

"Sightings"

Wyoming Council of the Blind

<https://www.wycb.info>

307 629-1916

June 2024

President's Address by Cheryl Godley

Hello WyCB Members. We have a lot of important news to share with you since our last Newsletter.

In March, Dan Grace, of Casper, made a very generous donation of \$2,000 to WyCB. Dan moved to Wyoming to pursue a job as a pilot for a Caterpillar dealer in Casper. He worked in that position for 35.5 years. When he started, he flew "tiny" planes, and over the years the size of the planes he flew, grew. "Aviation was my life." Over time, Dan stopped instructing others on flying aircraft, and has stopped flying planes himself. Now, his focus is to "care for people who themselves have problems." He remembers as a child, his mother reading for blind persons. He recognizes the significance of vision loss and the challenges associated with it. Thank you, Dan for your generous donation!

The WyCB Board has decided to use a portion of Dan's donation to make registration for this year's Convention on September 28, 2024 free to all members. We hope with free registration, more people will attend our Convention, either in person or via Zoom, and more people will be encouraged to join WyCB. We look forward to meeting all of you in September. Thank you, Dan, for your generosity. It is very much appreciated.

In May, Natrona Collective Health Trust awarded WyCB a \$6,975 Boost Grant to improve accessibility to our website and develop a Resource page on it. NCHT provides a collective approach to health and wellbeing in Natrona County. We are excited to partner with them in their mission.

The Resource page will provide information on blindness and visual impairment, and how to contact available services that may inform, educate, encourage, and support people with B/VI in Wyoming. There will be active links that will directly connect individuals to these important resources.

Other aspects of our website project include the development of an online membership application that may be paid through Square. Our newsletter Sightings will be searchable and archived. A Facebook page is being developed. A photo gallery of B/VI-related images and photographs taken during our activities is to be created, and other projects are likely to

evolve. Best of all, our website consultant, Annette Carter, will ensure that our website is accessible to individuals with B/VI.

We would like to express our gratitude to NCHT for providing the funds to greatly enhance our website. This will go a long way to further our mission to inform, educate, encourage and support those with B/VI.

We are again providing a \$1,000 scholarship to an individual who wants to further their education to either a college or a trade school. Please get the word out about this opportunity.

As we approach our Convention in September, there will be an opportunity for members to join our Board. There are Director Positions available, and we will be electing a new Vice President and Secretary, as Tom Lealos and Sherry Linen have announced their decision not to run for these positions for the next term. Thank you, Tom and Sherry for years of invaluable service and commitment to growing WyCB.

If you are interested in joining our Board, or if you are available to serve on any of our project committees, please let us know. We are becoming a more active organization and we welcome your participation. Any amount of help and involvement would be greatly appreciated. It is an exciting time for WyCB as we are growing and striving to make our presence known to Wyoming. Come join us in this journey!

White Cane Safety Day Observance By Sarah Sexton, Committee Chair

Every year, October 15th is celebrated as White Cane Safety Day around the world. The goal is to bring awareness and education to the sighted population about people who use white canes. To help in this effort, WyCB has created a committee to plan activities to educate as many Wyomingites as possible about white cane usage in Wyoming.

We are in the planning stages of a white cane march at the state capitol on Wednesday, October 02, 2024. We hope to have Governor Mark Gordon sign a proclamation that will designate October 15 as "White Cane Safety Day" this year. To make this a success we want as many white cane and dog guide users as possible to show up in Cheyenne on October 02. Please check our website at wycb.info or our WyCB Facebook page for updates on our planned march to raise white cane awareness.

We are also working with WyDOT to have the current driver's education manual updated to include information about people who use white canes and dog guides, and to have questions about their use placed on the Wyoming driver's license test.

