2001, p. 17).

Employment Issues for People with Vision Impairments

People with significant vision loss are no less affected than other disability groups by the issues discussed above. At the last Census of Population and Dwellings in 2001, approximately 81,500 New Zealand adults identified as having a significant vision loss that could not be corrected by glasses or contact lenses (Statistics New Zealand, 2001, p. 66). However, the published data do not identify people with significant vision loss separately in the unemployment rates. In both the United States and United Kingdom, only 30 to 40% of working age adults with vision impairments are employed (Bruce, McKennell & Walker, 1991; Hagemoser, 1996; McNeil, 1996; Roy, Dimigen & Taylor, 1998). The United States Commission for the Blind (2002)

reports that 46% of people with vision impairments and 32 % of people who experience blindness (legal blindness) in the United States are employed.

Similar employment rates have been identified in relation to New Zealanders with vision impairments. Beatson (1981) reported an employment rate of just 40% and 21 years later La Grow (2002) reported a rate of 39%. Beatson's (1981) study of the employment status of members of the then Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind (now Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind - RNZFB) illustrates the high level of unemployment and under-employment apparent at the time. Beatson (1981) found that when the unemployed and the so called "unemployable" were combined together, 28.5% or over one quarter of the population under study were "in a state of enforced inactivity" (p. 13). When Beatson (1981) added those identifying as "house-wives", "students" and "retired," only 573 of the total 1419 surveyed, or 40%, were employed. Forty eight percent of those working were employed in one of just 4 job types. Eighty workers were also employees of sheltered workshops. Beatson (1981) found no employers or managers with vision impairments.

Beatson (1981) asked who would have the best employment opportunities, someone blind when they sought their first job or someone blind after already having been in the workforce as a sighted person? Over a third of research participants experienced significant sight loss before taking up their first job. Beatson (1981) contends that " people have a considerably better chance of being in paid employment if they were blind since infancy, than if they went blind later in life" (p. 23). Once labelled "vision impaired", the degree of impairment was not particularly relevant to employment status. He further noted the functionally blind were in fact over-

represented in professional and technical careers. Beatson (1981) concluded that people who experience blindness are markedly under-employed. Thirty eight percent of women were in the lowest socio-economic group, as compared to just 12.5% of the total female workforce. This is an over-representation of 27%. Men with vision impairments were over-represented by 36%.

New Zealanders with vision impairments have access to a range of employment related services, provided by a number of public and voluntary sector organisations. Along with those previously noted, the RNZFB employs a number of vocational employment advisors to assist clients to gain and maintain employment. The RNZFB, together with the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand, commissioned a range of studies into the barriers faced by New Zealanders with vision impairments to participation in paid and unpaid work, as well as to tertiary study. The resulting (unpublished) report: *Increased Participation of Blind People in the Workforce* (2002) examines the difficulties experienced by registered members of the RNZFB regarding participation in the latter activities. The report notes specific barriers to participation identified by both member and allied agency focus groups, such as negative attitudes, lack of disability related information and lack of access to equipment and transport, as well as strategies useful for overcoming these barriers. The report also identifies vocational services most wanted by people with vision impairments themselves, and suggests a number of follow-up studies aimed at increasing participation of New Zealanders with vision impairments in both the paid and unpaid workforce.

A major study highlighted within the RNZFB report is that of La Grow (2002), who investigated the employment, unemployment and underemployment of adult New Zealanders with vision impairments. The purpose of the research was to:

1. Determine the level of employment, unemployment and underemployment for RNZFB members, aged between 18 and 65 years;
2. Identify the barriers to employment and/or advancement for this group; and to
3. Solicit from research participants, possible solutions for breaking down these barriers.

Of 170 randomly selected RNZFB members contacted, 150 people (67 male and 83 female) agreed to take part in a telephone survey. Participants self-reported vision loss as follows: no useful vision – 18%; a little useful vision – 58.7%; and a lot of useful vision – 22%. Two participants did not reply to the question. Data were analysed using standard statistical range and frequency measures. Ninety-one of the 150 people surveyed were not currently involved in paid employment. Of these, 55 were not interested in work, 21 were actively seeking employment and 15 were interested but not currently actively looking for a job. La Grow (2002) does not discuss the reasons for the lack of interest in employment by the 55 people reportedly not interested in work. This information may have provided some insight into whether these people were uninterested for similar reasons to those of the general population, or whether this was largely due to barriers perceived by study participants, relating to their vision loss (Kirchner, Johnson and Harkins, 1997). The rate of unemployment was reported at 14% but when those interested but not actively seeking work were added, the total rose to 24%. This figure was set against an unemployment rate for

the whole New Zealand population of 5.3% as at the March 2002 quarter, and 5% in March 2003 (Statistics New Zealand, 2003).

Whereas Beatson (1981) used socio-economic status to determine underemployment by implication, La Grow (2002) specifically asked research participants their views regarding the number of hours worked, the match between the demands of the job and the qualifications required, the rate of pay for the job and the chances for advancement compared to sighted peers. La Grow (2002) notes that 26.7% reported that the number of hours worked was about right and 23.4% stated the number of hours was a bit too few or way too few. Nineteen percent felt that they were underemployed in terms of their skills and qualifications, 18.5% felt their chances of promotion were less than for their peers and 28% reported believing that they were under paid. Based on these figures, the rate of under-employment was 20 to 25%. Those research participants who were employed worked in areas such as service provision, occupations involving unskilled labour, professional and managerial positions, sales and clerical jobs. Numbers employed in the private sector equalled 45.8%, while 23.7% worked in the public sector, 28.8% were self-employed and 5.7% listed their employer as "other". Over two thirds of participants (69.2%) reported always or mostly having been employed. The average tenure of employed participants was 6.5 years. They reported 7.2 years as the average length of service in their previous positions. Gaps between jobs tended to last an average of 5.2 years, which is a significant period of time out of the work force.

Although Beatson (1981); Hagemoser (1996); Roy, Dimigen & Taylor (1990); Roy, Dimigen & Taylor (1998) & Wolffe, Roessler & Schriener (1992), found degree

of impairment was not particularly relevant to employment status, both Tillesley (1997) and La Grow (2002) note a direct correlation between amount of vision and rate of employment. La Grow's (2002) study illustrates this specifically viz: 26% of employed participants had no usable vision, 35% had a little usable vision and 64% reported a lot of usable vision.

Gender alone did not impact significantly; 43.2% of males and 36% of females were engaged in paid employment. However when gender was tabulated with amount of usable vision, the interaction effect was marked: women with the least vision were least likely to be employed and those with the most vision were most likely to be employed. A significant gender gap also existed where women and men had no useful vision, with men being more likely to be employed (38%) than women (14%).

Kirchner, McBroom, Nelson & Graves (1992) also note that blind women have lower incomes than blind men or sighted women. La Grow (2002) found that women with other health conditions were less likely to be employed than men with other health conditions. Therefore, women with no usable vision and other health conditions were less likely to be employed than any other group in the study.

Although the report notes no significant relationship between age and employment status, La Grow (2002), like Beatson (1981), found an apparent trend between age at onset of vision loss and employment status. Those congenitally vision impaired and those who acquired their impairment in young adulthood were more likely to be employed, as against those adventitiously vision impaired after the age of 40 years. Only 25% of the latter were engaged in paid employment (Hagemoser, 1996). Education alone appeared to have little effect on employment status. However,

a curvilinear relationship between educational attainment and employment status was evident, in that those at either end of the educational spectrum were the least likely to be employed. A significant finding from this study was that 100% of those who reported having been apprenticed or having gained workplace qualifications were employed. On the job training was specifically noted by 27 participants as having been of most benefit to them, in terms of gaining/maintaining employment and promotion (Prezant & Rodriguez, 2001). A further 10 people mentioned attendance at work related courses as being very helpful and 3 had found work experience valuable. By contrast, Tillesley (1997) suggests that: “ educational attainment, rather than vocational qualifications, may provide better employment outcomes for visually impaired persons” (p. 4). Training in life skills, gaining tertiary qualifications and computer/typing training were also cited in La Grow’s (2002) study as relevant to gaining/maintaining employment.

The preferred reading format of participants was typically linked to degree of vision impairment and did not have any noticeable impact on employment status in this study. Similarly, Erin, Corn, and Wolffe (1993), found no appreciable differences in the learning and study strategies of secondary school students, by preferred reading medium. Furthermore, Fireison & Moore (1998) found that, although people who had attended a special school had a Braille literacy level of 72.2%, they actually earned significantly less than did those who had attended regular schools or a mixture of school types.

Employment Barriers

Employment barriers are a fact of life for all people who experience blindness, whether such people are new to the workforce or well on the way to fulfilling long held career aspirations. Both the studies conducted in New Zealand noted above and those conducted abroad suggest that barriers to employment for people with little or no vision relate to negative attitudes, ignorance, access issues and functional limitations caused by the vision impairment itself.

The *Human Rights Act 1993* prohibits employment discrimination against people who experience blindness, specifically mentioning those who use guide dogs for mobility. This applies to both the private and public sectors. The act makes it illegal to discriminate against a person with vision impairment by excluding them from employment for which they are qualified or by insisting on tasks difficult or impossible for the vision impaired person to perform, which are in any case not essential to the job.

The role of attitude towards disability is the most commonly discussed factor affecting people with all disabilities and yet it is one which is most often avoided by researchers when examining the disability sector (Barnes, Thornton & Maynard Campbell, 1998). This attitudinal barrier was highlighted with the publication of findings from the New Zealand Disability Strategy discussion document, released for consultation in August 2000. *Making a World of Difference: Whakanui Oranga* (2000) identified the issue of negative attitudes towards people with disabilities as the biggest barrier facing this group. This barrier was also identified as the number one issue for those surveyed for both the Public Service as Employer of Choice and

Career Progression and Development surveys, conducted by the SSC in 2001. Hasse (2003) contends that the two greatest barriers to hiring people with any sort of disability are lack of work-place experience on the part of people with disabilities and negative employer attitudes (see also Prezant & Rodriguez, 2001).

The Human Rights Commission advises that of the 786 complaints received for the 2001/2002 financial year, 50 dealt specifically with complaints alleging employment-related discrimination on the grounds of disability (Personal correspondence, 3 June 2003). This may not appear to be a high figure but is by far the largest category of complaint received during this period. It reflects widespread stereotypic thinking amongst the general population and systemic employment discrimination against this group. It also highlights the need for systematic investigation and collection of meaningful data on the employment of people with disabilities.

Purpose of Research

In a study to determine research priorities regarding people with vision impairments, Pillay and Thorburn (1997) identified issues relating to vocational options as needing further investigation. The studies reviewed in chapter two examine employment barriers and success factors relating to people with a range of vision impairments: from partial to total vision loss. The present study on the other hand, investigates employment barriers experienced by employed, totally blind New Zealanders and identifies the factors which have led to successful employment outcomes. Since the literature suggests that those with the least amount of vision experience the greatest difficulty gaining and maintaining long term and meaningful

employment, study participants were recruited on the basis of total blindness, that is having no usable reading vision and reliance on a white cane or guide dog for mobility. Participants were asked about their experience of employment barriers and what factors, including personal attributes, had assisted them to minimise or overcome these barriers. Aspects such as the setting and achievement of employment goals and dreams and other factors identified by participants are also highlighted within this study.

It is envisaged that the knowledge gained from this research will assist people with vision impairments to focus on their employment dreams and set/achieve goals; identify, remove and minimise the barriers to the achievement of these goals; and utilise the strategies identified by research participants to succeed in their chosen careers. The data collected may be of use to policy makers and programme developers when reviewing vocational services for people with vision impairments. The findings of this study may also be of value as context for further research into employment outcomes for people with disabilities and assist to redress any imbalances revealed.

This approach to the study of employment barriers experienced by people with vision impairments was guided by the objectives of the New Zealand Disability Strategy (included as Appendix F). The research was also guided by the notion of disability as a social construct: people with vision impairments are disabled by physical, systemic and attitudinal barriers to the attainment of meaningful long term employment.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

This chapter examines contemporary research into the employment barriers which exist for people who experience blindness. The success factors which minimise or eliminate these barriers are also identified and discussed. The review attempts to integrate current thinking in the field and provides a context in which to set the present study. It includes data based studies which specifically contained questions about barriers to employment for people with vision impairments and strategies designed to overcome these barriers, papers published in refereed journals and those available as practice research reports from the RNZFB. The studies reviewed were produced during the past 13 years.

