

# SERVICE TO THE BLIND & VISUALLY IMPAIRED (SBVI)



## VISIONS NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2016

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### **Director's Comments by Gaye Mattke**

It seems summer is always a busy time and this summer has been no exception. In addition to addressing staff turnover, we're concentrating on implementation of policies and procedures to come into compliance with the regulations for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The SBVI portion of the WIOA State Plan has been approved and other parts of the unified plan are being revised and will be resubmitted by September 1<sup>st</sup>. The final approved plan will be available on the SBVI web site.

We enjoyed the opportunity to touch base with members of the National Federation of the Blind of South Dakota at their convention in April. An SBVI Public Forum was held in conjunction with the convention with over twenty five people in attendance. We are planning to work with the South Dakota Association of the Blind to hold a town hall meeting on Saturday, September 17<sup>th</sup> in Aberdeen in conjunction with their convention. Lyle Cook and his staff took the lead on planning a disability awareness summit in Pierre in conjunction with Urban Indian Health on July 20<sup>th</sup>. A number of organizations shared information with visitors and enjoyed a meal of buffalo stew, fry bread and wojapi. These events offer the opportunity to educate about services and to discuss needs of citizens.

Watch for events around South Dakota in October recognizing employment of citizens with disabilities. This year's theme for National Disability Employment Awareness month is: #InclusionWorks. The Board and Division of SBVI are sponsors of these events in conjunction with the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Division of Rehabilitation Services.

I just received word on Board appointments so am excited to share this information with you. I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome new members and recognize those going off the Board.

- Kenneth Rollman served two three year terms – Replaced by Cheri Knipsel to represent business and industry and the National Federation of the Blind
- Teresa Nold served one three year term – Replaced by Tara Buresch to represent The Parent Connection
- Tim Neyhart appointed in 2014 – Replaced by Cole Uecker to represent the Client Assistance Program
- Lyle Cook served since 2009; Replaced by Roberta Ecoffey as the representative of Directors of the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Programs

Thanks to each of you for your selfless service as members of the Board of SBVI! Your contributions do make a difference in the services we deliver.

### **SBVI Staff Updates**

Gary Frentz retired from his position as Senior Rehabilitation Counselor for the Rapid City SBVI office on June 23<sup>rd</sup>. Gary began his role with Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) on March 10, 2014 after transferring from the Rehabilitation Services Watertown office. Gary worked in the rehabilitation field for more than twenty years and during that time he has helped countless people make positive changes in their lives. SBVI wishes Gary the best in his retirement! This position is currently announced at: <http://bhr.sd.gov/workforus> job ID 6933.

Twyla Eggers resigned from her position as the Assistant Director for SBVI effective July 8th. Twyla will continue to work for the Department of Human Services in her new position as the Assistant Director of the South Dakota Developmental Center in Redfield. We look forward to staying in touch with Twyla and wish her well in her new role and return home to Redfield.

We are pleased that Ronda Williams accepted the SBVI Assistant Director position effective August 24<sup>th</sup>. Ronda comes to us with a wealth of experience working with and for citizens with disabilities in both the vocational rehabilitation and independent living arenas. Her professional experience includes working with citizens with disabilities as a Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Program Specialist responsible for the vocational rehabilitation case management system for both SBVI and DRS, and, most recently, as the manager of the Assistive Daily Living Services Medicaid waiver and state Independent Living programs.

## **2016 Spirit of Volunteerism Awards**

More than 600 people, including local community leaders, non-profit agency representatives and business executives turned out for the **2016 Spirit of Volunteerism Awards**. The Helpline Center hosted the luncheon at the Sioux Falls Convention Center. During the event, 124 nominees, honorees and award winners were recognized.

Among the award winners was SBVI Board member **Eric Rippentrop** who received the Adult Up and Coming Award for his work with refugee students at LSS's Center for New Americans. Congratulations for this well-deserved honor Eric!

Winners of the Spirit of Volunteerism Awards in the Youth, Adult and Group Categories received \$500 to be awarded to a non-profit or charitable organization of their choice.

## **Rehabilitation Center for the Blind News**

Several students from the Skills of Blindness program at the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind were invited to attend the Sir Paul McCartney concert at the Denny Sanford Premier Center on May 2nd. The opportunity for tickets arose when SDRC was contacted by the Premier Center and asked if we were interested in tickets to the concert. It was a wonderful learning experience for the students who learned how to maneuver through crowds and use the skills they learned in training.

