

"Sightings"

Wyoming Council of the Blind

<https://www.wycb.info>

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October, 2023

Editor's Note:

WyCB had a very busy September, with our annual convention and a major fundraiser occurring within a week's time. We also had a presence at a Wyoming Independent Living workshop. In an effort to keep our members current, we are publishing a Special Edition of "Sightings" now instead of waiting until January. Along these same lines, we are contemplating publishing our newsletter three times a year at the end of February, June, and October. Your comments and participation are welcomed. If you would like to submit an article, or an idea for an article, you can email it to editor@wycb.info. There is a link to this email on our website [wycb.info](https://www.wycb.info). Those receiving our newsletter by mail will receive this issue in 2 envelopes due to postal regulations.

President's Message from Cheryl Godley

Hello folks,

Our annual WyCB convention was a success. It was exciting to see old faces reappear, and to see new faces, as well. It was wonderful to have in-person interaction with each other. The hybrid option allowed folks who were unable to travel to Casper to participate via Zoom.

We have two new Directors on our Board: Sara Sexton from Buffalo and Gary Olson from Powell. Welcome Sara and Gary! I want to thank each and every Board member for their willingness to donate their time and efforts to WyCB. We still have two open positions on the Board, so if you are interested in joining, please let us know. We would love to have you on the board. Also, if you have interest in working on a committee, please let us know as we are always working on projects and could use helping hands.

Our fundraiser Thankful Thursday was a huge success. This event shows us how successful we may be when we come together and work as a team to achieve our goals for WyCB. What a great job everybody did! Thank you!

Our business community was so gracious and supportive. I sent out 84 thank you letters to business owners and 14 thank

you letters to volunteers who generously donated their time to our cause.

Please let everyone you know with blindness and visual impairment (BVI) know about WyCB, and also do not forget their friends and family. Let's continue increasing our membership numbers so that the BVI community in Wyoming has a strong voice.

Thankful Thursday Report by Jacquie Flatley

Our Thankful Thursday fundraiser was originally scheduled for April 6, 2023, but was postponed due to the "Blizzard of 2023" that hit the Casper area that week. It finally took place on September 14, 2023 at the Beacon Club in Casper.

Prior to the event, over 150 flyers were distributed to advertise our fundraiser along with efforts to have radio and newspaper spots around the state. We also mailed numerous letters/invitations to past and present WyCB members; these letters included application forms in the event that individuals would consider joining. In order to provide another leg of advocacy and awareness, this letter included a request for BVI individuals to bring their cane or service animal to the event.

Items for the live auction were donated by 85 different businesses/individuals from communities around the state and were assembled into 28 baskets to be auctioned off, including 4 items/packages that were created by 4 of our members who are blind or visually impaired. Additionally, 2 firearms were donated to be used for the auction.

We had 18 volunteers help as greeters, ticket sellers, and money collectors, as well as transporting and arranging baskets, and other miscellaneous tasks. The event was deemed to be a success! Over 100 people attended and the profit from the auction and various raffles resulted in a total amount of just shy of \$8,000.

This was our most successful fundraiser ever. It is a testimony to what we can accomplish by working together. Congratulations and THANKS to all who participated.

WIL Conference by Sharon Byers

I was privileged to attend the WIL conference. There were many people and organizations dedicated to improving the quality of life and independence for individuals with disabilities.

Jaime Cureton, an employment coordinator, spoke about training, job development, and job coaching. I worked with Jamie at I-Reach as a skills trainer. I couldn't ask for a better co-worker.

Laurel Henry showed exit strategies to break away from an individual in uncomfortable situations and also demonstrated exercises to both strengthen muscles and gain better balance.

Jared Dixon advocates for the deaf and hard of hearing. He talked about cochlear implants that improve hearing for some people. He works on ways for better accessibility to restaurants, motels, airplanes, etc...