Employment Barriers

There are a number of major barriers to paid employment for people with a variety of significant disabilities. These barriers are structural, institutional, societal and individual (Golledge, 2001; Pernice & Lunt, 1998; Smyth & Maynard Campbell, 1997; Rumrill, Schuyler, & Longden, 1997). Similar systemic and attitudinal barriers are identified as being major negative factors to the employment of people with vision impairments (Beatson, 1981; La Grow, 2002).

Negative attitudes, ignorance of employment possibilities and fear of the functional limitations associated with blindness, often lead to over-protection and low expectations of people with vision impairments, by family, rehabilitation staff and teachers (Malakpa, 1994). An examination of the barriers faced by 12 young people with varying degrees of vision loss, transitioning from school to work, was undertaken by McBroom, Tedder, & Ji in 1990. Many of the young people in the

study lacked confidence, were negative about their disabilities, had few leisure time skills and were fearful of taking risks because of the possibility of failure, something many had never been allowed to experience. Yet confidence, comfort with disability and motivation (including risk taking), are the very attributes noted in the literature as being crucial in order to succeed in gaining, retaining and advancing in a range of employment options (Attmore, 1990; Rabby & Croft, 1990; Kirchner, Johnson, & Harkins, 1997).

McBroom re-examined barriers to employment for those in transition from school to work in 1995. This study addressed three questions:

1. What knowledge is needed by people with vision impairments when they begin work after graduating from college?
2. Are the issues around attending college the same as for working?
3. What level of knowledge and skill do employers require from employees with vision impairments?

Information packs were sent to vocational rehabilitation agencies and colleges, and staff were asked to disseminate these to employed people with a range of vision impairments who had graduated from college within the past three years. Telephone interviews took place with 45 employed graduates. Of these 29 agreed for researchers to talk to their employers, on the understanding that no reference would be made to specific people and their work. Twenty seven phone interviews took place with employers. Responses were analysed using frequency, correlation and factor analysis. From a list of 25 possible barriers to employment, study participants identified the following as being the most problematic: lack of access to transport; limited finances;

problems accessing printed material; discrimination because of vision loss; lack of access to computers; difficulties with time management; and loneliness. These barriers were not presented in any order of priority.

La Grow (2002) specifically addresses the question of barriers to employment. He reports that 95 of 150, or 63.35% of study participants registered with the RNZFB - either in paid employment or interested in gaining employment - had experienced barriers to gaining and maintaining employment and career advancement. The barriers identified by La Grow were:

1. The vision impairment itself - being unable to undertake tasks which require sight;
2. Discrimination – the attitudes of others;
3. Transport – access difficulties;
4. Employer ignorance – lack of knowledge about the abilities of people with vision impairments; and
5. Personal attributes, other than the vision impairment – age, lack of qualifications, presence of other health conditions;
6. Lack of access to adaptive equipment and training to use this;
7. Low self confidence due to impairment;
8. Lack of job opportunities;
9. Problems accessing information from government departments; and
10. The cost of education.

The barrier mentioned most often by participants was discrimination.

McBroom, Crudden, Skinner & Moore (1998) researched the views of 166 blind and vision impaired people. Study participants were drawn from the American Foundation for the Blind's Careers and Technology Information Bank and the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision's National Consumer Feedback Network, two national databases of people with vision impairments and vocational rehabilitation professionals. The mail survey consisted of questionnaires which contained both open and closed questions. These concerned: respondents' current employment; problems gaining and retaining employment; job search methods; barriers to employment; and vocational rehabilitation services. Analysis of the data collected from questionnaires was conducted using frequency analysis and Chi-square, factor analysis. Responses from the open-ended questions were categorised into themes and percentage responses calculated for each theme. The study found that negative attitudes on the part of the general public and employers, together with lack of access to transport, were the biggest barriers to employment for Americans with vision impairments.

In a nation-wide employment survey of 176 people with vision impairments, Crudden & McBroom (1999) focused on four key employment issues: major barriers to employment; important factors in overcoming employment barriers; supports instrumental in overcoming employment barriers; and identification of success factors. A sample of 400 employed blind or partially sighted people was drawn from two national databases and the survey protocol was developed from a review of existing literature, previous survey questionnaires and through consultation with other researchers. The survey was tested and amended to include both open and closed

questions. The questions sought information on: current employment situation; barriers to gaining and maintaining employment; methods for locating employment; the importance of vocational rehabilitation services; and demographics. Surveys were mailed out in large print, Braille or computer disk format, depending on the choice identified by participants as part of the database information accessed. In all, 176 usable surveys, or 44% of the originals, were received by the researchers and were analysed using both descriptive and quantitative methods.

The study noted the usual demographic characteristics including age range, ethnicity, gender and educational attainment. It was found that 31% of respondents used Braille as their preferred media and 27% preferred large print. Approximately 43% of respondents had "no usable vision," 24% had "very little usable vision," and 33% had "quite a bit of usable vision." The average age at onset of vision impairment was approximately nine years. The majority of respondents (82%) felt that they could not change jobs. Almost half (42%) believed that their vision impairment prevented them from gaining promotion with their present employer and 35% said they were over-qualified for the work they were undertaking. The most commonly cited barriers to employment reported by the survey respondents were negative attitudes, lack of suitable transport, lack of access to adaptive equipment and the absence of vision impaired role models (see also Butler, Crudden, Sansing, & LeJeune, 2002; Rosenblum, 2000; and Roy, Dimigen, & Taylor, 1996). Responsibility for overcoming barriers was taken by the individuals concerned, rather than being addressed at any macro level.

In Simpson and Rogers' (2002) report on a 1992 project to assist older people to return to the workforce, the Orlando District of the Florida Division of Blind Services developed Project VIEW (Visually Impaired Experienced Workers). The project's purpose was to increase vocational rehabilitation services provided to blind and vision-impaired people, aged 55 years and over. The authors found that lack of belief in the abilities of older people with vision impairments on the part of vocational rehabilitation specialists was a significant barrier to employment for this group.

A variety of employment barriers are identified by those people with vision loss in the reviewed studies. Indeed, over 80% of participants in the La Grow's study noted they had experienced barriers to employment. An examination of the literature illustrates that employment barriers tend to fall into four major categories:

(1) negative attitudes - on the part of society; (2) ignorance of what is possible – on the part of employers, parents and people with vision impairments; (3) access issues – regarding standard print, technology and transport; and (4) functional limitations – caused by the existence of the vision impairment (Beatson, 1981; Crudden, McBroom, Skinner, & Moore, 1998; Crudden & McBroom, 1999; La Grow, 2002; Malakpa, 1994; McBroom, 1995; Moore & Wolffe, 1997; Wolffe & Candela, 2002; and Young, n.d.).

Employment Success Factors

The literature suggests that the factors which influence employment success for people with vision impairments fall into two main areas. Self-awareness: understanding vision impairment and what this means; knowing one's strengths and relative weaknesses; and being able to advocate for oneself. Being pro-active:

knowing what to do about the weaknesses identified as part of self-awareness; building on the strengths; taking responsibility for success and managing risks; and setting and achieving goals. Literature reviewed so far has highlighted barriers to employment, such as negative attitudes on the part of society, and ways in which these barriers might be overcome, such as adaptations to the workplace.

What factors influence success for research participants? A study by Hutto & Hare (1997) reveals that traditional jobs for women with vision impairments tend to be low paying, entry level social work or rehabilitation counselling positions. Barriers to job retention and promotion identified were gender, disability, functional limitation and a gap in knowledge concerning career development theory for this group. The authors asked the question: "How can women with visual impairments break the mould to become successful in non-traditional mainstream occupations and advance in their careers?" (p. 2). The characteristics common to six highly successful graduate women working in non-traditional roles were investigated. Those selected for the study were between 36 and 45 years of age, a range which the authors deemed suitable to provide meaningful data for future work with female adolescents. The authors chose to undertake qualitative, rather than quantitative research: comparing the replication of themes to establish validity, rather than the use of statistical frequencies. Reliability was established using a case study protocol throughout the data collection phase. Once the case studies were completed, each participant was provided with a copy for correction and verification. Transcribed audio taped interviews using a topical protocol, fieldwork notes from direct observations and appropriate reference material, made up the data for analysis. Recurring themes were

used to establish generalisability. The case studies were analysed by using an adapted version of Yin's 1989 framework for analysis. Characteristics which lead to successful outcomes identified by the study included: intelligence, self-discipline, a strong personal self-concept and academic self-concept, drive, motivation, willingness to take risks, creative thinking, assertiveness, strong written-oral skills, self-reliance, determination, perseverance, the use of mentors, the development of career goals and early work experience. Success factors identified by the women themselves included: organisational and social skills (including attention to appearance), mobility, independence, access to assistive technology and adaptation to life in the mainstream.

In an informal focus group of nine blind and partially sighted employed people, conducted for the Oregon Commission for the Blind, Young (1995) asked why some people with vision impairments are such consistently high achievers in the area of finding employment and advancing in their chosen careers. The focus group consisted of people with adventitious vision loss, as well as those with congenital vision impairments. Participants worked in a range of public and private sector settings. Most came from families with high expectations for the vision impaired family member. However two participants reported little family support. The attitude of group members was central to their achievements. Success was measured by a high degree of comfort with vision loss among participants and the self-directed nature of their lives. Success factors identified by members of the group included: their own positive attitude towards life in general and high expectations of themselves; recognition of and adaptation to the sighted world; developing alternative techniques

to remove barriers and achieve desired outcomes; and seeking out role models and mentors who have achieved success.

Participants in McBroom's 1995 study suggest that those who want to be successful at gaining employment should consciously choose a career, discuss the career choice with others, develop a CV and keep this updated, locate suitable transport, and talk to employers about disability needs and adaptations required. The majority of study participants felt that college had prepared them well for employment. The average length of time needed by college graduates for their job search was seven months. Many participants used computers with various adaptations as part of their work. Most study participants were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their employment situations.

Employers did not mind how job applications were completed, provided they were completed correctly. Many employers were more favourably disposed towards direct contact from applicants than from vocational rehabilitation practitioners. Although most employers stated a desire to be advised of the vision impairment early and preferably prior to the job interview, some expressed the view that they would be less likely to discriminate unfairly if they were not informed until the interview. Job accommodations included: orientation around the workplace; adaptive software and hardware; and alternatives to print. Employers advised others to hire on merit and not because of legal requirements demanding affirmative action. Most employers also noted that accommodations were not difficult to provide.

Several participants in the study by La Grow (2002) identified experience of life and personal characteristics such as drive, motivation and perseverance, as most

useful to them for redressing barriers. Spirituality and the power of prayer were also mentioned by some participants.

Crudden & McBroom (1999) identified several factors which appear to reduce the impact of employment barriers. The most important of these was the support of family and friends, other networks and providers of vocational rehabilitation. Respondents reported that high expectations of significant people in their lives helped to motivate them to achieve. Other major factors identified included: personal motivation; a strong work ethic; independence; training; peer mentoring; and perseverance. In short, the key employment success factor for respondents to this study was willingness to take responsibility for themselves (Kirchner, Johnson & Harkins, 1997).

Participants in the member focus groups conducted by the RNZFB (noted in the previous chapter), saw their reasons for succeeding in employment as being a positive attitude, self-confidence, determination, flexibility, self-motivation, good literacy and the ability to ask for assistance when needed. It was also felt that ongoing training was important, as was undertaking some voluntary work. Peer support was seen as valuable, and participants spoke about needing to be realistic in setting job goals.

Attmore (1990) compiled a series of Interviews with blind and vision impaired professionals, which notes that attributes such as positive attitude and willingness to take risks are essential for gaining and advancing in a range of career options. In Rabby and Croft's (1990) report on a seminar attended by 18 successfully employed, legally blind Americans, discussion centred on initial job search experiences. Attributes common to group members were: motivation and willingness to work hard;

ability to articulate and be assertive; and what the author's described as deviance, in that participants refuse to accept negativity. Based on the information gathered at the seminar, the authors suggest that job-seekers with vision impairments should: talk to other blind people about their employment achievements; research the whole job, not just the part you know about and like; work out the strategies you will need to put in place to succeed in the job, once this is acquired; work out what accommodations are needed and where adaptive equipment might be located. The authors note the latter should not be left to others. The authors also note that successful employment outcomes are equally dependent on good mobility and literacy. The ability to travel independently with either a cane or guide dog ensures the development and retention of confidence. Although Braille is considered important, the ability to use other technologies, for example computers is considered at least as valuable, efficiency being the key to success.