RealSAM Pocket Phone: A Pocketful of Fun and Accessibility! By Krista Zwieg, Project Coordinator, (WATR)

The RealSAM Pocket's size is slightly larger than a deck of cards. It claims to be "simple to use and friendly." It lives up to this notion by having features that are designed for ease of use and accessibility. The RealSAM Pocket is a smartphone, which means everything is done through its touch screen. The touch screen has a talk button, which is not an actual button, it is just a space on the screen you tap to interact with the phone. To use the talk button, you will tap the bottom of the screen once and listen for a rising tone, when you hear that it will ask you what you want. When you hear a falling tone and a tick-tock sound, you will know that the phone is searching for your answer. The RealSAM Pocket features a couple of actual buttons. On the right side, there is a long button and a short one. The long button is used to control the volume. When you press the upper half of this button the volume will turn up and when you press the lower half of this button the volume will turn down. Below the volume button, you will find the short button that can be used to turn the device on and off.

Approximately 90% of this phone's functions are controlled with voice commands. For example, a user could ask the phone to "Call Sara" and the phone would then locate Sara in the contacts and initiate the call, entirely hands-free. This makes the phone highly accessible for users who cannot see or easily access the screen. The RealSAM Pocket is compatible with any US mobile carrier. This allows users to choose whatever phone service provider they want.

The RealSAM Pocket includes some amazing features.

- Call management: This phone maintains consistency with its touch screen button placements. The RealSAM Pocket ensures that these buttons, including the end call button, all remain in the same location, allowing users to develop muscle memory for each button.**
- Gesture control: Users can navigate the call screen by dragging their fingers down the screen until they hear the desired action. This allows for intuitive and tactile interaction.**
- Quick End Call: For those of you who hate trying to find the end call button the RealSAM Pocket has the option to end a conversation quickly by hitting the small button on the right side of the phone below the volume button.**

- **Be My Eyes Integration:** This phone is linked to **Be My Eyes**, an app that connects users through a video call with a volunteer for an extra set of eyes. This feature also provides precautions to handle private information responsibly.
- **Magnifier:** By using the phone's camera as a digital video magnifier the user can zoom in on any object or text. Within this feature, users can make color contrast adjustments and use text recognition to better access their surroundings.
- **Location Services:** When asked the **RealSAM Pocket** can provide users with their exact location, which can aid in orientation and enable users to communicate their whereabouts with others.

The RealSAM pocket provides different entertainment options:

- **Book options:** Users can ask the **RealSAM Pocket** to find a book and it then presents a list for easy selection. These books can be streamed from **Librivox**, **Project Gutenberg**, and **Torch Trust**.
- **Audiobooks:** The **RealSAM Pocket** has many options and can read the selected book aloud.

- **Podcast: Do you enjoy Podcasts? The RealSAM Pocket can assist you in discovering and listening to podcasts.**

The RealSAM Pocket is indeed simple to use and friendly by being 90% voice activated. If you would like to purchase this phone, you can find it at realsam.us/pocket/. If you would like more information or a demonstration of this device you can reach out to Wyoming Assistive Technology Resources (WATR) by email at: watr@uwyo.edu or by phone at: (307)766-6187.

Chinchillas, Peacocks, and Alligators! Oh my! Counterfeit Service Animals and What To Do About Them By Sara Sexton

After hearing frequent stories of various critters being unsuccessfully passed off as service animals or emotional support animals, I became interested in researching what could or should be done when someone encounters a counterfeit service animal or emotional support animal. In Wyoming, it is a misdemeanor offense to misrepresent any animal as a service animal in a public space, punishable up to a \$750 fine per occurrence.

My research took me down various moral and ethical paths. Below are three of the most thought-provoking opinions I found.

The first place I called for information on this matter was Leaderdogs for the Blind, the organization that I received my guide dog, Sonny Boy, from. They are perpetually a wealth of knowledge and always so helpful. Julianna at Leaderdogs shared some simple advice: Let your wonderfully trained dog be the shining example of what a true service animal looks, acts, and behaves like. She also clarified that if people ask what Sonny Boy does, or if I am asked why he only wears a leather harness and not a service dog vest, to explain what a guide dog does. While doing so I am to make sure to keep the focus on my dog and the training that he and I both received.

