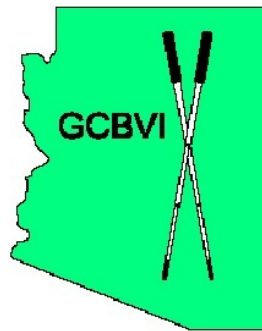


**Arizona Governor's Council
on Blindness and Visual Impairment
GCBVI**

**Annual Report
July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017**



Ensuring that the specialized needs of Arizonans who are blind and visually impaired are addressed effectively.

GCBVI Council Members

Amy Porterfield, Chair

Bob Kresmer, Vice Chair

Jeff Bishop, Secretary

Dan Martinez

Ted Chittenden

Mike Gordon

Ed Gervasoni

Nathan Pullen

Mike Kanitsch

Nicole Jeffords

Allan Curry

Sharonda Greenlaw

Donald Porterfield

Thomas Hicks

Larry Wanger

Bea Shapiro

Janet Fisher*

Jim LaMay*

Annette Reichman*

Rich Sorey*

*Indicates Ex-Officio members

GCBVI Vision:

“Create, foster and sustain a climate of opportunity where all Arizonans who are blind or visually impaired are able to direct their own lives and reach their personal chosen goals and objectives”

GCBVI Mission:

“To provide the leadership, advocacy, and guidance that promotes opportunities for Arizonans of all ages who are blind or visually impaired that result in increased dignity, respect and independence.”



Message from the Chair

The Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment (GCBVI) derives its strength, capability, and future potential from a diverse council membership that reflects the viewpoints and combined wisdom of members who are a representative cross section of the community. This diversity of perspective, combined with the due diligence of process, provides the most comprehensive advice on blindness policy.

The Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment supports the administration's focus on an efficient and streamlined approach to state operations and services that places emphasis on achieving outcomes. The GCBVI asserts that through implementation of best practices and consistent attention to the provision of outcome-based direct specialized services, blind Arizonans will contribute to our state and communities as productive and thriving citizens.

The need for blindness specific programs, such as the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) and others, is absolutely necessary to address the unique obstacles created by vision loss. The integrity and positive results of these programs would be lost if they were co-mingled and integrated with other services. Therefore, the GCBVI supports the continuation of blindness specific programs.



Position Statements

The Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment supports LEAN processes that deliver more value for customers with fewer resources.

The Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment supports the philosophy of a LEAN management process in the delivery of DES/RSA services to consumers. The GCBVI appreciates the focus on customer values and needs and the elimination of waste and cumbersome procedural barriers that impede timely and efficient consumer outcomes. The GCBVI believes that optimum efficiency can be achieved through public private collaborative partnerships that can develop and implement best practice approaches to vocational rehabilitation and independent living services. Additionally, further analysis and implementation of best practices in procuring services, hiring, training staff, and 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 from fiscal contributions through contracts.

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 schooling. This includes the full implementation of Arizona's Braille literacy law and the educational and testing platform designs that always allow access technology to function within the learning and testing platforms.

The GCBVI believes that full inclusive educational experiences for blind students can only exist with a best practices approach for implementing the Arizona state standards as well as the Expanded Core Curriculum, 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.

The Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment supports the continuation of the Business Enterprise Program. The Business Enterprise Program in a close partnership with Rehabilitation Services Administration's Vocational Rehabilitation program, which 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 a population that is experiencing a staggering 70% unemployment rate. Drastic changes or the elimination of this crucial program that encourages more job creation and self-sufficiency for operators is not acceptable.

The Governor's Council on Blindness and Visual Impairment supports the privatization of the Arizona Industries for the Blind (AIB). We believe that this job-creating institution for blind Arizonans will thrive through the successful partnering of private and public contracts that will allow for economic growth of the blind community, lessening reliance on public systems.