In summary, the literature suggests that successful employment outcomes depend at least as much on the positive attitude of those seeking work as on employer attitudes. These attitude driven factors for success include: confidence and self-esteem; a positive outlook on life in general; high expectations; motivation, drive, determination, perseverance and a strong work ethic; self-discipline; willingness to take risks; being creative and able to think laterally; self-reliance; good organisational, social, mobility, problem-solving, written and oral skills; attention to appearance; and adaptation to mainstream society (Crudden & McBroom, 1999; Hutto & Hare, 1997; Rabby & Croft, 1990; Young, 1995).

Further Research

While many research studies have examined the issue of employment for people with vision impairments in terms of factors such as: barriers to employment (Crudden, McBroom, Skinner & Moore, 1998; Hutto & Hare, 1997; O'Day, 1999; Young, 1995); low employment rates (Beatson, 1981; Newbold, 1987); and age at onset (Beatson, 1981; Drydon, 2000-2001; Keeffe, Lam, Cheung, Dinh & McCarty 1998), there remains a gap in the literature. This concerns the barriers to employment identified by people with no functional vision, as opposed to those with vision impairments. The paucity of employment focused research with those who identify as totally blind provides an opportunity for further work to be undertaken which will complement that of Beatson (1981) and La Grow (2002).

The present study explores the employment barriers experienced by employed, totally blind New Zealanders and asks how these barriers were minimised or overcome. This study also identifies and analyses success factors in terms of their applicability to a totally blind, employed New Zealand sample, in order to discover why some people with vision impairments become employed in high profile and well paid jobs, while others either seem unable to get a foot in the employment door at all, or become trapped in dead-end, poorly paid jobs. Chapter three examines the methodology and methods used in this study in detail.

Chapter Three: Methods

This study examines employment barriers experienced by 22 employed, totally blind New Zealanders and asks how these barriers were minimised or overcome. Beatson (1981) notes that blindness is a subjective term. Indeed, definitions vary from the restrictive one used by the Ministry of Social Development for the purpose of determining entitlement to income support, to the broader definition used by the RNZFB to determine eligibility for membership. The approach taken to the present study, as with Beatson (1981), is pragmatic in that participants are functionally blind, or have no usable vision, as self reported.

The study consisted of information gathering, description of data and phenomena, discovery, understanding and explanation of findings (Depoy and Gitlin, 1994). The research process used consisted of self reflection leading to heuristic incubation, research interviews to generate data and content analysis of the categorised data collected (Shelef, 1994). This data comprised both quantitative and qualitative information from research participants.

Research Design

Both convenience and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit research participants, as well as a call for volunteers who met the eligibility criteria.

In-depth telephone interviews were carried out using an interview protocol, designed to initiate the data collection process. Development of the protocol was assisted by a pilot group of four blind individuals, three from the United States and one from Great Britain. This input served to increase the interpretive validity of the protocol. The interview schedule used with participants is included as appendix E.

Data were analysed using content analysis, that is, categorisation of themes into usable chunks of data, which are described as research results in chapter four.

Subjects

Research participants were selected using purposeful sampling criterion, that is, subjects were totally blind, employed New Zealanders. For the purposes of this study, totally blind means no usable reading vision and reliance on a white cane, guide dog or sighted guide for mobility. Employed means being in full or part-time, paid work. Participants were defined as New Zealanders, provided they were citizens or permanent residents, over 16 years of age.

A total of 22 people volunteered to take part in the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants via the provision of information about the research, which noted points relating to the rights of research participants to decline involvement, ask questions about any aspect of research, refuse to answer particular questions and withdraw from research. Commitment to confidentiality was reiterated throughout the process. The information sheet and consent forms used in this study are included as appendices C and D respectively.

Major Concepts & Variables

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect information about family of origin, vision impairment, education, barriers to gaining and maintaining employment, employment history and employment success factors. A series of demographic questions relating to age, ethnicity, gender, marital status and geographical location were also included.

The researcher is totally blind and works in a full-time occupation involving the facilitation of employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities.

Research Procedures

Calls were made for research participants via e-mail messages sent to a vision impaired user group, established and maintained via the RNZFB. The request for volunteers explained the purpose of the study and possible uses for research data. Those people who wished to participate and who met the criteria for participation, were asked to contact the researcher directly by e-mail. Of 23 volunteers who initially agreed to take part, 15 people contacted the researcher as a result of the e-mail call for research participants. A copy of the e-mail is included as Appendix B. A further eight participants were identified to the researcher by these volunteers.

Once initial consent was gained, the researcher sent electronic copies of the information sheet and consent form for completion. Both electronic and Braille copies were sent to one participant who requested this. Electronic copies of the information sheet and consent forms were e-mailed to 23 people and 22 completed consent forms were received, also in electronic form. One person who initially agreed to take part in the study did not return the consent form after two e-mail prompts.

All 22 people who returned completed consent forms were sent an electronic schedule to be used during the phone interview. The interview schedule was supplied ahead of time as a courtesy and to enable research participants to think about their experience of employment barriers. Participants were asked not to physically complete the questions in the schedule. A date and time were negotiated with participants for the phone interview.

Each research participant was contacted on the date and at the time agreed. Participants were advised that the interview would be taped and assured that although the conversation was being broadcast to a tape recorder via speaker-phone, every effort had been made to ensure confidentiality, that is, by sealing off the interview room from the rest of the building.

The researcher ensured that each participant had read and understood the information previously supplied about the rights of research participants and this was reiterated. Verbal consent was requested to proceed and this was gained in all 22 cases.

Research interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to over 2 hours, with most taking an hour to complete. All interviews were carried out by the researcher, as was all work undertaken to transcribe and analyse the interviews. The author felt strongly the need to preserve the relationship between researcher and subject, as members of the same community of experience. Research participants received information about the study in electronic form. The intention of the researcher was to ensure easy access to information about, and consent to, the study. All research participants requested information about the findings of the study and this will also be made available electronically to 21 participants and in Braille to one participant who has requested this.

Setting & Apparatus

All but one research interview took place via telephone: 5 calls were made from the author's workplace and 16 from the author's home. One interview was conducted face to face, at the subject's place of work. Apparatus consisted of telephones with

external speakers – to enable recording of each interview, four track tape recorders and C90 cassette tapes, the interview schedule (produced in Braille) – to enable the researcher to read the questionnaire aloud and computers with adaptive software and synthetic speech – to enable the researcher to transcribe taped data on to individual computer files.

Ethical and Political Issues

All ethical considerations required by Massey University were adhered to in this study. The researcher ensured no harm to participants in any way, including preservation of confidentiality. Verbal and written agreement were provided by participants to informed participation in the research. Privacy of participants was ensured when taping interviews. Social and cultural sensitivity was safeguarded throughout the research process. The study was represented truthfully to all participants. All data gathered from the study is locked in a secure storage area at the researcher's place of work. The information gathered from questionnaires is reported in a way which does not identify particular participants.

A number of risks were identified. These included: the possibility of researcher bias, due to personal experience; the need for extra care and attention to confidentiality, particularly given the researcher's own involvement as both a provider of employment services and as a member of the blind community; and the inherent bias in the method used to obtain interviewees, that is, the researcher called for participation of those who self-identified as totally blind, on the basis of inability to read standard print and use of a long cane or guide dog for mobility. It was also noted that the attributes routinely collected about research participants may not be sufficient

to illustrate the true impact of the complexities of cultural diversity. Every effort was made to minimise or eliminate these risks, through personal diligence, that is, care and attention to detail when planning and undertaking the study. Communication with supervisors regarding all facets of the study ensured the utmost integrity of the research was maintained.

Analysis of Research Findings

The present study has generated a descriptive body of knowledge which was analysed using content analysis. Data were reduced to a manageable size, analysed and important trends highlighted. Finally, conclusions were drawn and recommendations made.

Participant information was analysed by manually counting occurrences. Averages were noted and scores kept in a separate computer file for summarising. Frequency of responses were recorded and patterns noted. Each transcribed interview schedule was reduced to a page or two of responses. All answers to each question was noted in a separate computer file. Each of these sheets was read and emerging patterns and themes noted (Cole, 1994; Palmquist, 1997-2003). A list of distilled words and phrases which captured the recurring themes was developed and a code sheet for each participant's responses written up in Braille. Coded items were counted and suitable quotations included to add depth and meaning to the data.

Chapter four describes the results of the study in depth, specifically outlining the barriers to employment for totally blind New Zealanders, and postulates explanations for the phenomena associated with success factors.

Chapter Four: Results

This study asked 22 employed, totally blind New Zealanders about the employment barriers they had faced and how these had been minimised or overcome. Information was gathered using a semi-structured interview protocol. Those who took part in the study self identified as totally blind, although two qualifications were applied: research participants were unable to read standard print and either used a white cane or guide dog for mobility. Sixteen out of the 22 (or 72%) used a guide dog.

A number of demographic questions were asked of study participants. These related to age, ethnicity, gender, marital status and geographical location. Statistics noted have been rounded up and do not therefore necessarily add up to 100%.

Quoted material has been used extensively throughout this chapter, to highlight findings and to enable research participants to speak for themselves. Pseudonyms have not been used nor names attributed to any quoted material, in order to maintain confidentiality, in what is a very small community of blind people. Research subjects are referred to by the term "Participant", followed by a number. Only a few participants, whose ideas most represented the discussions held with other participants, have been quoted as examples. Quoted material is grouped under the particular themes they most relate to.

Profile of Participants

Twenty-two people participated in this study; their mean age was 45.1 years and ranged from 31 to 63. Eleven were male and 11 female. Nineteen considered themselves to be either New Zealand European (n=17) or European (n=2). The remaining three identified as New Zealand Maori. All participants were totally blind

and nine of the 22 were considered to be congenitally blind. Most had lost their sight due to congenital hereditary ($n=9$) or congenital, non-hereditary ($n = 7$) conditions. The remaining six had lost their sight due to accident ($n=3$) or illness ($n=3$).

Two of the 22 participants attended a special school throughout their education. Twelve people experienced a combination of both regular and special schools, three attended a regular school only and the remaining five were sighted during their school years. All of the participants had some form of qualification, with 14 having tertiary qualifications, and the remaining eight having school certificate or some sort of trade certificates. All were currently in paid employment. The mean length of time in their current job was 8.3 years and ranged from .5 to 40 years. Thirteen worked full-time and nine part-time, no-one worked fewer than 20 hours per week. The average number of hours worked per week was 24.6.

Twenty of the 22 held professional positions such as university lecturers, social workers, policy analysts, project coordinators, news coordinator, managing director, physiotherapist, and medical doctor. Five participants or 22.73% worked in the public sector, which includes public service departments, crown entities and local bodies. Six people or 27.27% worked in private sector occupations. Of these, three were full-time self-employed. Eleven people or 50% worked in voluntary sector (NGO) jobs. Four said they made over \$70,000 per annum, 10 said they earned between \$30,000 and \$50,000 per year, while seven said they earned less than 30,000 per year. One person did not respond to this question.

The 2001 disability survey (Statistics New Zealand, 2001), notes that 10% of people with disabilities, who were employed, were working in professional

occupations and a further 10% were managers. Ninety-four percent of people with disabilities had a personal income of less than \$50,000 and 81% had an income of less than \$30,000. By contrast, 27% of the general population of employed New Zealanders worked in professional or managerial occupations, as at June 2002. The average salary for these groups combined was \$50,400 (Statistics New Zealand 2002). The latter does not include the self-employed, for which no data could be found.

Eighteen of the 22 people in the present study said they accessed scholarships or funding of some sort to assist with employment. All said they had access to employment-related training.

All research participants used some sort of adaptive equipment to assist them with day to day employment related tasks. Every person surveyed used a screen reader with synthetic speech. Sixteen people used optical character recognition software with a computer scanner to read standard ink print. A range of Braille devices were used by 16 participants, from low tech Braille dymo labellers and Perkins Braille writers, to state of the art electronic Braille systems, such as palmtops and Braille displays attached to standard computers. Other equipment used by participants at work included dictation software, dictaphones and standard cassette recorders. Two people mentioned their guide dogs, noting they would not be able to work without them.

All participants said they were happy with their present employment, although two noted they were thinking of moving on to the next challenge. Aspects of work enjoyed by participants included: working in an intellectually stimulating environment; having the opportunity to assist others; being valued; being taken

seriously as a professional; the variety of work; the people contact; the autonomy of the role; and being able to work as part of a team. Specific comments included: "I get to hear the full story behind the headlines on the news. The work is often pressured because there is competition with other media and I enjoy this pressure!" (Participant 13). Participant 14 also noted: "For someone like me, who is driven by intellectual curiosity, my job is ideal. I get paid well to pursue my personal interests. I don't like all aspects of the job but it's an ideal coincidence of my abilities and my opportunities." Participant 22 stated, "I am well paid to follow one of my greatest interests."