Tina Bennett was so welcoming. She is from Gillette, WY. She talked about the "American Disabilities Act." There are five sections to it:

Title 1: Employment

Title 2: Public Services (State and local governments)

Title 3: Public Accommodations

Title 4: Telecommunications

Title 5: Transportation and Miscellaneous

I have a detailed account of these if you would like more information on the ADA.

Tina showed film clips of handicapped parking spots with good examples and bad ones.

TJ Mechem talked about the various ways the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation helps people. When I was living in Sheridan working two, sometimes three jobs, DVR helped me train for a career as a “skills trainer” working with handicapped adults. WIL will pay your employer (in my case Easter Seals) part of your wage for a while as an incentive for an employer to give an employee with a disability an opportunity to work. I loved that job. It was rewarding and I got a lot of hugs and a paycheck!

When I moved back to Casper, DVR got me in touch with the local Masonic Temple which generously paid for my cataract surgery. What a blessing!

To be a part of the WIL conference was terrific and a great opportunity to meet such dedicated people. I taught my children at an early age that there were three words they were not allowed to use: “hate, shut up, and retard.” My middle son coined a word my whole family now uses, “handi-capable.”

Helpful Gadgets and Tech by Sharon Byers

My son looked up “blind and low vision equipment” on Amazon. There were things like a clip on light for a cane, and Braille tags and clothing tags that can be scanned with a smart phone and become audible. There were guide templates to assist with writing “to” and “from” in the right place on envelopes, and to write out bank checks. There was also an audible label maker, the Reizen Talking Label Wand. There were lots of interesting and helpful devices. MaxiAids.com is another website that offers a wide variety of assistive equipment.

2023 WyCB Annual Hybrid Convention

Our 2023 Annual Hybrid Convention was a big success thanks to the folks at WIL, who provided the facility and the Zoom Call technology, We presented our annual scholarship of \$1,000 to Emily Miller. She is studying for a degree in education at Sheridan Junior College and is looking forward to establishing her own private pre-school/kindergarten program.

We heard the annual reports from the Treasurer and Secretary along with those from our various standing and ad hoc committees. Post-convention discussion revealed that our

biggest issue was the lunch situation, which will be addressed and improved in future conventions.

Additionally, we elected three new members to the Board. Our interim Treasurer, Tom Smyth, was formally seated, and Gary Olson and Sara Sexton were elected to serve as Directors.

Bios of Our New Directors

Gary Olson (Powell)

Because I was born two months premature, my lungs were not fully developed. I had to be put in an incubator and remained in it for 55 days. I received too much oxygen, which damaged my retinas and left me totally blind. I have light perception in my right eye, and I love being able to see the sun.

After attending the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind for six years, I began attending public school in the fall of 1965 in Cheyenne, where I was born and raised. After graduation, I attended the University of Wyoming and received a bachelor's degree in sociology in 1976. I earned a master's degree in vocational rehabilitation counseling in 1982 from the University of Northern Colorado.

For most of my career, I worked for what is now known as Vision Outreach Services (VOS) under the Wyoming Department of Education as an outreach consultant for the visually impaired. I retired in July 2019 after nearly 26 years with VOS. My wife Ilene and I reside in Powell, where we have lived for a total of 23 years. We have five wonderful children and 16 totally awesome grandchildren. In my spare time I enjoy cutting and polishing rocks, reading novels, and listening to classic country music. Occasionally, I play my guitar and sing for Ilene.

Sara Sexton (Buffalo)

I am 39 years old. My husband, Zac, and I have been married for ten years. We have an eight-year-old child and two dogs. We live in Buffalo, Wyoming.

I have been blind for four years. I was blinded by a traumatic brain injury and subsequent spinal infection. While my life has been irrevocably changed by this event, my family and I have adapted and grown to accommodate my new lot in life.

I have a leader dog named Sonny Boy. He is a black lab. While we have only been together for a year, he does a great job of keeping me safe and teaching me patience and compassion.

