

Employment Committee

During State Fiscal Year 2018, The GCBVI Employment Committee continued our work toward the mission of the GCBVI. We discussed ways to address Council priorities that resulted from the recently passed Strategic Plan that were assigned to the Employment Committee. We also continued working with our branded concept of E75, “Eliminate, Employ, and Empower” the estimated 75% of individuals who are blind or visually impaired and unemployed. Towards this end, we have engaged in the following:

- Created, in collaboration with the Department of Economic Security (DES), an E75 Video public service announcement, to alert the public and potential employers to the capabilities of individuals who are blind and visually impaired.
- Presented at the Governor’s Summit on Civic Engagement and Volunteerism to share the value blind and visually impaired individuals can bring to the table, and we asked for advice in how to grow our audience in the future.
- Sponsored a Business Breakfast in collaboration with Arizona Industries for the Blind (AIB) at the Flinn Foundation, where Kirk Adams, President and CEO of the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), spoke to 30+ employers about the benefits of embracing a workplace of diversity and inclusion.
- Successfully honored 6 Arizona employers at our 3rd Annual E75 Diversity Builders Awards Luncheon, which took place in January at Ability 360’s Conference Center.

The GCBVI Employment Committee is honored to serve the Council. We will continue to create opportunities to advocate for the rights of Arizonans who are blind or visually impaired, especially those seeking to enter the workforce.

Committee Members

Nicole Jeffords, Chair

Terrell Welch

Kevin Foster

Tanner Gers

Jordan Moon

Bea Shapiro

Jim Strohacker

Education Committee

The Education Committee is working with several community partners to assure that the education of students who are blind is equivalent to the education received by their sighted peers. The committee is composed of education professionals, Vocational Rehabilitation services agency members, and private agency professionals, as well as parents of blind students. We have formed three work groups:

- Early childhood
- Kindergarten through Grade 12
- Transition age and college students

We are working with the Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and Blind (ASDB) and the Arizona Department of Education to establish base lines for comparing the achievements of students who are blind with the achievements of their sighted peers. We meet every month, and ours is a very active committee in our effort to achieve the goals of the Council.

Our future goals include:

- Collaboratively develop a data collection mechanism that tracks test scores from Kindergarten through Grade 12 for all school districts in Arizona.
- Assure blind and low vision accessibility standards are in place for instruction and testing of infants and toddlers through post-secondary education students.
- Establish a clearing house of manuscripts on best practices in the education of students who are blind and visually impaired and make it available to all Arizona school districts' personnel who administer expanded core curriculum education.

Committee Members

Bob Kresmer, Chair

Doris Woltman

Jared Kittelson

Ed House

Lisa Jackson

Lisa Yencarelli

Julie Urban

Legislative and Public Policy Committee

Members of the Legislative and Public Policy Committee were busy between July 1, 2017 and June 30, 2018. With the backing of the GCBVI, a bill was passed in the State Legislature that would make it illegal for social workers to remove children from their homes solely because of the visual disability of one or both parents. The GCBVI also supported efforts to exempt the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation from some of the state's purchasing policy requirements. While this effort failed in 2018, due mainly to an opinion issued by the office of the State Attorney General, it is expected that efforts to reform the purchasing process for needed equipment for blind Arizonans in the Vocational Rehabilitation program will resume in 2019.

The Strategic Plan developed in 2017 gives the Legislative and Public Policy Committee many goals on which it must take the lead. These goals include:

- 1) Ensuring that funding for VR services is available through all possible methods;
- 2) Making sure that all blind Arizonans who want them are receiving VR services and that the comprehensive blindness skills training programs are available to all blind consumers;
- 3) Revising SBVID best practices with collaboration from the GCBVI and other blind stakeholders;
- 4) Ensuring that funding for independent living training for blind and visually impaired seniors is both increased and sustained; and
- 5) Establishing and maintaining funding for independent living training for blind and visually impaired persons under the age of 55 who are not necessarily looking to return to the workforce.

The Legislative and Public Policy committee is prepared to meet these strategic plan goals.

Position Statements

The Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment appreciates the Governor's and State Legislature's support to the blind community through increasing the Arizona line item for Vocational Rehabilitation services. Through this increase, blind/visually impaired Arizonans will no longer wait for services and will be able to access the tools they need to obtain employment and contribute to our communities. The GCBVI believes that increased support means increased responsibility for successful outcomes and transparency.