Deaf-Blind Issues Committee Report

The committee continues to be active in matters concerning citizens who are Deaf-Blind (D-B) or who live with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss (CVHL) in Arizona. The following bulleted sections address the areas of focus and type of activities in which the committee continues to be engaged:

Support Service Providers (SSPs)

SSPs provide specialized services to people who are D-B or have CVHL for the purposes of gaining access to communication, visual and auditory information, and travel within community environments.

- Supported efforts of the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ACDHH) to supplement funding for existing SSP Services. Ongoing.
- Supported efforts of ACDHH to collaborate with the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) to explore the long-term community access needs or SSP services for people who are Deaf-Blind or have CVHL living in the state. Ongoing.
- Collaborated with and supported ACDHH to create and establish a Statewide Training and Certification Program for SSPs. The curriculum was presented to the committee in the fall of 2016. Certification options are currently being explored by ACDHH and the committee. Ongoing.
- In January of 2016, the committee established a task force to investigate ways to implement SSP services for individuals who are Deaf-Blind or have CVHL on a statewide level. After 16 months of research and discussion, the Task Force has established a non-profit organization, DeafBlind Connections in Arizona, Inc., with the goal of providing statewide advocacy and SSP services for those affected by deaf-blindness.
- Continued to stay informed about SSP service delivery in Tucson from the Community Outreach Program for the Deaf and in Phoenix from the Valley Center of the Deaf from both the perspectives of the service agencies and the consumers. Ongoing.

iCanConnect (Deaf-Blind Assistive Technology Access Program)

iCanConnect is another name for the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP), a federal program designed to help the many thousands of Americans with combined hearing and vision loss to connect with family, friends and community.

- Continued to monitor the delivery of access technology and training to individuals who are D-B or have CVHL throughout Arizona. Ongoing.
- Used data from these efforts to become more informed about the demographics and needs of individuals living with Deaf-Blindness and CVHL to better advocate on their behalf. Ongoing.

Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)

- Continued to collaborate and stay informed about the efforts and activities of RSA to serve individuals with Deaf-Blindness and CVHL, ranging from transition age to independent living support for older adults. Ongoing.
- Used information and demographic data from RSA to better advocate for the needs of the D-B and those with CVHL in Arizona. Ongoing.

Arizona Deaf-Blind Project

The Arizona Deafblind Project is a federally funded grant program whose purpose is to provide technical assistance, training, information, and resources to families, educational team members, and other service providers who work with children ages birth to age 22 who have an educationally significant combined vision and hearing loss.

- Continued to collaborate and stay informed about the efforts and activities of the Arizona DeafBlind Project serving children with Deaf-Blindness and CVHL ranging from birth to age 22. Ongoing.
- Used information and demographic data from the Arizona DeafBlind Project to advocate for the needs of children living with deaf-blindness or CVHL in the state. Ongoing.
- Continued to learn and stay informed about the need for Intervener services for children living with Deaf-Blindness or CVHL in Arizona. Ongoing.

General Activities

Members of the committee presented at the following conferences to inform the general public about the issues facing the Deaf-Blind community in Arizona:

- National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of Arizona Statewide Conference, Tucson Arizona, 9/11-16/2016
- Vision Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Expo (VRATE) Conference, Phoenix Arizona, 9/30/2016
- Association of Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind and Visually Impaired (AERBVI) of Arizona Statewide Conference, Yuma Arizona, 11/4/2016
- National Federation of the Blind of Arizona Day at the Capital, Phoenix AZ, 2/27/2017
- ACDHH Day at the Capital, Phoenix AZ, 3/7/2017
- Governor's Advisory Council on Aging, Phoenix AZ, January and March 2017

Submitted by Ed Gervasoni Chairperson and Mary Hartle, immediate past Chairperson

Ed Gervasoni, Chair

Mary Hartle

Carmen Green

Cindi Robinson

Steve Wilson

Chris Desborough

Diane McElmury

Employment Committee Report

Throughout the 2016-2017 Fiscal Year, the GCBVI Employment Committee has been meeting approximately twice each month. Our efforts are aimed at supporting GCBVI's Strategic Plan relative to improving employment opportunities and outcomes for Arizona citizens who are blind or with low vision.