I currently work for a non-profit called Compass Center for Families as a case manager; connecting people in Johnson County with resources they need to stay housed and fed. I am excited to be on the WyCB board because I am ready to advocate more for the Wyoming B/VI community. Educating the public about blindness is crucial to our happiness and accommodation as a whole.

WyCB Annual Convention Presentation Recap

So that you might recount some of the useful information that was presented at our convention, the following are brief take-aways from each presentation instead of just a general summary. They may prove to be useful references.

Update of VOS Support and Services by Jennifer D'Alessandro

Vision Outreach Services (VOS) works to meet the needs of schools and adult clients dealing with low vision, vision loss, and blindness. We are based out of 4 different offices located across the state. Our Cheyenne office services clients in Laramie, Albany, Carbon, Platte, and Goshen counties. The Powell Office services clients in Park, Big Horn, Washakie, Hot Springs, Sheridan, Johnson, and Campbell Counties. The

Casper office serves Natrona, Converse, Niobrara, Crook, and Weston counties. Our Lander office serves those in Teton, Lincoln, Uinta, Sublette, Sweetwater, and Fremont counties.

VOS provides a variety of services and trainings ranging from daily living skills, adaptive living skills, Orientation and Mobility, Assistive Technology, Adjustment, and Accommodations for reading and writing. We also oversee a variety of Programs and Projects such as direct client support. We provide resources such as connecting clients and schools to other local, state, national, and international resources. This can include instructional resources, consumer groups like WyCB, connecting with other state agencies like WSIL or WIL, providing informational resources like Vision Aware and even connecting to other services like Wyoming Relay, which supports the needs of people who are deaf/hard of hearing.

We provide services to Wyoming residents dealing with blindness and low vision who are 55 and older. As part of this work, we are currently doing a pilot program called Community Partners which works to provide some training, information, support, and limited equipment to other agencies in the state that support people with B/VI. Through these community partners, we hope to continue to increase the number of people who are referred to VOS. We also have a monthly Adult Forum call-in meeting with topical discussion

pertinent to the needs of people in Wyoming with B/VI. We provided access to the National Library Services Talking Book Program and provide consultation to Educational Agencies. These areas are not all that VOS is responsible to do. We also have significant responsibility as part of the Special Education Division to support statewide monitoring ensuring implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. And we oversee the American Printing House for the Blind Federal Quota Funds; Accessible Educational Materials, Post-Secondary Transition, Wyoming Deaf-Blind Project and other programs.

In 2023, we have already served 214 new clients. We have had 830 in home and office visits and distributed 771 pieces of equipment. Our offices have taken 1,807 telephone calls with clients and continue to steadily increase the numbers of people served through the Older Blind Program.

Embracing O&M by Melissa Walker

Orientation & Mobility is so much more than the use of a long white cane or a guide dog. It is a means of gaining the skills, knowledge, and freedom to go and do despite your loss of vision. For many the use of a long white cane can be difficult at first because of the emotional hurdle it presents; acceptance

of one's vision loss, the public statement using it makes, or feeling like it is an admittance to needing help.

During the WyCB convention in September many of those in attendance shared their own stories of how receiving O&M training opened doors to travel independently or better interact in the community and with others. Overall, we shared that the use of O&M skills and a cane is a key step to safe travel, easing interactions in the community, and embracing blindness as a part of you.

I leave each of you with a challenge if you have had O&M training: who can you share your experience with, and are there areas you are still hesitant in and need more guidance? For those of you who have not received O&M training, why not, and what might be holding you back from doing so? No matter your vision, everyone can benefit from O&M instruction and use of a long white cane.

Is the Blind Shell Classic 2 the Ideal Mobile Phone for You? by Ryan Rausch

For those with low to no vision, the Blind Shell Classic 2 is a remarkable cellphone, offering a simple and easy to use alternative to complex smartphones. Its oversized, tactile

buttons and voice-feedback streamline navigation help to keep you from dialing a wrong number. The loud speaker provides ample sound even in noisy environments, while voice control allows for essentially hands-free use. These integrated features reflect a strong commitment to inclusive design. It is available in two classic colors, red and black, both models feature black keypads with white lettering, with the red model offering superior high-contrast visibility. Measuring just a little over 5 by 2 inches, it conveniently slips into your pocket. Worth highlighting, there is an SOS button on the back of the phone, which can be programmed to your emergency contacts, offering peace of mind.