The next organization that I spoke with was Advocates for Service Animals Partners, Inc. (ASAP). I spoke with Marion who used to work for the National Association of Guide Dog Users. He was incredibly well-versed in the laws of each state and what legal recourse can be taken against people who misrepresent their pets.

Marion informed me about Wyoming state law, as noted above. He encouraged me to alert the sheriff's department about any person who is publicly and purposefully misrepresenting their pet. He also encouraged me to write up

a press release or a news article for the local newspaper to clarify for the public the laws and the consequences for people with counterfeit service animals. Marion also told me that if the newspaper wanted to interview someone about the subject that he would be glad to speak with them.

I then spoke with Julia who is an advocate for people with all forms of disability, as well as working for the Put People First campaign, which is a group focused on prioritizing the needs of poor and dispossessed people ahead of the needs of companies and government interests.

Julia finds it appalling that people are being fined and charged with a misdemeanor when they are caught misrepresenting a service animal. She suggested that people lobby to have the fine dropped and the misdemeanor charge changed to a compulsory educational class that the offender has to pass about service animals, emotional support animals, and the work and training that is required for these people and animals to be allowed to carry such a title.

She then pondered the challenge of obtaining one of these highly trained animals. I explained the various reasons why it was so hard to obtain and maintain service and emotional support animals. Her stance was that if it is less challenging for people to obtain service animals and emotional support

animals, then there will not be as many people trying to pass off their pets as legitimately trained service animals.

With all of this input, it really seems like making a decision about how to respond to an encounter with a counterfeit service animal is up to that person's discretion. As for me, unless the public interaction that I have with a counterfeit service animal becomes aggressive, I will not be calling the sheriff's department to report a counterfeit animal.

The complexity of this issue is quite deep. For now, my stance is going to be one of neutrality simply because I do not think the repercussions for the violations are fitting or are able to cause a change in the offender's behavior. I will simply let my beautifully trained, well-mannered guide dog speak for himself.

With that being said, I have begun the process of developing an amendment to the current law in Wyoming; it is going to be a rather involved process that requires lots of research and persistence on my part. My hope is that if the law can be changed to include education, instead of just a punitive fine, that it will create more change in public behavior. Stay tuned for updates!

Editor's Note: This following timely article was posted on the ACB Conversation List by Guide Dog Users Inc. on May 30, 2024. It is included here with Sarah Sexton's article to provide a means for our members to report incidents of this nature.

Report Those Ads That Encourage Doting Pet Owners to Break the Law and Identify Untrained Pets as Service and Guide Dogs!

We find the ads everywhere! On our favorite social media platforms; inside newspapers and magazines; scattered throughout online advertising circulars for big box stores, grocery chains, even Amazon.com! These are ads that sell a cape or a vest or some other piece of identification paraphernalia that gives pet owners the confidence to falsely claim their pets are service dogs! Once identified as indispensable service or guide dogs, those same treasured pets can become understandably terrified or even aggressive when accompanying their owners into busy settings like airports, train stations, fast food establishments, the crowded aisles of grocery and other stores, or virtually any other unfamiliar environment, and misbehave!

Nothing in the civil rights laws that allow us to bring our guide and service dogs into public settings requires our dogs

to be certified in any way. It's our dogs' excellent training, along with the training we receive, ourselves, from experts and professionals in the field, and the specific tasks that our dogs are individually trained to perform for us, that qualify our dogs as guide and service dogs! There is neither a process nor any official evaluation that certifies a dog for guide or service work. Those fake "certifications," that advertisers offer to sell pet owners, are meaningless!

Untrained and unauthorized pets can – and often do – present real threats to the safety of guide dog users and our legitimately trained guide and service dogs. And, when a business owner or store manager has experienced a few unpleasant incidents caused by falsely identified, so-called, "service animals," those same owners and managers may be reluctant to welcome even well-behaved and much needed guide dogs into their establishments and inside public venues.