Future Considerations: The GCBVI will continue to observe the access to and quality of Vocational Rehabilitation services, and advocate for increased service levels with increased outcomes with the adherence to best practices. To ensure that all blind RSA consumers have the access to services that provide tools for eliminating access and skill related barriers to independent living and employment, it is imperative that RSA collaborate with blind consumer groups and the GCBVI for guidance and feedback. This includes policy development, selection of key blindness professionals working in RSA Services for the Blind Visually Impaired and Deaf, and in the training and development of RSA staff working with Blind and Deaf-Blind consumers.

The Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment supports the philosophy of the Managed Service Provide (MSP) for services to blind consumers within DES/RSA. The GCBVI appreciates the focus on best practices for customer values and needs, and the elimination of wasteful barriers that

impede the time and efficiency for achieving consumer outcomes for employment and independent living. The GCBVI believes that best efficiency can be achieved through collaboration with consumer groups and private organizations for development and implementation of best practice approaches to vocational rehabilitation and independent living services. Additionally, further analysis of procurement practices, hiring, training staff, and efficiently assigning and processing consumer caseloads will support a productive service delivery system. Finally, the GCBVI asserts that the highest quality and efficiency of federal funding can be best achieved through public-private partnerships where the responsibility for serving blind Arizonans can be shared both from direct service and fiscal contributions through contracting.

Future considerations: The GCBVI calls for increased transparency within the DES Office of Procurement for the exploration of more efficient use of state and federal funding. Through an open and collaborative relationship with consumer groups and community, DES will learn about the most effective use of funds while focusing on consumer outcomes. The GCBVI additionally calls for a re-evaluation and update to best practices for Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living services for blind consumers to ensure that consumers and community groups can provide feedback on how services impact employment and independent living outcomes.

The Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment supports inclusive, and accessible education for all of Arizona's blind students from early intervention through post-secondary education. The GCBVI believes that fully inclusive, educational experiences for blind students can only exist when a best practice approach for implementing the Arizona state standards as well as the Expanded Core Curriculum is developed and supported by the Arizona Department of Education, public school systems, private and charter school entities, the Arizona State School for the Deaf and Blind, School for the Blind, and all relevant stakeholders within the blind community.

Future Considerations: The GCBVI calls for a task force to develop and analyze a data-based strategy to measurably improve the teaching of and learning by Arizona blind and visually impaired students. Currently, the Arizona State School for the Deaf and Blind reports that Main Campus blind/visually impaired students are testing at the bottom 5% of all Arizona students. The GCBVI asserts that to identify best practices for instruction to blind/visually impaired students to be effective, it is imperative that we gather all test score data to identify what is and is not effective practices for instruction to blind/visually impaired students K-12 in all districts and schools through the state of Arizona. The GCBVI further calls for full implementation of Arizona's Braille Literacy Law, which includes effective assessment of all blind/visually impaired students, guidelines for full implementation, and effective training and support to Arizona teachers of blind students.

The Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment supports the continuation of the Business Enterprise Program. The Business Enterprise Program in a close partnering relationship with Rehabilitation Services Administration's Vocational Rehabilitation Program, offers legally blind persons the opportunity to become independent entrepreneurs capable of achieving their fullest potential through self-employment. Being self-supporting through one's own efforts is fundamental to the American way of life. Today, thousands of blind Americans are living proof that this program works.

The GCBVI supports the Business Enterprise Program and considers it to be a vital tool for

employment of people who are experiencing a staggering 70% unemployment rate. Removal of BEP locations, or the elimination of this crucial program is not acceptable.

Future Considerations: The Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment calls for stronger support from the Department of Economic Security in the areas of maintaining and growing vending opportunities by collaborating with consumer groups

Committee Members

Amy Porterfield, Chair

Bob Kresmer

Ted Chittenden

Donald Porterfield

Allan Curry

Public Information Committee

The efforts of the Public Information Committee center around developing two-way communication with stakeholders. The committee disseminates information to stakeholders on the excellent work of the GCBVI in assuring that the specialized needs of people who are blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind are met effectively. Additionally, the Committee utilizes traditional communication and social media in support of Council growth and the development of Council membership.