It is important to note that the Blind Shell Classic 2 operates exclusively on the T-Mobile network, which may not work in certain areas, particularly in northwest Wyoming. Therefore, checking with T-Mobile to confirm service coverage at your specific location is critical if you are interested in this phone.

Nevertheless, the phone remains an excellent choice for those seeking a straightforward and user-friendly device, especially as it was designed for and tested by the blind and low vision community. If you are interested in getting your hands on the phone or would like to know more, please reach out to Wyoming Assistive Technology Resources at 307-766-6187 or contact us via email at watr@uwyo.edu.

Information on the other two phones that Ryan spoke about will be featured in upcoming editions of *“Sightings.”*

Considering Other ACB Affiliates presented by Zelda Gebhard & Terry Pacheco

There are over 70 State and Special Interest affiliates within our parent organization, the American Council of the Blind (ACB). They cover a wide range of interests depending on one’s visual acuity, level of technology, age, etc. They can all be found on the Affiliate link on the ACB website, www.acb.org. We chose to feature only two of these affiliates to highlight the diversity found within ACB.

Both Zelda and Terry have many decades of experience and leadership within their State and Special Interest affiliates and now with the leadership of ACB. They both have a working knowledge of the Affiliate they chose to describe.

Zelda explained that the Council of Citizens with Low Vision International (CCLVI) is the premier low vision affiliate within ACB. Their numerous activities, Zoom Calls, fundraisers, and newsletter make them an ideal organization to explore if you

find yourself with low vision from any number of eye afflictions. Check them out at their website: <https://cclvi.org>.

If you are a senior who is experiencing vision loss, the Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss (AAVL) might appeal to you. They do some of the same things that the other affiliates do, but with an older spin. Terry encouraged those who have an interest, to check out their website: <https://www.aavl-blind-seniors.org>

You will find people within all of these affiliates who have already experienced what you may be going through while trying to cope with your own vision condition. Don't make the mistake of trying to navigate this very scary journey alone. Challenge yourself to reach out.

SEED by Laurel Henry

During my WyCB convention presentation I spoke about SEED (Safety Education Empowering Defense Program). This program is designed to provide safety education and physical techniques for individuals who are blind or have low vision. It emphasizes the importance of safety for everyone and addresses the unique challenges of individuals who are blind or have low vision. It addresses the extremely high rates of individuals with disabilities that are violated.

By providing safety education and physical techniques training, individuals are able to recognize, analyze, and respond to potentially threatening situations.

Empowering words are used to advocate for yourself during a consensual interaction, incident, or violation. A person should practice these words before the situation occurs.

Home safety is very important. You should make sure your alarms cameras are working, doors and gates are locked, security lights are working and that your family has an emergency plan. Never share personal information online.

Safety in the community is also very important. Share your plan of travel with someone, have a plan, share your location with a family member or friend on the Uber app. If something doesn't feel right get out of the situation.

Conduct a personal internal assessment for yourself. How am I feeling physically, emotionally, and socially?

Self-defense techniques can increase a person's confidence and ability to feel safer in their home and community.

If you are interested in learning more about self-defense or safety education, please feel free to contact me.

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Conclusion

Thank you to everyone who helped make our convention and Thankful Thursday great successes!

As a reminder our “WyCB Roundup” teleconference chat call is held at 7 PM on the fourth Wednesday of every month. It provides a wonderful opportunity for the blind and visually impaired and others to learn about WyCB, get acquainted with each other, and together explore various ways to help each other cope with vision loss, all in a free-flowing conversation.

To participate in the chat call, simply dial: (605) 472-5395 and when prompted, enter the access code: 569373 followed by the # sign. All are welcome.