Vanda Pharmaceuticals provided an informational presentation for staff and students about NON-24, a sleep disorder that affects people with blindness who struggle when their Circadian Rhythm is not in sync with the 24-hour day. SDRC also hosted a presentation from the Seeing Eye about dog guides. A field representative and a dog guide trainer provided the training; students learned about the benefits of using a dog guide and how to consider the demands and drawbacks of keeping a dog. They had an opportunity to try out harness training to see how it feels to be led by a dog guide.

"Step into the Future" was the 2016 Transition Week theme at the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, June 26- 30. Five boys attended; four for the first time. The students had a variety of experiences including: riding the city transit, money identification, smart phone apps, accessing digital books, preparing a meal, and a review of adaptive technology. As a service project, the students made and donated fleece tie blankets to the Sanford Children's Hospital. They toured Chesterman Coca Cola, and learned about the Business Enterprise Program at EROS. They attended the Washington Pavilion and learned about the variety of jobs available through science careers. They spoke with several adults who are visually impaired and talked about their life experiences and how vocational rehabilitation services were a benefit to them. Transition Week ended with a breakfast and a group of 11 representatives who talked about the services they could provide to enhance their lives. Parents were invited to the breakfast so they could interact with those additional agencies.

## Peer Support Interview with Kay Miller

This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> in a short series about Peer Support Groups and the volunteer leaders across the state. Peer Support groups are led by volunteer leaders who are interested in assisting the members through low vision education and activities. The overall intent is for the members to remain involved with others who are facing challenging lifestyle changes due to their eye disease.

- **Volunteer Leader:** Kay Miller
- **Town:** Mitchell
- **How long have you been involved with Peer Support?** - The peer support group started in 2004. I became a volunteer leader 11 years ago in 2005.
- **What made you decide to get involved with Peer Support?** - At the time I started asking questions about Peer Support, I was actually thinking about myself. I know that sounds selfish, but I was really struggling with my own vision loss. I knew I could be involved as a volunteer leader but realized I also needed to help myself with adjustment as much as I wanted to offer support and encouragement to others. In order to help others, I really needed to help myself first. My conversations with my Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor made a big difference and helped me get started.
- **What do you feel are the benefits of peer support?** - It is always good to know there are other people who are in similar situations. I know there are so many different kinds of vision loss, but in ways, it is so similar. My uncle, who passed away many years ago, had a disease that affected his muscles and resulted in some vision loss. On some level, I knew what we were facing was similar in many ways. When we're facing challenges, it's important for people to learn through each other how to adjust to make daily life o.k.
- **Why is it helpful to be connected and involved with others?** Many people think they're the only ones dealing with challenges. Sitting next to someone who has another struggle and recognizing that others are experiencing a difficult situation and that we can help them through it is so helpful. We should recognize how important it is to be with someone who thinks positively and can bring themselves out of a difficult situation. Most of the people in the Mitchell Support Group are 75-85-90 years old and they are great role models to someone else who is challenged by vision loss.
- **What has been the best part of being involved with Peer Support?** - Meeting the people, especially those that step up to share their stories or do something for others. The more they do for others, the more this helps to increase their comfort level.

- **Do you have any advice for someone who is interested in peer support but hasn't connected yet with a group?** - Talk to the leader, rehabilitation teacher or counselor to discuss it. It's important to speak with someone who has been at the meeting and ask questions. Without support of someone, I'm not sure I would have been brave enough to step into the room. Having vision loss can be scary but getting encouragement from someone...just one person, can make a huge difference in your life.

If you are interested in starting a Peer Support Group in your community, please call 1-800-265-9684 for more information.

### **Mitchell Peer Support Group Holds Summer Picnic**

Thinking about summer time activities can take us back to memories of having picnics and long conversations with friends over a meal while enjoying a day that is just a little bit more pleasant because of the time spent with friends. On June 14<sup>th</sup>, Mitchell Peer Support Group gathered for a third straight year to share food and have conversation with each other about challenges they face with vision loss.

### **Electronic Video Magnification (CCTV) Lease/Loan**

SBVI ended the state fiscal year with an expansion of Electronic Video Magnification devices for the participants in the Older Blind Independent Living Program. With this expansion, SBVI was able to remove five older Clarity Units and completely eliminate the waiting list. We will also have units available for individuals who have requested an option to switch their current machine for a 20" Acrobat or 24" Merlin LCD HD unit.

We are also pleased to announce expansion of the program to include a limited number of text to speech reading units. These will be available to individuals who have near total vision loss or no usable vision who would benefit from a unit that provides them with auditory output.