Over half (13) of those surveyed said they had no real worries about being able to retain their present employment situations. The concerns of the remaining nine related to: employer compliance requirements; working under fixed-term employment agreements; employer relocating to an area difficult to access via public transport; the specialist nature of the role; possibility of deteriorating health; incompatible technology; the tentative nature of funding for the position.

Employment Barriers

Despite generally expressing job satisfaction, most participants discussed a number of barriers to obtaining and advancing in employment. These barriers fall into two categories: barriers commonly acknowledged in the literature and barriers specifically identified by study participants themselves. The employment barriers presented in table one were discussed with each research participant, to discover whether such factors, commonly identified in mainly overseas literature, apply in a contemporary New Zealand context.

Table 1: Barriers Commonly Acknowledged in the Literature

Barriers	Number of people in current study	Percentage
Gaps between periods of employment	13	59.09%
Difficulty gaining employment for which qualified	10	45.45%
Underemployment	12	54.55%
Difficulty gaining promotion	8	36.36%
Difficulty retaining employment	8	36.36%

All participants described barriers experienced when attempting to gain or advance in employment. Barriers identified by study participants tended to fall into four major categories: (1) attitudes, (2) access to adaptive equipment, (3) functional limitations associated with blindness, and (4) access to the environment.

Table 2: Barriers Specifically Identified by Study Participants Themselves

Barriers	Number of people in current study	Percentage
Attitudes	22	100%
Access to adaptive equipment	17	77.27%
Functional limitations associated with blindness	5	22.72%
Access to environment	2	9.09%

Attitudes

All 22 respondents referred to negative attitudes or ignorance on the part of employers, as being the single biggest barrier to employment. Participants expressed frustration with these negative attitudes in the following ways:

Participant 10: "Employers make a sighted person's judgment of what a blind person can do. It's not always deliberate discrimination; it's most often just ignorance." Similarly, participant 21 noted:

It's the boss who thinks: 'gosh, I wouldn't be able to do that if I closed my eyes'. That's ridiculous because you can't go from sighted to blind in a few seconds and be able to do all the things we, as experienced blind people, can do – so it's not a fair comparison.

Participant 7 said:

It's frustrating when you don't get a job you just know you're right for! You never know whether you didn't get it because the employer didn't agree you were the best person for the job or because of discrimination regarding your blindness.

Participant 1 pointed out that:

It's very hard to find an employer who will accept your blindness while also overlooking it. It's also hard to find someone who will tell you when you're not doing the job correctly.

Participant 13 told the story of being denied qualifications, which in turn meant being denied employment of choice.

I went to Teacher's Training College [first blind person in New Zealand to do so] but they wouldn't allow me to graduate, despite my having passed all the papers. This was so unfair, particularly when they knew I wanted to work at the school for the blind – it's not like I even wanted to teach sighted children! They got out of having to give me the qualification by considering my blindness as a health issue. In those days, if a candidate had health issues, they could be denied qualification as a teacher. I still have a very long telegram from the [then] Minister of Education explaining why I was not allowed to qualify as a teacher. I did eventually teach as an aide at Homai College for the Blind.

The negative and sometimes bazaar attitudes of work colleagues were noted by 11 study participants. Participant 9 recalled: "I once worked with someone who, no matter how many times she saw me do something, was still convinced I couldn't do it because of my blindness." Participant 8 stated:

It is possible to be overprotected by some colleagues and picked on by others. It's hard to find a good balance: people either put you down every step of the way or want you to depend on them, to satisfy their ego or even to curry favour,

should you be in a position to comment on their work performance.

Participant 3 pointed out: “When you have a disability you can’t just leave and find another job if your boss or workmates make life difficult for you.”

Ignorance was a common term used by 10 participants when discussing the attitude of colleagues. Participant 12 shared the following experience:

The ignorance displayed by co-workers can make life difficult – large meetings and team building exercises can all include barriers to participation within them – print being handed out at the meeting etc. If you are one blind person in a group, you miss out on the non-verbal communication that goes on. Your views aren’t always heard – the facilitator may not write down what you have said on the whiteboard or may credit something you have said to someone else in the group.

Lack of support by family was noted by 3 people and overindulgence by family members was mentioned by 9 study participants as having a potentially negative impact on employment outcomes. Thus participant 17 noted:

Many blind children are told that when they grow up they will be able to do anything. They become used to being praised for mere average performance, so don’t learn the technique of trial and error. They are not allowed to fail so can’t handle it when they inevitably do.

Participant 10 stated:

Family members who overprotect the blind person are harmful because their interest lies in meeting their own needs, rather than assisting the blind family member to become self determining.

Agencies for people with disabilities, including consumer groups, were felt by 7 people to be responsible for the erection of barriers to employment. Participant 9 asserted that:

Blind Week and previously Braille Week advertising is crass and sends all the wrong messages to the public – about how we must have their help because we're unable to help ourselves. This stuff creates problems for me and others, which we end up having to deal with on a daily basis.

Participant 4 spoke of the low expectations of employment agencies for people with disabilities:

Although there are generic agencies such as Workbridge to assist people with disabilities to find employment, they tend to focus on basic and often unskilled or only semi-skilled jobs. There is little interest in assisting anyone who has career aspirations as opposed to just wanting to work."

Participant 7 noted that:

Consumer groups must also take some responsibility for public education about disability issues regarding employment

and not just leave it up to disability agencies like the Foundation and Workbridge.”

Negative attitudes and low expectations on the part of society in general were noted by 21 of the 22 participants. The comments below are typical of the responses received. For example, participant 10 noted:

We are often not acknowledged as people. I recall Peter Beatson’s words: ‘we are tolerated but not welcomed’. People often can’t wait to get rid of us – like we’re an embarrassment!

Similarly, participant 21 stated:

The negative attitude society has towards us is a huge barrier – people’s low expectations of us, which we sometimes unfortunately live down to – this attitude is very pervasive and extremely easy to get sucked into if we’re not careful.

Access to Adaptive Equipment

Seventeen study participants discussed the barrier to employment caused by lack of access to assessment, and timing, for example not being able to apply for equipment until employment was gained. Eight people specifically mentioned being unable to access appropriate training to use the equipment once this had been obtained. Participant 9 highlighted:

The old problem of not being able to access equipment unless you have a job and not being able to get a job until you have equipment is still evident as a barrier. Then, once you have the

equipment, you need to have access to training – and that’s not always possible.

Participant 2 made the point that, “Computers can be both a solution and a problem [and that] funding to access adaptive equipment and the time taken to organise this is a distinct barrier.”

Eligibility for funding to meet the cost of adaptive equipment, was noted as a particular source of frustration. Participant 6 spoke of this frustration and provided the following example: “If you’re a participant of the State Services Commission Mainstream Programme you can’t get funding for equipment through Mainstream or Workbridge!” The high cost of adaptive equipment was identified as a barrier by all three self-employed participants.

Questions were raised by nine participants about the unwillingness of the RNZFB and Enable Services to make second hand adaptive equipment available for purchase, at a cost which reflects the true depreciation of this. Participant 8 said: “There’s a lot of good quality second hand equipment around and this should be sold on to people who can use it.”

Functional Limitations

Five people acknowledged the unavoidable barriers to employment which stem from blindness itself. According to participant 14 “There are jobs we simply can’t do and also some we can do, but with the utmost difficulty.” Participant 12 affirmed this view and added: “There is a lack of versatility about blindness which can create a barrier to certain occupations.” Participant 18 also noted that, “Opportunities for

casual work are not there – I can't exactly go stacking supermarket shelves or work part time in a café while my child is at school."

Three people specifically noted lack of access to work experience when young as a major barrier to skill acquisition and later employment. Participant 2 noted: "We don't get to do the paper run or the holiday job." The lack of blind role models and the lack of positive examples portrayed in the media were also mentioned.

Access to the Environment

Difficulty accessing the environment is a major barrier to employment for people who experience blindness. The most commonly identified barriers were related to mobility issues.

Lack of transport, difficulty with mobility and the geographical location of suitable housing were all mentioned by at least two people as being significant barriers to getting established in employment. Participant 9 observed:

Another barrier is the need for a driver's license, even though there may be little or no driving involved in a particular job. It just means a sighted candidate would have the inside running.

Ten people mentioned having to expend a lot of extra energy on visualisation and management of time, people, and things, to accommodate vision impairment. Although not an employment barrier as such, participant 14 noted going to lunch at 11.40, so as to get into the lunchroom before others, thus avoiding concerns around mobility and having people observe how every-day tasks are performed.

The presence of a guide dog in the work-place was felt by three people to be a barrier to acceptance. Participant 3 said:

A guide dog can be a barrier to being taken seriously at work.

The dog's role must be kept in perspective so far as work-mates are concerned. Time must be found in a busy day to toilet and walk the dog, which can create extra stress.

Participant 19 recalled: "I worked with a woman once who was terrified of my dog and the employer made me feel as if I was in the wrong, even though I'd been there for several years." Many employers make incorrect assumptions about the role and function of a guide dog. Some work colleagues will not admit to fear of the dog, because they don't want to be accused of discriminating against someone with a disability. Participant 13 outlines one such experience:

When I got my first dog I was told by my employer, the dog had to be in another part of the building from me during the day. I discussed this with Guide Dog Services and found out the other switchboard operator had written to our manager, refusing to work with me if my dog was with me. So, having the dog became a huge potential barrier to my employment.

Barriers to Advancement and Promotion

The employment barriers discussed above apply equally to promotion and advancement at work. Issues such as transport and orientation/mobility were identified as major considerations for seven people, particularly where promotion would have to be sought away from their present geographical location. Barriers to advancement related by study participants included: advancement by relocation;

systemic barriers; difficulties associated with changing employment focus, upgrading equipment and professional development; inflated expectations and inaccurate assumptions; negative self-perception, and inability to self promote.

Participant 1 spoke of the difficulties associated with promotion, when this depended on shifting to an unknown area:

Advancement by relocation would have issues, in terms of the relocation but not the advancement. A new job wouldn't phase me but all the blindness-related stuff about mobility etc would make me hesitate.

Participant 5 emphatically stated: "There's just too much effort involved!" However advancement by relocation may not be an issue for all workers with impaired vision. While eight research participants stated there were no barriers to advancement for them, seven others said there was simply nowhere to go in their present job. The remainder admitted that what really stopped them from advancing was their own unwillingness to work towards this.

Confidence was a major issue for several people - many appeared to feel as though they had no choice but to stay with their present employer.

Barriers which exist within the workplace were noted as blocks to advancement by participant 7:

While I would be happy to try for a management position, managers are expected to do loads of paperwork. Plus the internal database where I work is not accessible with screen reading software.

Other barriers identified concerned lack of opportunity to change employment focus, equipment upgrades and professional development.

Participant 8 advised:

It is very hard to move within an organisation, once you have a job. Even sideways movement is difficult, especially if you are doing a job no one else wants – you'll be told how well you do it, but it's only because it's a rubbish job and no-one else wants it!

Difficulty changing career direction was also highlighted by Participant 21:

It is not as easy to change organisation or career direction when you're blind. You get type-cast within your organisation but if you try to leave, there's that whole proving yourself thing to do all over again – like you don't have a work history with achievements under your belt.

Access to adaptive hardware and software upgrades was noted as an ongoing issue for two participants. Pursuing advancement via continuing professional development was mentioned as a distinct difficulty by three people, due to education and training becoming more and more visual. Many participants noted employment barriers which they saw affecting others but which had not impacted upon themselves.

Inflated expectations and inaccurate assumptions about the world of work, on the part of people who experience blindness, were specific issues mentioned by 18 study participants. Among these were Participants 17 and 21. Participant 17 noted:

Blind people themselves often expect to be given work, rather than obtaining the skills necessary for employment. Many people also believe they will get a high powered job first time up! They have no idea about starting small and working their way up.

This observation was equally emphasised by Participant 21: “There is a mentality that we should just be given everything on a plate, that someone else should do things for us and it’s not reality.”