With tremendous support from the Department of Economic Security Rehabilitation Services Administration (DES/RSA), the Employment Committee developed the branded concept of E75 Diversity Builder Awards that recognizes business that employ and value Arizonans who are blind or have low vision. The E75 event continues to evolve as we further identify ways to enhance and improve the program and build relationships with the business community.

The E75 event focuses on and aids in reducing the high unemployment rate of persons who are blind. An estimated 70-75% of Americans who are blind or who have low vision are not employed. The E75 tag line, "Eliminate, Employ, Empower!" really says it all. Eliminate the barriers, real and imagined, that prevent employment; employ qualified job candidates who are blind or visually impaired; and empower businesses and people who are blind or who have low vision to achieve success.

The committee is developing connections with key employers and sharing factual information with them about the capabilities of individuals who are blind or have low vision, challenging and eliminating preconceived notions and attitudes about blindness and enhancing employers' understanding of the value this pool of qualified candidates adds to the workplace. The E75 brand extends beyond Arizona and is a model of excellence which can be emulated throughout the country.

We are working on:

- Actively planning and coordinating the 3rd Annual E75. This year's event will be held at the Ability 360 Conference Room on January 26, 2018.
- Cultivating resources to support the E75 Event.
- Creating an E75 Newsletter through an Employment Committee Workgroup. This product will be designed to have useful content for both employers and citizens.
- Engaging all GCBVI members in supporting the 2018 E75 Event on Friday, January 26, 2018.
- Hosting a LinkedIn E75 Group.

Tom Hicks, Chair
Nikki Jeffords, Co-Chair
Dan Martinez
Kryslen Holt
Terell Welch
Jordan Moon
Tanner Gers



Public Information Committee Report

2016-2017 was a very productive year for the Public Information Committee. We accomplished one of our GCBVI 2011 strategic plan goals and represented the Council at several public events.

In September of 2016, in partnership with the Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration, an entity within the Department of Economic Security (DES), and the Secretary of State's office, the committee launched EyeKnow.AZ, a searchable web based information and referral service. This database provides information on non-medical facilities and services available to people who are blind, visually impaired, or who experience combined vision and hearing loss.

Public Outreach. The Public Information Committee participated in three public events between July 1, 2016, and June 30, 2017. These events included: the VRATE Conference in September of 2016; the White Cane Safety Day event sponsored by the Veterans' Administration Hospital in Phoenix in mid-October 2016; and the E75 conference hosted by the GCBVI's Employment Committee in January 2017.

Goals for the Public Information Committee for fiscal year 2017 - 2018, will include continued development and marketing of the EyeKnow.AZ database, especially to the ophthalmology community, which has been more difficult to reach. The committee has also held some initial discussions about creating a phone line to assist those looking for information but who do not have computer access. We also plan to participate in more public events, including the AZTAP conference, which took a year's hiatus in 2016. The committee has also had some discussions about creating a GCBVI Facebook page, and we are currently reviewing our options regarding Facebook policies on creating non-profit pages.

Ted Chittenden, Chair
Dan Martinez
Barbara McDonald
Janet Fisher
Carlos Paraskevas
David Steinmetz



Education Committee Report

The Education Committee was recently re-invigorated with members who have expertise in the education of blind students from infants and toddlers, Kindergarten through Grade 12, to post-secondary institutions with workgroups for each category. Established goals include recommendations for the GCBVI, the Governor, Legislators, consumer groups, and the public and private agencies providing education for blind and visually impaired students. The committee is addressing, among other goals, the shortage of qualified teachers of blind and visually impaired students, the lack of resources for outreach to parents of infants and toddlers, unequal services between urban and rural outlying areas, and the inaccessibility of high stakes mandated testing.