Any discussion of what the Public Information committee did during this period must begin with the GCBVI's Strategic Plan. Developed by Council membership in August and finalized by the Full Council in November, the Strategic Plan gives the council and its committees a road map of what the near and far-term goals of the GCBVI are and where we should be placing our emphasis. For the Public Information Committee, these goals included:

- Working closely with the Assistive Technology (AT) Committee to improve access to the EyeKnow.AZ database.
- Collaborating with the Employment Committee to publicize the latter's efforts to make more employers aware of the capabilities and employment potential of blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind Arizonans.
- Creating greater public awareness of the GCBVI and what it does for both the blind/visually impaired/deaf-blind communities and the general public.

Our partnership with the AT Committee has led to the development of a Best Practices and Standards page on the EyeKnow.AZ website. In addition, we are in ongoing discussions with this committee concerning how to make it easier for website users to print search results.

The Public Information Committee has created "rack cards" with specific information aimed at encouraging employers to consider adding more blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind persons to their payrolls. We are currently in the process of working with the Employment Committee to refine these cards to be more useful to that committee. The Public Information Committee also assisted the Employment Committee with its annual E75 Conference held on January 26, 2018. The Public Information Committee always has an open hand out to all the council committees to assist in publicizing any upcoming events.

Public Information Committee (and other council members) staffed GCBVI exhibitor tables at the following events during the reporting period:

- The NFBA convention (September 1 and 2, 2017)
- The Macular Degeneration Association (September 23, 2017)
- the VA White Cane Safety Day event (October 19, 2017)
- the VRATE Expo (November 18, 2017)
- the Convention of the Arizona Lions Clubs (May 18-19, 2018)

In addition, the committee's chairperson, Ted Chittenden, attended all the Introduction to Blindness Workshops (save one) held by Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) during this reporting period to introduce the clients to the GCBVI and its role in advocating for the community to the highest offices of state government.

The EyeKnow.AZ website continues to grow in popularity. Community committee member Carlos Paraskevas has taken on the task of making sure that all of the website's listings are up-to-date.

RSA's Council Liaison Lindsey Powers, keeps the council's Facebook page updated with information supplied by the members of this committee. It has been slow, but there has been some renewed interest in this page as of late.

This committee's report would be remiss if we didn't note the passing of long-time committee member Barbara McDonald in late May of 2018. Barbara's contributions from her humor at committee meetings to the "Barbara's Bits" postings on Facebook will be difficult, if not impossible, to replace.

The committee is currently searching for community members to serve on it. Goals for next year include the recruitment of at least two new members to ensure that this committee can continue to fulfill its goals set forth both by the council and its strategic plan. We need to increase knowledge and involvement by the blind/visually impaired/deaf-blind community in the council and increase the awareness the general public has about our purpose and function. This means being present at more events. We also need to continue to work more closely with the other council committees to ensure that events they sponsor get more publicity. Knowledge and interest in both the GCBVI's Facebook page and the EyeKnow.AZ website needs to continue to grow. We look forward to reporting on developments in these areas in future submissions.

Committee Members

Ted Chittenden, Chair

Daniel Martinez

David Steinmetz

Janet Fisher

Carlos Paraskevas

Independent Living Committee

This was a previously defunct committee that had not been functioning for some time. Therefore, most of our efforts have been in the recruitment and reformation of this committee. Our committee is currently gathering information and data regarding current Independent Living Services provided to individuals who are blind and visually impaired residing in Arizona. The Committee has received:

- The Annual Report Independent Living Services FFY 2017
- Independent Living Services Guidelines
- Best Practices Vocational Rehabilitation Services (currently there are no Independent Living Best Practices)
- Assistive Technology for Blind and Visually Impaired Best Practices
- The recent Independent Living justification forms for High Equipment Cost

The committee is charged through in the Strategic Plan (by priority and sequentially) with:

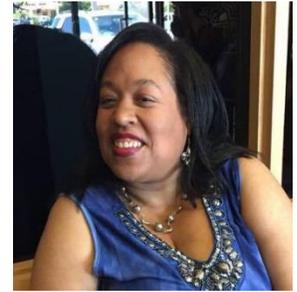
1. Seeing that ILB funding is increased and services to older blind consumers is stable and sustained (Committee is under Legislative Public Policy as lead committee)
2. Re-establishing and sustaining Under 55 years of age Independent Living funding
 - a. Making Independent Living Services to all blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind populations universally available
 - b. Ensuring that SSP services to deaf/blind Arizonans is sustained across the state (Deaf Blind Committee Lead)
 - c. Establishing ILB Best practices for SBVID ILB unit with Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment and stakeholders
3. Making sure that public service agencies receive regular feedback regarding accessibility (Legislative Public Policy Lead committee)
 - a. Establishing Best Practices are established and implemented for ILB consumers who are deaf/blind (Deaf Blind Committee Lead)

Obviously, our committee has its work cut out for us over the next three years. Independent Living training funding has remained at the same level over the past ten years, and funding for independent living training of those under 55 years of age has not been available since 2013. It is ironic that the largest segment of the Blind and Visually Impaired population in the United States and Arizona should continually see the least amount of funding available to serve them. Our committee and the Arizona Governor's Council will work diligently to assist this underserved population.

Committee Members:

Jim LaMay, Chair
George Martinez
Frank Vance
Karla Rivas-Parker
Tom Simmons
Martha Macias
Virginia Thompson
Katie Gomez

Sharonda Goode was born blind but was never allowed to feel sorry for herself. Sharonda's education includes both Western Michigan University and Grand Canyon University. For employment, Sharonda has worked in the Assistive Technology field for over 15 years. She serves as Chair of the Assistive Technology Committee on both the Governor's Council for Blindness and Visual Impairment, as well as the National Federation of the Blind of Arizona. She has been an ordained minister since 2012. Her many hobbies include singing, reading, journaling, going to movies, and hanging out with family and friends.



Annette Reichman's career has been devoted to supporting children and adults who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. Her professional focus has also extended to supporting children and adults who are blind or visually impaired. Superintendent at Arizona State Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (ASDB), Ms. Reichman has served as the Director of the Office of Special Institutions within the U.S. Department of Education (DoED). In this role, she has conducted monitoring and oversight of federally-funded special institutions, including the American Printing House for the Blind, Gallaudet University, the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf.



Bea Shapiro is the Assistive Technology/IT Consultant for Rehabilitation Services Administration with a specialty in Blindness/ Visual Impairments. In addition to the BVI Specialization, Bea has extensive experience working with AT for other disability groups including deaf-blind and blindness with physical access and has been working in the field since 1991. Bea holds certificates from CSUN (ATACP) and has completed the Master's level certificate courses in Assistive Technology from NAU. Bea is a member of the Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairments Assistive Technology Committee.



George Martinez currently manages his own public accounting firm serving clients across the state of Arizona. He voluntarily retired his Arizona CPA Certificate in May 2018. George graduated from the NAU School of Business with a BS in Accounting. After graduation he worked in the New York City financial district for 3 years as an auditor with Price Waterhouse. Mr. Martinez served 16 years as Secretary-Treasurer for a large nonprofit in Tucson and thereafter, he served for 15 years as a Senior Pastor for a church in Deming, New Mexico before returning to Phoenix and beginning his current business.

He serves as a Board member and officer for ACB and VRATE and is also an advisor for his Church Board.

Lindsey Powers is the Council Liaison for the GCBVI and Rehabilitation Services Administration and supports the council's mission and goals. Lindsey earned a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Arizona State University and a Master's degree in Information Resources from the University of Arizona.



Ted Chittenden is currently a part-time braille proofreader for the Foundation for Blind Children (FBC) and the Arizona State Department of Education. Originally from California, Ted became the first totally blind person to attend, and graduate from, Brophy College Preparatory (1981). He went on to receive a Bachelor's in Communications from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles (1985) and a MBA from Arizona State University (1990). Ted worked in the hotel industry between 1990 and 2000 and as a full-time braille proofreader for Arizona State University from 2004 until 2011.

Richard Sorey is a Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and he earned his master's degree from Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. Rich has been the Program Manager of Services for the Blind, Visually Impaired and Deaf with the Arizona Department of Economic Security since November of 2016.