Negative self perception was mentioned by six people as a barrier to employment. Participant 5 noted that “not being comfortable with oneself and one’s disability is a huge barrier.” Participant 21 went further, stating:

We have a national hang-up that the sighted way is superior to adaptive strategies such as the use of Braille. Some people will spend an eternity on a reading task that could be completed in a fraction of the time by using Braille or speech, and think it’s okay because they’re doing it the ‘normal’ way. But the reality is this is unproductive!

Another barrier identified by five study participants concerned the inability of some people with vision impairments to sell themselves effectively and follow this up with proof of capability. An overemphasis on practicality, for example focusing too much on solving today’s problem to the exclusion of reaching for tomorrow’s goal, was a negative influence discussed by three participants.

Employment Success Factors

All the participants described themselves as successful, in terms of their present employment situation, despite the barriers they had to face to get there. Thus, they were asked to identify the factors which have made success possible. These are grouped into the following themes: general attributes, blindness success factors, family expectations, relevance of education to employment, level of comfort with disability, assertiveness and job search skills.

General Attributes

Important general attributes identified by participants were: (1) possessing the ability to step outside one's comfort zone and take risks; (2) having employment goals; (3) being willing to learn new things and maintain motivation; (4) having a strong work ethic; (5) being able to work with stress; (6) being able to give and receive constructive feedback; and (7) being prepared to take on a challenge, run with it, work through it and not give up at the first hurdle. Honesty, punctuality and reliability were also noted as crucial general attributes necessary for building credibility and employment success.

Blindness Related Success Factors

Blindness-related success factors were identified by 17 participants as follows: (1) adapting to and accepting vision impairment; (2) the ability to deal with frustrations relating to such things as other people's attitudes and equipment difficulties; (3) having good mobility and people skills; (4) knowing one's limitations but being prepared to be flexible and take risks; (5) being determined; (6) seeking vocational advice from the RNZFB and Workbridge; (7) being happy with

achievements but not being so satisfied that achievement stops; and(8) remembering that everyone makes mistakes – it's not always because of blindness.

It was also noted that, although not strictly blindness-related, having a good sense of humour and highly developed time management and organisational skills are even more important for people with vision impairments than for the general population.

Family Expectations

What impact, if any, do the expectations of one's family of origin have on later employment prospects? Five participants reported family expectations as having been low and that this had been due to ignorance of what was possible for people with vision impairments. Participant 16 recalls: "Some family members thought I'd leave school, go to the Foundation workshops, go to Pearson House and die there." Two people stated that their parents simply hoped for the best. Participant 6 stated: "No quarter was given whatsoever by my family to my blindness – there wasn't much understanding so the expectation was for me to get on with it." Similarly, participant 18 related: "My parents didn't understand and I didn't want to know so the whole family were blind, even though I was the only one who couldn't see."

Most of the sample reported the expectations of parents as being at least as high for them, as for sighted family members. Participant 13 reported: "My dad used to tell me that if I didn't get a good education, I'd sit in the Foundation's workshops and pack strawberry boxes all my life." Six people noted that attendance at a university was expected of them. Two participants said that their parents expected

them to get a better education than their siblings, in order to combat discriminatory practices in the work-place.

Relevance of Education to Employment

Three people noted that the informal acquisition of practical skills had ensured their employment prospects, rather than formal education as such. For participant 4: “School was a waste of time. If you were left behind no one cared because you were going to the workshops so it didn’t matter.” Others said knowledge of comprehension and good literacy had been invaluable for the types of jobs they had chosen.

The majority of respondents (17) indicated that they did not set out from a young age to achieve a certain career. Rather their expectations of themselves and what was possible increased along with educational achievement. Participant 21 shared the following observations and concerns about current educational practices for children with vision impairments:

I had the benefit of concentrated blindness-specific education at Homai and then the social interaction that comes from mainstreaming. I believe this is a perfect mix which has now unfortunately been lost. Having met blind children of around 10 years of age who don’t have any other disability, but can’t eat without having food cut up for them and whose orientation and mobility is shocking, shows me the mixed education I had was really great. There are no benchmarks for kids today because many of them haven’t been educated along side other blind kids and neither they nor parents and teachers really

know what is possible. A good mix of education and social skills is critical in terms of later employment.

Six people specifically noted that tertiary education had taught them good time management and problem solving skills.

Participant 9 spoke of the way in which confidence and assertiveness was built up in the pursuit of personal goals:

I was rather shy but I had to approach lecturers and explain my needs which helped me to build confidence, assertiveness and negotiation skills. My desire to succeed outweighed my fear of rejection. Nowadays everything is laid on for blind students compared to when I went to university which, although very positive, means they may miss out on the opportunity to gain those skills early on.

Participant 7 used university as a way of rehabilitating:

When I went back to university six months after losing my sight, I couldn't touch type very well or walk around on my own. I used the university environment and experience to learn these skills. University was a stepping stone to becoming independent again. This was a conscious decision and not just something drifted into. My friends joked that I had more focus once I'd lost my sight than I ever had before!

Choices about employment appear for many to have been made once a certain level of confidence had been reached and education was consciously tailored to those employment choices. Thus participant 8 related:

I knew unemployment rates were high among the blind so I chose my career quite deliberately. I knew if the focus was on working with people to assist them, I would be more likely to gain employment than if I chose something technical.

Level of Comfort with Disability.

Twenty-one participants stated they felt quite comfortable with their vision loss. Many had either never known anything else or had been without sight for such a long time that they had become accustomed to blindness. Participant 14 noted: "I am endlessly irritated, frustrated and humiliated by my blindness, but I've been blind for so long now that I'm used to it."

Three participants stated that adolescence had been particularly difficult for them. In particular, participant 2 said: "I thought everyone was having a great time except me!"

All those who had lost their sight later in life had adjusted to blindness relatively quickly and made positive statements about their situations. Participant 7 recalled: "When I first went blind I couldn't even say the word! I'm not looking for the miracle cure, it just is, and it's part of my life." Participant 20 was confident in asserting:

There are things I have done through being blind that I would never have done if I had remained sighted, for example

playing sport for New Zealand. I have met a far more diverse group of people since being blind than I would have met if I'd stayed sighted.

Thirteen people spoke about the amount of planning necessary to accomplish simple tasks as being major frustrations. According to participant 17:

It's a pain, because it takes the spontaneity out of life; you have to plan everything down to the last detail. You can't just wander off one day and do whatever comes to mind.

Seven participants spoke of the attitudes of others towards them as being a major negative influence on self-esteem. Participant 10 expressed frustration with others and noted:

I get angry at other people's attitudes towards me and resent their discomfort with my blindness. It makes me feel uncomfortable about myself and who needs that! I also get annoyed with other people's impatience with me because of my needing to do some things differently or not as quickly as they might. Sight is always right!

Participant 21 spoke of being subjected to other people's ignorance of blindness:

One's ability to tolerate other people's stupidity can vary, according to what else is going on in one's life. We are put into an almost ambassadorial role and this can be a drag.

Self Assessment

When asked how participants describe themselves given a negative and a positive choice as prompts, 18 stated they were independent, assertive and confident. Some noted they are on a journey towards the positive end of the spectrum while others used adjectives such as: outgoing, stubborn, determined, physically and socially active, task driven, non-conformist and outrageous. Participant 14 described himself as dependent, passive and lacking in confidence:

Although I am mentally tough, in terms of existential living, I stick very much to what I know – my home, the route to work, and don't go much outside that. I get nervous whenever I have to do anything different. So, my level of comfort really depends on the situation.

Job Search Skills

In answer to the question: what methods have you used for locating employment, 19 participants noted that word of mouth had been most successful, for example hearing about work opportunities through family and friends. Other successful methods were through: specialist employment agencies such as Workbridge; job connections and workforce personnel; the (former) RNZFB placement service; personal approaches to employers; and newspaper advertisements accessed via the now defunct Employment Matters Wellington Jobline. Three participants created their own employment opportunities.

Removal of Employment Barriers

Research participants were asked how the barriers previously identified could be removed and who they felt was responsible for promoting change. Not surprisingly, most of the comments and suggestions involved the removal of negative attitudes. Twenty participants felt strongly that responsibility for driving change lay with people with vision impairments themselves and also with the RNZFB.

People with Vision Impairments as Agents of Change

Twenty of the participants noted the role people who experience blindness have in changing attitudes. Several study participants also emphasised their own role in advocating for resources. Participant 20 said:

We, as blind people, have to be more demanding and advocate better for ourselves. We need to take care though not to develop a victim mentality about employment. It's one thing to feel frustrated when someone doesn't believe you have the skills and abilities to do a job but it's another to blame your blindness for not getting a job. If you haven't set yourself up to be the best you can be, then you may well not get that job.

The role of self-advocacy to change negative attitudes was also focussed on by Participant 12 who said: "Through advocacy of and for the blind regarding access issues, we help to redress some of the attitudinal barriers." Participant 21 further noted:

We need to change the culture that permeates rehabilitation for blind people in New Zealand. Many sighted rehabilitation

staff have a mind-set that the sighted way is the superior way.

I've heard teachers say for example: this child can read print

but this other child has to read Braille, like there's something wrong with that!

Participant 10 asserted: "We should be portrayed as capable and competent, not as losers! We don't want the super-blindy image either. We need people who the average person can identify with, out there showing what is possible.

Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind and Other Agencies

Many research participants felt that responsibility for promoting and driving change also lay with the RNZFB. Participant 9 argued: "The Foundation and others continue to play on the sympathy angle - it's out of date and very negative but they just can't see past the drive to collect donations." Suggestions regarding how attitudinal change can be affected to promote employment for people with vision impairments included positive publicity through the RNZFB fund-raising department and modelling what is possible to potential employers. Participant 13 suggested:

The Foundation should have representatives from large companies such as Telecom observe people using computers and other technical equipment to show what is possible, with a view to recruiting blind workers.

The positive benefits of work experience was mentioned by three people. Participant 18 explained: "This enables young blind people to learn about the culture of work and how to make their needs known confidently but appropriately."

The Human Rights Commission, Office for Disability Issues, EEO Trust, consumer groups, parents and schools were identified as having a role to play in promoting attitudinal change.

Access to Adaptive Equipment

Suggestions regarding access to adaptive equipment were made by seven people and included: increasing the funds available; changing funding structures and ensuring access to second hand hardware and software. Participant 7 observed: “Agencies such as Workbridge and Enable need better resourcing.” Participant 6 asserted that “Funding for equipment needs to be centralised, with one set of eligibility criteria.”

The need for access to basic adaptive equipment when looking for work was seen as critical by Participant 9:

When you set out to find employment you need to be more prepared than the next person. You really need to have some adaptive equipment available to start with, even if it's old and out of date. Provided it will enable you to do most of the job while waiting for new equipment, you're holding up your end of the bargain. The Foundation needs to make second hand equipment available to us at a reasonable price.

Advice to Others

Finally, participants were asked if they had any other comments regarding how to overcome employment barriers. Most comments took the form of advice in the

following areas: self-awareness; networking; job trialling; appearance and grooming; and general employment related advice.

Table 3: Advice Offered by Research Participants

Advice to Others	Number of people in current study	Percentage
Self-awareness	4	18.18%
Networking	20	90.90%
Job-trialling	3	13.63%
Appearance and grooming	6	27.27%
General advice	12	54.54%

Self-awareness.

Four people mentioned the importance of being aware of limitations, while not allowing these to become reasons for inaction. Participant 7 stated that:”We need to be realistic about what our capabilities are and remember that the world does not owe us a living.” Similarly, participant 21 noted:

Some blind people attempt to get into various careers, on the basis that if one blind person can do it we all can. This isn’t true. Some people are much better at assessing their own potential and limitations than others.

Participant 19 urged:

Risk taking is really important. You need to believe in yourself. If you do a job poorly, use the feedback gained to

your advantage and do it better next time. Be open about where you are, how you feel and what you're doing.

Networking.

The most common forms of advice to others related to networking. Various suggestions were proposed by 20 people as crucial to employment success. Participant 15 advised: "Find yourself a mentor, either formal or informal. A sounding board you know will be supportive but also honest about improvements that could be made." Participant 5 recommended: "Maintain contact with peers and use every opportunity as a networking opportunity." Participant 21 observed: "I have found people who have been able to push me beyond my comfort zone and who are willing to take a chance on me. This has been really important in my working life." Participant 18 advised:

Build social networks, inside and outside work to assist in growing your confidence. Work can not meet all your needs. Keep work, home and recreation separate. Don't be too dependent on one person. Networking is a great way to develop and improve good work skills and professional credibility. Humans are social animals but blindness can result in isolation so networks are really important to us.

Job trialling.