Bob Kresmer, Chair

Shannon Kemlo

Lisa Yencarrelli

Jared Kittelson

Julie Urban

Success Stories

Heather Quincy



Heather Quincy graduated in August of 2015 with her Master's Degree in Social Work from the College of Public Service and Community Solutions at Arizona State University. She studied for and recently passed the state board exam to become a Licensed Professional Social Worker. She starts a new job on 12/27/16 at Terros, working as a Clinician with their Families F.I.R.S.T. program.

This wasn't the first employer who was interested in Heather, as she is a very desirable job candidate, but it is where Heather accepted a very lucrative offer. She went on many job interviews and said it was a challenge, but she is now relieved that she has a job that doesn't require driving. She is also glad that Terros is understanding of the fact that she's a new graduate and is more than willing to make sure she has the proper accommodations to do her job. They are tremendously lucky to have her!

The reason Heather chose social work was because she came from a broken home as a young child and wanted to give back the hope and healing she received as an older teenager.

Heather was born with Retinopathy of Prematurity and went to public school before enrolling in the 8th grade at the Arizona State School for the Deaf and Blind where she remained until her junior year. She then continued her education and graduated from Canyon del Oro High School in Tucson in 2005. She always had a great support system at home, learning and retaining compensatory skills in her activities of daily living. In addition to her vision loss, Heather learned that she also had short-term memory loss and a math learning disability. This meant that she always had to study harder than other students, but she persevered and made her own success.

Starting at Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona, she completed her General Education requirements before transferring to ASU's College of Public Programs in the spring of 2010. She continued to work toward her Bachelor of Social Work Degree, which she completed with Cum Laude honors, earning a 3.46 grade point average, in May of 2013.

Heather was referred to The Foundation for Blind Children's Supported Education Program shortly before obtaining her Bachelor's Degree. She had just applied to ASU's Masters of Social Work Program. Heather says that Supported Education took a lot of the stress away from her. She continued to say that, as a client of State VR, she always felt she had to over-advocate for herself, explaining that, although she understood that accommodations need to be justified, she felt that it was always more of a struggle than it should be. Once she was working with us in Supported Education, she said that we just saw her needs and made sure she had what would help and she no longer had to defend herself.

We are all very proud of her and wish her well in her new career!

Hilda, Bob and Mike and SAAVI Comprehensive Services

Hilda joined the Comprehensive Day Program (CDP) in 2014 with a goal of being a Spanish speaking interpreter. She successfully mastered all core areas of the CDP program and was hired in 2016 to work in her chosen career as an interpreter at CyraCom. Once she obtained this position, SAAVI staff supported her by completing a work site evaluation to verify that Hilda had all of the necessary tools to complete her job duties. In her position at CyraCom, Hilda works to support patients who need Spanish interpreting during medical appointments. She has been successfully employed since 2016.

Bob first came to SAAVI to complete the Comprehensive program in 2013. He eventually transitioned into the Supported Education Program (SEP) where he completed a Business Degree at Northern Arizona University. During both the CDP and SEP programs, Bob maintained a high level of focus and success. After completing a challenging undergraduate program, Bob accepted a position out of state working with Fidelity Investments, a financial firm, where he currently maintains successful employment.

Mike first joined The SAAVI Comprehensive Program in 2013 where he explored various career options related to psychology. While successfully completing his comprehensive blindness training, Mike settled on the goal of becoming a Counselor with an interest in working with blind individuals on their orientation and adjustment to blindness. He transitioned to the Supported Education Program where he will soon complete his Counseling degree at Grand Canyon University. In July of 2017 Mike will graduate with his degree and will continue working with the private practice in Phoenix where he has been interning during his graduate program. Mike looks forward to serving his community as a Licensed Professional Counselor.

SAAVI provides a comprehensive rehabilitation program for blind and visually impaired people throughout Arizona that includes: counseling and support groups to help with adjustment to vision loss; home management training; access technology training; orientation and mobility training; career exploration; job readiness, placement, retention; health and wellness, adaptive sports; diabetes management; college support; remedial education, GED preparation, and English as a Second Language. <http://www.saavi.us>

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