Rich began his career with the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired, where he served as a VR Counselor, regional Manager and Business Enterprise Program Manager. Rich moved on to direct the Blindness Division of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitative Services in 2011 and he was employed as the Director of the Iowa Department for the Blind for 4 years before moving to his current position. Rich has more than 30 years of work experience as a blind person, so he is very much aware of the challenges that blind people encounter in a work environment.



Bob Kresmer became blind suddenly while working as a Producer, Assistant Director, and Production Manager in the film industry in Chicago. He quickly enrolled in the Vocational Rehabilitation program and years later earned a Master's Degree as a Rehabilitation Teacher for adult blind individuals. Bob is very active in the National Federation of the Blind and serves on the Board of Directors of the NFBA and SAAVI Services for the Blind.



Jim LaMay has over 38 years experience in the administration and management of private not-for-profit service agencies in both Minneapolis and Arizona. Since September of 1990, he has served as the Executive Director, and later as President and Chief Executive Officer for the Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Inc. He currently serves as an Ex-Oficio member of the Arizona Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment as a representative of private non-profit agencies that provide services to the blind and visually impaired community.

Amy Porterfield earned her Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Arizona. As Chair of the Arizona Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment (GCBVI), Amy excels at providing leadership for the Council and is responsible for the facilitation of the council's strategic plan, as well as day-to-day activities, which includes the appointment and oversight of all Council committees and work groups and officiating at all Full Council meetings. Amy Porterfield is the GCBVI's direct liaison to the Governor's office and legislators on blindness related issues.



Amy is employed as Chief Operating Officer at SAAVI Services for the Blind. SAAVI Services for the Blind is a non-profit agency serving visually impaired adults in Arizona offering rehabilitation services, skills training and social and recreational opportunities.

Success Stories

Kole



Meet Kole. He was born blind and deaf. It was difficult for his family to bond with him because he didn't react to visual or audio cues. They were visited at home several times each month by an FBC vision teacher who helped them understand how to teach him.

When his mom joined FBC's parent program, her world changed. She met families with children who had similar health issues and realized she wasn't alone. She felt hope for her son for the very first time.

Prior to attending the parent program and getting her first glimpse of FBC's preschool, Kole's mom was going to opt out of preschool and keep him home until he was seven years old. Her visit had such an impact that she changed her mind and asked her school district to send Kole to FBC. Today, Kole is thriving. FBC has been a blessing in their lives and his mom is grateful for the way we improved his quality of life.

Thank you for helping students like Kole grow and achieve great things!

Gregory

Two years ago, Greg was at the top of his career field as a pilot for a major airline. In his 50s, he had a fantastic income and a great deal of respect from others in the industry. As many of us tend to do, Greg measured his self-worth by his career status. Things took a sudden turn for Greg when he suffered a stroke which resulted in a significant loss of vision. He was no longer able to fly, and his stellar career came to an end. He felt devastated and did not know where to turn.

Greg went to the Arizona Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ACBVI) to learn what programs and services would be available. He realized that he needed something but didn't even know what questions to ask. During his intake interview, Greg learned about ACBVI's Orientation and Adjustment to Disability services. He was encouraged to join a support group designed especially for individuals who are adjusting to vision loss.

Gregory participated in ACBVI's Fundamentals of Adaptive Skills Training class. During this time, he learned how to modify his routine daily activities, so he could better hold on to his independence. He learned how to organize food and medication. He also learned quite a bit about kitchen safety and household management. Perhaps best of all, he learned how to use lighting and contrast to aid him in carrying out a number of tasks. For example, pouring coffee into a light mug or cup is far easier than pouring into a dark cup as the contrast between light and dark allowed him to use his remaining vision.

Greg noticed that a few of his peers were involved in wood turning. He was surprised that people without sight could use sharp instruments and power tools such as a lathe for turning wood. These individuals were active in crafting pens, bottle openers, wine bottle stoppers and many other products that involved turned wood. Although he couldn't fathom how this could be done by people who can't see, he took advantage of the opportunity to learn.

As he learned the techniques of turning and finishing wood products, Greg became especially skilled at these processes. His self-esteem improved markedly, and Greg began to realize that life is more than career status. He wanted to share his success with others and underwent training to be one of the instructors in ACBVI's wood turning program. He also learned the value of being patient with himself as well as with others and became one of ACBVI's highly regarded trainers.