Three participants spoke of experience of different work-places as being crucial for youngsters with vision impairments. Participant 2 advised: "Holiday work when young is really helpful for blind kids."

It was however noted that experience in several work places is difficult to accomplish, due to adaptations which may be required and the short duration of the job. Voluntary work was suggested as a way of overcoming the difficulties associated with employer reluctance. For Participant 7, voluntary work is better than remaining unemployed and has its advantages: "Don't just do nothing if you aren't working, do voluntary work. It's great for building confidence in yourself." Participant 4 offered this advice: "Try getting some work experience at several workplaces if possible – it's really hard to know what you want until you've tried a few things out."

Appearance and grooming.

Six people noted the importance of grooming and overall presentation.

Participant 16 observed:

Some blind people let the side down because of their appearance, their manner and their laziness. You've got to look clean and tidy – keep spare clothes at work in case you spill something on yourself.

Appearance was also emphasised by participant 18 who noted:

Be aware of your appearance – it does count! A person will notice someone who is scruffy but they'll notice even more if the person is scruffy and blind. The thing is they won't criticize because you are someone who doesn't bother they'll do it because you are blind. Eccentricity is fine but you shouldn't go for that different look until you are really confident enough to carry it off.

Participant 17 stated:

People will be too embarrassed to tell you if you have a mark on your shirt because of your blindness, so make sure you constantly check with people you can trust, whether clothes are clean. You need someone that you can rely on totally to tell you if you look clean and tidy and which clothes go with what.

General advice.

Twelve people made suggestions which constituted general advice about how to succeed in employment. Participant 10 emphasised the importance of education and learning. "Education is the key to success – you must be prepared to work hard and manage your time well. Access education life-long." Participant 20 said:

People like me who are adventitiously blind have the half full or half empty scenario – do we look at what we can no longer do or focus instead on what we can achieve? I believe the latter is far healthier and is more likely to result in positive employment outcomes for the adventitiously blind.

Participant 9 noted:

It's unfortunate that the standards we, as blind people, must attain are generally higher than what is expected of others. However, there's little point in moaning about that – we need to get on with proving and promoting ourselves.

Participant 18 advised:

Be dignified and carry yourself well, while still retaining a sense of humor. You need good manners – there will be times when you have to ask for assistance and there is a right way and a wrong way to do that.

The ability to communicate well, along with good time and people management skills, are essential employment attributes. Participant 8 noted: "Braille skills are essential – you must be literate and have a range of communication methods. Time management and good time keeping are also really important." Participant 7 recommended: "Make good use of the opportunities you get. Make the Foundation and other agencies like Workbridge work for you."

Not everyone wants to be a professional; Participant 13 noted:

I often hear people with disabilities berating others for laziness – like we all have to be lawyers etc. Some people are happy being factory workers and that's fine! We also need to remember how depressed we felt when we were rejected by employer after employer and not lose sight of where we have come from, both as a class of people and as individuals.

Participant 22 encouraged:

Don't limit yourself to jobs you know blind people can do – break new ground. Remember to go for what you want and not what others say they think you can do. Don't think you have to be a 'super-blindy' either.

Chapter five discusses the findings from the present study (noting trends also evident in the literature), examines these in light of contemporary vocational issues, makes recommendations based on research findings and recommends further research.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

As suggested in the literature, people with vision impairments regularly face barriers to employment and advancement in employment. Even in the present study, where all participants considered themselves to be successful in terms of employment, nearly half said that they had experienced difficulty in gaining employment. More than half the participants surveyed reported having been underemployed at some time, more than a third said they had experienced difficulty retaining employment and the same number had experienced problems gaining promotion once employed. Nearly, 60% had experienced significant gaps in employment with notable periods of time out of the workforce.

Employment Barriers

Negative attitudes and discrimination on the part of employers posed major problems for the participants in this study. These attitudinal issues are also commonly noted in the literature as the biggest barrier to employment for people with vision impairments (Beatson, 1981; Crudden & McBroom, 1999; Hasse 2003; La Grow 2002; McBroom, 1995; McBroom, Crudden, Skinner & Moore, 1998; Prezant & Rodriguez, 2001; State Services Commission, 2002). The negative attitudes of work colleagues, friends, family, agencies for people with disabilities and society in general, were also barriers to building the confidence necessary to gain and maintain employment. One participant summed up the frustration experienced by many in the study:

Constant rejection by employers can result in diminished confidence. It is really stressful continually having to prove

yourself and come up with alternative ways of achieving the desired end result – no one else has to explain all this at job interviews the way we are expected to.

Another participant noted:

It's frustrating when you don't get a job you just know you're right for! You never know whether you didn't get it because the employer didn't agree you were the best person for the job or because of discrimination regarding your blindness.

Once employment is gained, the employee is often faced with difficulties in accessing the equipment required for successful performance of the job. Much of this adaptive equipment consists of expensive computer hardware and software, which enables access to print, including word-processing, e-mail, the internet, spreadsheets and other data bases.

A number of the participants spoke of shelves full of second-hand equipment "gathering dust in Auckland" and the need for used equipment to be made available, at a reasonable price, to those who need it. One participant summed this up by saying: "not everyone needs the latest adaptive equipment so why not make second-hand computers and scanners available to other blind people, at a reduced cost?"

Many people spoke of the lack of casual, after school and holiday employment available to blind children. Inability to access such work, denies them the opportunity to gain work experience, establish work habits, earn some pocket money, and generally experience a lead in to more formal work commonly available to others. One reason identified for this is that such things as paper delivery and odd jobs

require sight. Any adaptations possible are considered hardly worthwhile, given the temporary nature of the work. The visual disability itself was seen as limiting opportunities by imposing a lack of versatility and even in some cases, a complete inability to undertake certain job-types and professions. One participant - who had been sighted into her 20s - said that, upon returning to university after losing her sight,

I was extremely limited in the holiday and casual work I could do. Whereas before I waitressed and worked in retail, I just couldn't do those things once I'd lost my sight! The range of short term employment options just shrank right away.

Issues around transport availability, housing which may need to accommodate a guide dog and mobility were noted by participants as impacting on employment and promotion options. Other practical barriers mentioned by participants were not knowing where job opportunities lie and all the disability-related financial and emotional costs associated with employment.

Success Factors

The literature offers mixed views about whether these sorts of barriers can be overcome by personal attributes, effort or planning (O'Day, 1999; Rumrill, Schuyler & Longden, 1997). However the present study strongly suggests that positive self-image and a "can do" attitude play a huge part in determining employment success for those who experience blindness. The literature reviewed in chapter two notes that attributes such as willingness to learn, work hard and take risks, good time management skills, having a good work ethic, good manners and appearance, a wide

social network and support and a sense of humour, are crucial to successful employment outcomes (Crudden & McBroom, 1999; Hutto & Hare, 1997; Rabby & Croft, 1990; Young, 1995).

These attributes can be grouped under two major headings: positive attitude and motivation, as can the factors identified in the member focus groups conducted by the RNZFB in 2002 and by those who took part in the present study. Blindness-specific success factors noted by study participants were also similar to studies reviewed in chapter two. These were: acceptance of disability; developing good orientation and mobility skills; the ability to deal with stress and frustration; and good communication and literacy skills, including mastery of adaptive techniques and equipment.

Five people in the present study offered advice about what to do to ensure ongoing employment and advancing at work. Participant 20 summed up these comments in the following way:

It's wise to have objectives in mind, while also being prepared to branch off in a different direction if necessary - flexibility is crucial. Be open to possibilities and keep up with contemporary trends. Keep your networks and skills current.

McBroom (1995) identifies three key factors to advancement at work, once employed: competence building from within entry level positions; volunteering for tasks or projects which have the potential to lead to greater responsibility and thence to promotion; and the formation of networks within the workplace. The latter involves risk but also reward.

*Discussion of Barriers and Success Factors**Negative Attitudes*

There can be no doubt that negative attitudes comprise the most significant barrier in the lives of people with vision impairments. However such attitudes are both societal and individual. Whether one grows up experiencing life with no usable vision as a matter of course, becomes increasingly vision impaired over a period of time or loses vision later in life, the attitudes of others inevitably shape our own to some extent. The most prevalent negative attitude is that of the propensity of others to focus on the vision impairment, rather than the abilities of the person who experiences it. But what of the attitudes of people with vision impairments, to themselves and their abilities? People who experience blindness are constantly bombarded with a plethora of mixed messages about what they can and should achieve and it is hardly surprising that some simply opt out of responsibility for themselves and their own lives, handing over decision making power to someone else.

For those with congenital impairments, a lifetime of processing other people's negative attitudes can be very damaging to the psyche, leading to the belief that others (those without impairments) know what is best. Many children with vision impairments learn that it is easier to give power over themselves and their lives away to others, rather than constantly battling over a long list of seemingly trivial issues. How traumatic then to reach adulthood, only to find that one is after all expected to be self-directed. Baker, Stephens & Hill (2001) note that independence and dependence are not at opposite ends of the spectrum but are " ... domain-specific and complex and are determined by both environmental factors and personal characteristics" (p. 3).

For someone who becomes blind later in life, the initial shock is naturally devastating to them, their family and friends. Once psychological healing and adjustment are underway, the person must next grapple with their own ideas and attitudes about disability, which have been built up over time, and somehow marry these to a self concept which has also been formed over many years. There is some evidence to suggest that people who acquire impairments later in life tend to deal with the event of this acquisition, in much the same way as they have coped with other major changes to their lives. Thus, a person's own self concept and attitude towards impairment seems crucial to the achievement of a fulfilling life, which includes success in achieving employment goals. If previously held attitudes about disability are negative, this must surely make the transition to "disabled person" that much harder.

Many of the personal coping strategies developed by people with vision impairments and encouraged by various rehabilitation interventions as a means to ultimate self-determination, turn out to be what Johnson & Walker (1996) refer to as "attitudes of learned helplessness fostered by professionals and significant others." This learned helplessness hinders the achievement of significant growth and itself becomes a major barrier (Kirchner, Schmeidler & Todorov, 1999). The achievement of employment goals when significantly disabled, requires a high degree of risk taking. While placing the emphasis on mere coping strategies and problem solving skills can lead to minimalist, repetitive repartees, designed merely to enable the person to make it through each day. Many people with vision impairments internalise the negative attitudes of others, including family members, and make them their own

(McConnell, 1999). In fact, Freedman & Fesko (1995) found that family members of people with impairments in employment tended to believe that any job was better than none and did not believe the disabled family member could or should attempt to move into a better job.

The achievement of self-determination means being prepared to move out of one's comfort zone and take on new responsibilities. Even for those in employment, fear of the responsibility which success brings may be a major factor in the often reported underemployment of this group. It is necessary for all people to take responsibility for themselves, placing themselves firmly in the driver's seat of their own lives. However for people with vision impairments who may be sheltered by well meaning family members or protected by institutional norms in other residential situations, it can be very difficult to take the first step. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) wrote:

Each of us is born with two contradictory sets of instructions: a conservative tendency, made up of instincts for self-preservation, self-aggrandizement, and saving energy, and an expansive tendency made up of instincts for exploring, for enjoying novelty and risk--the curiosity that leads to creativity belongs to this set. But whereas the first tendency requires little encouragement or support from outside to motivate behavior, the second can wilt if not cultivated. If too few opportunities for curiosity are available, if too many obstacles are put in the way of risk and exploration, the motivation to engage in creative behavior is easily extinguished.

Employment Placement

There are a number of factors which must be taken into consideration by placement specialists, when assisting clients with vision impairments to formulate plans for future vocational endeavours. Attributes such as age, gender, geographical location, educational attainment and increasingly, ethnicity and culture are routinely taken into consideration by practitioners, when planning various strategies to achieve positive vocational outcomes for clients.

Placement specialists need to examine their own attitudes to people with disabilities and their wishes relating to employment. Many of those interviewed for the present study noted that placement specialists they had worked with were often negative and indulged in stereotypic thinking regarding the types of tasks which can be performed by blind people (Rabby & Croft, 1990; Wolffe, Roessler & Schriener, 1992). "The system is made up of an incestuous group of well-intentioned do-gooders who are unimaginative in their thinking and afraid to let clients fail" (Pomerantz, 1990, In *Career Perspectives: Interviews with blind and visually impaired professionals*, Marie Attmore (Comp.), New York: American Foundation for the Blind, pp.17).