### **Voting Rights Card in Braille (From EAC)**

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC), working with the National Braille Press (NBP), released a voting rights card in braille and large print to assist voters who are visually impaired and blind as they prepare to participate in the 2016 presidential election.

The announcement follows EAC's public hearing on April 27 to receive testimony from election administrators and voters with disabilities about accessible voting and the progress made since passage of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). HAVA requires that individuals with disabilities be given the same opportunity to vote freely and independently as all other voters. During the hearing, EAC released a voting

rights card to assist voters with disabilities at the polls. The card is available in text format at BeReady16.

The Commission is also making resources available on its website for election officials to use to ensure polling places and other election services are accessible for voters with disabilities as part of its #BeReady16 effort.

### **Web Accessibility (From National Council of State Agencies for the Blind)**

Recently, the DOJ announced that it will be issuing website regulations for public entities (Title II) in late 2016 or early 2017; however at the same time, the DOJ indicated that it is delaying the issuance of website accessibility regulations for public accommodations (Title III) until at least 2018.

Web accessibility is vital to employment and, therefore, is directly applicable to our work as members of the rehabilitation community. But web accessibility goes much farther than employment; it is integral to the full integration of people with disabilities into all aspects of life. It speaks to the point that we, the rehabilitation community, do much more than help blind people and others with disabilities find jobs; we are part of the movement toward full and equal social integration of people with disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities can wait no longer for access to employment and access to the use today's society makes of the internet—vocational and avocational--and we, must encourage the Obama administration to move forward with issuing ADA web accessibility regulations before the end of the year.

For the full article please visit <http://www.ncsab.org/>.

### **Ai Squared Joins VFO, Home of Freedom Scientific and Optelec**

VFO, home of the Freedom Scientific and Optelec brands, announced today that it has acquired Ai Squared, a leading developer of screen magnification and screen reading software. Together, the companies offer the world's broadest suite of assistive technology products for the visually-impaired. Each of the companies has a long history of providing innovative technology solutions that enable blind and low vision individuals to reach their full potential – to gain an education, obtain employment, succeed in professional careers, and live independently throughout their lives. VFO is committed to offering our end customers innovative technology solutions and market leading support at a level that is unmatched in the industry.

### **The Sun, UV Radiation and Your Eyes (From EyeSmart News)**

Eye medical doctors (ophthalmologists) caution us that too much exposure to UV light raises the risks of eye diseases, including cataract, growths on the eye, and cancer.

Strong exposure to snow reflection can also quickly cause painful damage called snow blindness.

Follow these tips to protect your eyes from the sun all year long:

- Sun damage to eyes can occur anytime during the year, not just in the summertime, so be sure to wear UV-blocking sunglasses and broad-brimmed hats whenever you're outside.
- Don't be fooled by clouds: the sun's rays can pass through haze and thin clouds.
- Never look directly at the sun. Looking directly at the sun at any time, including during an eclipse, can lead to solar retinopathy, which is damage to the eye's retina from solar radiation.
- Don't forget the kids and older family members: everyone is at risk, including children and senior citizens. Protect their eyes with hats and sunglasses.

As we sleep, our eyes enjoy continuous lubrication. During sleep the eyes also clear out irritants such as dust, allergens or smoke that may have accumulated during the day. Some research suggests that light-sensitive cells in the eye are important to our ability to regulate wake-sleep cycles. This may be more critical as we age, when more people have problems with insomnia. While it's important that we protect our eyes from overexposure to UV light, our eyes also need minimal exposure to natural light every day to help maintain normal sleep-wake cycles.

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### **Announcements**

- Governor's Awards for Employment of People with Disabilities – Sept. 13<sup>th</sup>, Pierre
- SD Association of the Blind Convention – September 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup>, Aberdeen
- SBVI Town Hall Meeting – September 17<sup>th</sup>, Aberdeen
- Board of SBVI Orientation and Board Meeting – September 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, Pierre
- SBVI All Staff Meeting & Training – September 26<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup>, Pierre
- Fall Conference – October 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>, Deadwood

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- The SD Department of Human Services, Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired has a job opening in the Rapid City office for a vocational rehabilitation counselor. For more information and to apply, please go to <http://bhr.sd.gov/workforus> and reference Job ID #6933. This position closes on 8/30/2016. Feel free to share this announcement with others who meet the qualifications and may be interested in applying for this position.

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To request alternative formats or for other information contact us toll free at: 1-800-265-9684, (605) 773-4644, or visit our web site at: <http://dhs.sd.gov/sbvi/>