Disclosure of disability related information is an emerging and complex issue for placement specialists and people with vision impairments alike. The issue is not one of merely disclosing the vision impairment but how much personal information to divulge and how this should be managed. For example, positive language should be used when describing the impairment. Medical jargon about various eye conditions, coupled with negative language such as victim and suffer, are at best meaningless and

at worst, extremely off-putting to an employer. However, describing an impairment in terms of the way in which this is managed by the individual demonstrates an ability to think laterally to resolve difficulties (Rocco, 1997; State Services Commission, 2001). The encouragement of employment dreams, goal setting and action planning, together with strategies aimed at reducing or removing barriers to satisfying, long term employment, must be included as important aspects of successful vocational rehabilitation intervention (Rumrill, Schuyler & Longden, 1997).

*Recommendations from Study Findings**Employment Placement*

While it is easier to focus on what is already known to be possible for people who experience blindness, all studies reviewed clearly illustrate that risk taking is essential to the achievement of client aspirations. It is recommended that placement specialists work with clients towards stated long term goals— encouraging them to dream of what is possible and work towards the fulfilment of these dreams and goals. Since success breeds success, a step by step approach needs to be taken. This will enable the establishment, enhancement and layering of confidence to occur.

Mentoring

Many comments noted in both the literature consulted for this study and the present study itself, emphasise the role and importance of mentoring. It is recommended that the RNZFB examine practical mentoring programmes for clients, especially for young people and those newly blinded.

Adaptive Equipment

Suggestions made by participants in this study regarding access to adaptive equipment included: increasing the funds available; changing funding structures and ensuring access to second hand hardware and software. Since all participants in the present study used some sort of adaptive equipment - including screen readers - to assist with day to day employment related tasks, it is obvious that employment success largely depends on being able to acquire and train to use such equipment. Given the cost of new equipment is very expensive, it is recommended that the

RNZFB and Enable New Zealand advertise and make second-hand equipment available to registered members of the Foundation. It is further noted that such second-hand equipment must be provided at a realistic cost, which takes into account market rates of depreciation.

Job Trialling

It is noted that participants in the present study spoke of work experience being difficult for blind youth to access. This was also noted in the literature. It is recommended that the RNZFB use its own networks (for example through Community Committees) to establish a pool of employers, willing to provide work experience to young people with vision impairments. Adaptive equipment would need to be provided and remain with each employer taking part. This would provide young people with a range of workplaces and tasks to try out during school holidays.

Portrayal of Vision Impairment

Participants in the present study were adamant that the RNZFB must focus its fundraising efforts on the positive aspects of living with blindness, rather than merely concerning itself with pushing for the dollar. Positive promotion of the abilities of people with vision impairments must also be undertaken by Workbridge and other disability sector agencies.

Advice to Others

Finally, study participants made several suggestions to assist others to gain and maintain long-term, successful employment outcomes. It is recommended that the section on advice to others, at the end of chapter four of the present study, be

produced in accessible formats and made available to people with vision impairments through RNZFB Vocational Employment Advisors and Workbridge offices.

Further Research

The issue of disability employment is, in the words of a 1998 study by Barnes, Thornton and Maynard Campbell, "a moving target for research" (p.4). Knowledge and information about the nature of service provision and the needs of people with disabilities must be constantly updated, in order to gain a clear picture of current reality.

The two major factors for employment success identified in the present study are positive attitude, including self-awareness, and motivation. The latter characteristics are not employment-specific but nevertheless have implications for the way in which assistance is provided to people with vision impairments by placement specialists. Further research needs to be conducted among people with vision impairments, using a recognised tool, to assess level of self-awareness and motivation. It is suggested that two groups of people with vision impairments (one employed and one seeking work but unemployed) be sampled, to determine any significant differences in attitude and motivation. Use of the Career Thoughts Inventory developed by Lustig & Strauser (2003) may highlight the role individual's attitudes play in determining employment success. The findings of such research may contribute positively to the provision of practical vocational assistance. The timeliness of such assistance being of particular importance, given the likelihood of motivation diminishing soon after leaving school or a previous job and the consequent loss of ability to succeed in employment.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the knowledge gained from the present study will assist people who experience blindness to focus on their employment dreams and set/achieve long-term goals; identify, remove and minimise the barriers to the achievement of these goals; and utilise the strategies identified by research participants to succeed in their chosen careers. It is also hoped that the data collected may be of use to policy makers and programme developers when reviewing vocational services for people with vision impairments.

To conclude this research into barriers and successes experienced by employed, totally blind New Zealanders, let's look on the bright side and hear from the study participants themselves. Participant 12 stated:

Don't give up when things go wrong – they will go badly wrong at times but don't be afraid to fail – fear of failure often stops people from trying in the first place. We all learn from our mistakes. Parents must let blind children do the same. They do their children no favours at all by over-protecting them.

The last word goes to participant 21 who advises:

Don't underestimate yourself or your abilities but be prepared to work hard. Life can be pretty good when you're blind but you really do have to work at it all, including social relationships.

Revised 5/9/02)

Appendix A

Te Kunenga ki PŴrehuroa

Human Ethics Committee

To: Secretary, Human Ethics Committee

AT Principal's Office Albany	OR Equity & Ethics Old Main Building Turitea, Palmerston North	OR Principal's Office Wellington
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Please send this original (1) application plus twelve (12) copies
Application should be double-sided and stapled
Application due two (2) weeks prior to the meeting

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF PROPOSED
RESEARCH/TEACHING/EVALUATION
PROCEDURES INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

Including Attachments:
Information Sheet, Consent Form, Draft Interview Schedule

SECTION A: GENERAL INFORMATION

1	Full Name of Staff Applicant <i>(for staff research, teaching and evaluations)</i> <i>Please sign the relevant Staff Applicant's Declaration.</i>									
	School/Department/ Institute/Section									
	Region (mark one only)	<table><tr><td>Albany</td><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td>Palmerston North</td><td><input type="checkbox"/></td></tr><tr><td>Wellington</td><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Albany	<input type="checkbox"/>	Palmerston North	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wellington	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Albany	<input type="checkbox"/>	Palmerston North	<input type="checkbox"/>							
Wellington	<input type="checkbox"/>									
	Telephone									
	Email Address									

- 2 **Full Name of Student** Pamela J Crothall

Applicant

(for supervised student research)

Please sign the relevant Student Applicant's Declaration.

Telephone

Email Address

Postal Address

Employer

State Services Commission

- 3 Full Name of Professor Steve LaGrow

Supervisor

(for supervised student research)
Please sign the relevant Supervisor's Declaration.

School/Department School of Health Sciences – Rehabilitation Programme

Region (*mark one only*)

Albany

Palmerston North

X

Wellington

(06) 350-5799 ext. 2248

Telephone

Email Address

s.j.lagrow@massey.ac.nz

- 4 Full Name of Line**

Manager

(for evaluations)

Please sign the relevant Line Manager's Declaration.

Section

Region (mark one Albany only)

Albany

Palmerston North

Wellington

Telephone**Email Address**

5	Project Title	“Employment barriers identified by totally blind, employed New Zealanders and how these were overcome”			
6	Projected start date of Project	February 2002			
	Projected end date of Project	December 2003			
7	Type of Project: (mark one only)	Staff Research	<input type="checkbox"/>	Honours Project	<input type="checkbox"/>
		PhD Thesis	<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluation Programme	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Master’s Thesis	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Teaching Programme	<input type="checkbox"/>
		MBA Project	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
				If Other, specify	
8	Summary of Project (no more than 200 words in lay language)				

(Note: All the information provided in the application is potentially available if a request is made under the Official Information Act. In the event that a request is made, the University, in the first instance, would endeavour to satisfy that request by providing this summary. Please ensure that the language used is comprehensible to all.)

One group of people with impairments who experience very high levels of unemployment are those with no usable vision, (see LaGrow, 2002: *Employment, unemployment and underemployment among working age members of the Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind*).

The proposed research is to be undertaken with a group of employed, totally blind New Zealanders, those experiencing total blindness being a very under-researched group. The study will investigate employment barriers experienced prior to employment, as well as barriers to advancement in employment and how these have been overcome.

Analysis of variables such as gender, level of family support, educational attainment, use of adaptive equipment, and age at onset will also be highlighted within the study.

The data collected will be analysed using thematic analysis.

It is intended that the knowledge gained from this research will assist people who experience total blindness to:

- focus on their employment dreams and set goals;
- identify, remove and/or minimise the barriers to the achievement of these goals; and
- utilise the strategies identified by the research findings to succeed in their chosen careers.

The data collected will assist policy makers and programme developers in reviewing vocational services for people with vision impairments.

Finally, this approach to the study of employment barriers for people who experience blindness will be guided by the notion of disability as a social construct. This acknowledges that people with vision impairments are disabled by physical, systemic and attitudinal barriers to the attainment of meaningful long-term employment.

Declarations

DECLARATIONS FOR PERSONS PROCEEDING WITHOUT A FULL APPLICATION

DECLARATION FOR THE STAFF APPLICANT

I have read the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants. I understand my obligations and the rights of the participants, particularly in so far as obtaining informed consent is concerned. I agree to undertake the research as set out in the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants.

Staff Applicant's
Signature

Date:

DECLARATION FOR LINE MANAGER (for research/evaluations undertaken in the Divisions)

I declare that to the best of my knowledge, this application complies with the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants and that I have approved its content and agreed that it can be submitted.

Line Manager's
Signature

Date:

DECLARATION FOR THE STUDENT APPLICANT (for supervised student research)

I have read the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants and discussed the ethical analysis with my Supervisor. I understand my obligations and the rights of the participants, particularly in so far as obtaining informed consent is concerned. I agree to undertake the research as set out in the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants.

Student
Applicant's
Signature

Date:

DECLARATION FOR THE SUPERVISOR (for supervised student research)

I have assisted the student in the ethical analysis of this project. I understand my obligations and the rights of the participants, particularly in so far as obtaining informed consent is concerned. I agree to undertake the research as set out in the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants.

Supervisor's
Signature

Date:

Appendix B

E-mail Call for Participants

From: Pam Crothall [REDACTED]

Sent: Saturday, November 30, 2002 1:14 P.M.

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: Employment barriers

Hello!

My name is Pam Crothall and I am a registered member of the Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind. I am currently half way through an M-Phil in rehabilitation studies, at Massey University, in Palmerston North. The study I am undertaking for this degree focuses on the employment barriers experienced by employed, totally blind New Zealanders and how these barriers were overcome. It is hoped that the knowledge gained from this research will assist people with vision loss to:

- focus on their employment dreams and set goals;
- identify, remove and/or minimise the barriers to the achievement of these goals; and
- utilise the strategies identified by the research findings to succeed in their chosen careers.

In order to undertake the above research, I need the assistance of people who meet the study criteria, i.e. people who are totally blind and currently employed. For the purposes of this study, totally blind means no usable reading vision and reliance on a white cane, guide dog or sighted guide for mobility. Please note that study

participants need not be registered with the Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind.

If you would like to participate in this study, please reply to this e-mail. I will send you an information sheet and a consent form, and arrange a suitable time to contact you by phone to discuss your experience of employment barriers. If you agree to take part, your participation will remain confidential and information gathered from the phone interview will be used in a way that will not identify you.

Regards

Pam Crothall

Appendix C

Information Sheet

Looking on the Bright Side: Employment Barriers Experienced by Employed, Totally Blind New Zealanders and How These Were Minimised or Overcome

For those who identify as employed, totally blind (no usable vision) New Zealanders (Also available in Braille and on cassette)

Who Is Doing This Research?

My name is Pam Crothall, and I am a student in the School of Health Sciences at Massey University in Palmerston North. This research project is part of my work towards an M.Phil (Master of Philosophy) in Rehabilitation Studies. It takes the form of a series of telephone interviews with volunteer participants, and the data gathered will be collated for use in the writing of my thesis. Parts of the thesis may be published. My supervisors are Professor Steve LaGrow, Dr Regina Pernice, and Ms Gretchen Good. I currently work as the Manager of the Mainstream Supported Employment Programme, for people with disabilities, provided by the State Services Commission. I am myself totally blind. My full contact details, and those of my supervisors, are on the last page of this Information Sheet. You will also find there contact details for the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, which has approved this project.

What Is This Research About?

This study focuses on the barriers to employment experienced by employed, totally blind New Zealanders, whether registered with the Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind (RNZFB) or not, and how these barriers were overcome.

How Did This Research Come About?

My experiences as long term unemployed when a young adult, and currently as Mainstream Programme Manager have lead me to ask why some people who experience blindness become employed in rewarding, challenging and worthwhile jobs, while others seem unable to get a foot in the employment door, or become trapped in dead-end, poorly paid jobs. By undertaking this research I hope to gain both personal and professional understanding of the success factors which lead to long term employment for people who experience blindness. This study will both inform my work and, by sharing the research findings with other people who experience blindness, assist them to at least minimise barriers to their own employment.

How Will Participants Be Found?

Once approval from the Ethics Committee has been gained, the researcher will call for volunteers within New Zealand via a vision-impaired email group, the Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind (RNZFB) Telephone Information Service, and by use of snowballing. Please note that for the purposes of this study:

1. Totally blind means no usable reading vision and reliance on a white cane, guide dog or sighted guide for mobility;
2. Employed means being in full or part-time, paid work; and
3. Participants must be New Zealanders, over 16 years of age.

No payment will be given for participating in the survey.

What Should I Do if I Want to Participate?

To participate, please complete the consent form and return it to me via e-mail. I will send you a copy of the schedule to be used during the telephone interview, in

the format most accessible to you. I will then arrange with you a suitable time to complete a telephone interview about your experience of employment barriers and strategies you may have used to minimise or overcome these. The telephone interview will be tape-recorded and should take about one hour to complete. You can ask for the tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Issues of Confidentiality and Anonymity

My supervisors and I will be the only people with access to the telephone interview tape-recordings and these will be locked away securely, with no need for your name to be attached to the information taken from these. If any research assistants are hired to help input data, they will sign a confidentiality agreement. None of the information you provide will go to any agency, such as the Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind. This organisation may, of course, be interested in the overall survey results, but none of your private information will be made available to anyone other than the researcher.

All data gathered will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office at the State Services Commission. After the required waiting period (five years), all documents and cassette tapes will be destroyed. No reference to individuals will be made in the Masters thesis or any publications arising from it.

Your Rights as a Participant

- You will be advised of your rights as a participant in this research and asked to give oral consent before proceeding with the interview.
- Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary.
- You have the right to decline any involvement.

- You can ask any questions about the research at any stage.
- You can withdraw from the research, effective immediately, and also refuse to answer any question.
- Your participation will remain confidential to the researcher. That is, your information will be used in a way that you will not be identified and is given on the understanding that your name will not be used under any circumstances, unless you give permission. As far as possible, I will assure your anonymity and confidentiality.

A summary of the findings will be available to you in an accessible format on request, at the completion of the research.

Contact Details

If you wish to take part in this study you will need to:

1. Contact the researcher: Pam Crothall;
2. Complete a consent form;
3. Indicate the format in which you would like the interview schedule sent to you;
4. Negotiate a suitable time for me to telephone you.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Protocol 01/118. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee, Palmerston North; telephone (6) 350-5249, email S.V.Rumball@massey.ac.nz

Thank you for considering this request.

Principal Researcher:

Pam Crothall, Phone: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

Supervisors:

Professor Steven J. LaGrow, School of Health Sciences, Phone: (06) 350-5799 ext. 2248

E-mail: s.j.lagrow@massey.ac.nz

Dr Regina Pernice, School of Health Sciences

Phone: (06) 350-5799 ext. 2542

E-mail: r.e.pernice@massey.ac.nz

Gretchen Good, School of Health Sciences

Phone: (06) 350-5799 ext. 2245

E-mail: g.a.good@massey.ac.nz

Appendix D

Consent Form

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

*Looking on the Bright Side: Employment Barriers Experienced by Employed, Totally
Blind New Zealanders and How These Were Overcome*

I have read the Information Sheet or had it read to me, and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to the interview being audiotaped.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission.

I understand that the information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project.

I also understand that my participation in this project will not affect any services I may receive from any agency or organisation.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

My telephone number: _____

I would like the interview schedule sent to me (Please delete that which does not apply):

Via email

In Braille

On cassette

Appendix E

Interview Schedule

Looking on the Bright Side: Employment Barriers Experienced by Employed, Totally Blind New Zealanders and How These Were Overcome

Introduction of Researcher and Topic

Hi! My name is Pam Crothall and I'd like to thank you once again for agreeing to take part in this research study. As noted in the information sheet recently sent to you, the study I am undertaking focuses on the employment barriers experienced by employed, totally blind New Zealanders, whether registered with the Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind or not, and how these barriers were overcome.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You can ask any questions about the research at any stage. You can refuse to answer particular questions or withdraw from the research at any time. Your participation will remain confidential and information gathered from this phone interview will be used in a way that will not identify you. As far as possible, I will ensure your anonymity and confidentiality.

1. Demographic Information

1.1. What is your age group?

ث 16 to 20 years?

ث 21 to 25 years?

ث 26 to 30 years?

ث 31 to 35 years?

ث 36 to 40 years?

☐ 41 to 45 years?

☐ 46 to 50 years?

☐ 51 to 55 years?

☐ 56 to 60 years?

☐ 61 to 65 years?

☐ 66 years or older?

1.2. What is your ethnicity?

☐ Maori

☐ NZ European

☐ Non-NZ European

☐ Pacific Islands Person

☐ Asian

☐ Other – please state

1.3. What is your gender?

☐ Male

☐ Female

1.4. What is your marital status, e.g.married, de facto,single?

.....

1.5.In what type of geographical location do you reside?

☐ City

☐ Suburban

☐ Semi-rural

☐ Rural

ف Other – please state

2. Vision Impairment

2.1. How old were you when you began to have problems with your vision?

.....

.....

.....

2.2. Was vision loss sudden or gradual?

.....

.....

.....

2.3. What caused the vision loss? Prompt if needed:

ف Disease?

ف Injury?

2.4. Is vision impairment a family trait?

ف Yes

ف No

2.5. Are you registered with the Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind?

ف Yes

ف No

3. Disability and Self-Esteem

3.1. Would you say you are comfortable or uncomfortable with your disability?

.....

.....

.....

Supplementary questions are: Have you always felt this way about your blindness?

Can you say a little more about your feelings?

.....

.....

.....

3.2. How would you describe yourself? For example would you say you are:
dependent, passive,lacking in confidence or, independent,assertive and confident?

.....

.....

.....

.....

4. Family

Please tell me about your family of origin, including:

4.1.Income level, e.g. high, medium or low?

.....

.....

.....

4.2. Siblings – Number and sex?

.....

.....

.....

4.3.Family members' expectations of you, regarding education and employment

.....

.....

.....

5.Education

5.1. Was your education gained at regular or special schools, or a mixture of both?

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5.2.If a mixture, how many years at each type of facility?

.....

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5.3.Did you gain School Certificate?

ﻓﺎ ﻳﻪﺱ

ﻓﺎ ﻧﻮ

5.4. If not, go to question 5.7.If so, in what subjects?

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5.5. Did you gain University Entrance?

ﻓﺎ ﻳﻪﺱ

ﻓﺎ ﻧﻮ

5.6. If not, go to question 5.7. If so, in what subjects?

.....

.....

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5.7. Would you say your education equipped you well for employment? If yes, how?

.....

.....

.....

If no, why not?

.....

.....

.....

5.8. Have you ever attended a university or polytechnic?

ﻓﻲ Yes

ﻓﻲ No

5.9. If Yes, at what age did you attend and for how long?

.....

.....

.....

If no, go to section 6.

5.10 Did you gain any qualifications while at university or polytechnic? If so, what were these?

.....

.....

.....

6. Employment History

6.1. Please describe any difficulties experienced in the past with the following:

6.1.1- gaining employment for which you were qualified?

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.....

6.1.2- retaining employment?

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6.1.3- gaps between periods of employment?

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6.2. What other barriers to employment have you experienced?

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6.3. Have you used employment scholarships or programmes for people with disabilities to gain employment?

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6.4.Describe any other methods for locating jobs you have used in the past?

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.....

7.Current Employment

7.1. What is your current job?

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7.2. How long have you had this job?

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7.3. Do you work in the public or private sector?

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7. 4. Are you self employed?

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7.5. Is your job full or part-time? If part-time, how many hours per week do you work?

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7.6. How did you locate this job?

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7.7. What adaptive equipment do you use at work?

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7.8. What level of seniority do you have at work?

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7.9. Are you happy with this job? If so why? If not why not?

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7.10. Would you say your desire to work is high, medium or low?

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Do you have access to adequate training opportunities with your present employer?

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7.12. Do you worry about being able to retain your job? If so why?

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7.13. Please describe any barriers to advancement in your current job.

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7.14. What factors might prevent you from applying for a more senior position, either with your present employer or with another employer?

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7.15. In terms of your employment situation, would you describe yourself as a successful person? If not why not? If so, what factors would you say have made this success possible?

.....

.....

.....

7.16. Which of the following best describes your current gross salary level:

- ف 0 to \$5,000?
- ف \$5,000 to \$10,000?
- ف \$10,000 to \$15,000?
- ف \$15,000 to \$20,000?
- ف \$20,000 to \$25,000?
- ف \$25,000 to \$30,000?
- ف \$30,000 to \$35,000?
- ف \$35,000 to \$40,000?
- ف \$40,000 to \$45,000?
- ف \$45,000 to \$50,000?
- ف \$50,000 to \$55,000?
- ف \$55,000 to \$60,000?
- ف \$60,000 to \$65,000?
- ف \$65,000 to \$70,000?
- ف \$70,000 to \$75,000?
- ف \$75,000 to \$80,000?

فـ \$80,000 to \$85,000?

فـ \$85,000 to \$90,000?

فـ \$90,000 to \$95,000?

فـ \$95,000 to \$100,000?

فـ Over \$100,000?

7.17. Do you have a long term employment goal or dream? If so, what is this? What strategies have you developed to ensure this is achieved?

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8. Final Comments

Do you have any other comments to make regarding employment barriers for people who experience blindness and how these barriers can be overcome?

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Appendix F

The New Zealand Disability Strategy

Fifteen Objectives have been developed for the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

Objective 1: Encourage and educate for a non-disabling society.

- Encourage the emergence of a non-disabling society that respects and highly values the lives of disabled people and supports inclusive communities.

Objective 2: Ensure rights for disabled people.

- Uphold and promote the rights of disabled people.

Objective 3: Provide the best education for disabled people.

- Improve education so that all children, youth and adult learners will have equal opportunities to learn and develop in their local, regular educational centres.

Objective 4: Provide opportunities in employment and economic development for disabled people.

- Enable disabled people to work in the open labour market in accordance with human rights principles) and maintain an adequate income.

Objective 5: Foster leadership by disabled people.

- Acknowledge the experience of disability as a form of specialised knowledge and strengthen the leadership of disabled people.

Objective 6: Foster an aware and responsive public service.

- Ensure that government agencies, publicly funded services and publicly accountable bodies (such as territorial authorities) are aware of and responsive to disabled people.

Objective 7: Create long-term support systems centred on the individual.

- Create a quality assessment and service delivery system that is centred on disabled people, ensures their participation in assessment and service delivery, has invisible borders and is easy to access.

Objective 8: Support quality living in the community for disabled people.

- Provide opportunities for disabled people to have their own homes and live in the community.

Objective 9: Support lifestyle choices, recreation and culture for disabled people.

- Create and support lifestyle choices for disabled people within the community and promote access to recreation and cultural opportunities.

Objective 10: Collect and use relevant information about disabled people and disability issues.

- Improve the quality of relevant disability information collected, analysed and used, including regular national surveys of activity limitation.

Objective 11: Promote participation of disabled Maori.

- Promote opportunities for disabled Maori to participate in their communities and access disability services. Disabled Maori should receive an equitable level of resource that is delivered in a culturally appropriate way.

Objective 12: Promote participation of disabled Pacific peoples.

- Promote opportunities for disabled Pacific peoples to participate in their communities and access disability services. Disabled Pacific peoples should receive an equitable level of resource that is delivered in a culturally appropriate way.

Objective 13: Enable disabled children and youth to lead full and active lives.

- Disabled children and youth should enjoy full and active lives, in conditions that prepare them for adulthood and which:
 - 1) ensure their dignity;
 - 2) affirm their right to a good future and to; participate in education, relationships, leisure, work and political processes;
 - 3) recognise their emerging identities as individuals and reinforce their sense of self;
 - 4) promote self-reliance;
 - 5) recognise their important links with family, friends and school; and
 - 6) facilitate their active participation in the community.

Objective 14: Promote participation of disabled women in order to improve their quality of life.

- Improve opportunities for disabled women to participate in their communities, access appropriate disability services, and improve their quality of life.

Objective 15: Value families, whanau and people providing ongoing support.

- Acknowledge and support the roles, responsibilities and issues facing family, whanau and those who support disabled people.

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