Don't make it easy for pet owners to break the law – and harder for guide and service dog users to travel independently and safely with our dogs! Report those ads every time you encounter them! Here's how!

When you encounter advertising for capes or vests or I.D. cards or tags that make your pet appear to be certified as an emotional support animal or a service dog, report them.

Report these misleading ads that encourage fraudulent behavior to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The FTC has primary responsibility for determining whether specific advertising is false or misleading, and for taking action against the sponsors of these advertisements. To file a complaint with the FTC, go to ReportFraud.ftc.gov.

Whether or not you are a guide or service dog user, Guide Dog Users, Inc. thanks you for your help. Please make the world a safer place for us and our guide dogs.

Losing Your Vision Late in Life By Tom Lealos

My low vision journey lasted about forty years. My vision loss was very gradual, so I had plenty of time to adjust, so when I finally became totally blind in my early 70's it was not such a shock to me. In contrast to this, I know people who lost their vision very rapidly, either by accident or naturally. These folks certainly had some very tough mental issues to cope with.

I have learned much on my journey which now seems to be rather uneventful, but some lessons came hard. I have become very aware of my other senses. They were always there but now I trust them all.

Since “low vision” has such a wide range of visual acuities, we have a hard time defining our vision loss to ourselves, let alone trying to explain our vision situation to others. This can be very frustrating. This is why some folks say that they would sooner be totally blind than low vision. Being totally blind is finite in reality. Once you adjust to it, you’re there. There is no more confusion.

I have been in conversations where people share their feelings about being “partial” or “total” and why they prefer one over the other. I am in the camp with those who choose “partial.” Even though those early years of my journey were very frustrating I miss not being able to know what my grandkids look like, what my wife looks like now, what the yard looks like after a long day of mowing, pruning, and trimming, not to mention, what I look like in the mirror these days. I guess I would have liked to have made a few more mental memories before the lights went out. This kind of sounds like sour grapes, but we don’t get do-overs, so I don’t dwell.

You can get somewhat morbid and depressed about this stuff if you’re not careful. It is much better to greet each day with a positive attitude and treat each challenge as a learning moment. All of those little victories and successes can add up and really boost your self-confidence. When people ask

me how I can keep doing what I do my answer is always, "I'm not dead yet." Onward!

WyCB is Now on Facebook

Announcing an exciting development for WyCB! We now have an active and informative Facebook page, says committee chair, Sarah Sexton. You can find us on Facebook by typing Wyoming Council of the Blind into the Facebook search bar. Please like and follow us to stay updated on local events and meetings for those who are low vision and blind as well as regional and national information, events, and legislation. Sarah and our committee are making every effort to keep the page current. You can also connect to our WyCB webpage via our Facebook page. Check it out and let us know what you think about our venture into the world of social media. We look forward to hearing from you.

Announcing the Wyoming Independent Living Peer Advocacy Conference 2024 By Joseph "JJ" Sanchez, Independent Living Program Manager, WIL.

Please join us for our annual WIL Peer Advocacy Conference 2024. The conference theme is "Peers United: Creating a Spark." This year we are getting back to our "roots" of self-advocacy and peer-led discussions. The conference will be

held at the Best Western Downtown at 123 West “E” Street, Casper, WY. The conference is a three day event, August 6th 1pm to 5pm, the 7th 9am to 5am, and the 8th 9am to 12:30pm.

Our keynote speaker this year is Michael Beers! Michael is a comedian and disability advocate, who is a sought-after speaker on topics like humor, disability advocacy, education, and community building. Conference topics will include disability history, the power of grass roots advocacy, self-exploration, sharing your story, leadership opportunities, and identifying your supports. There will be activities as well like Advocacy through Art, group activities, and a movie night! Please register now! We look forward to seeing you!

***This conference is free for individuals with a disability. We are asking for a registration fee of \$50 for government employees, service providers, and other professionals. A waiver or discounts can be obtained by contacting WIL at (307) 316-4654. (If you are an individual with a disability and would like to attend, travel stipends may be available.) For more information contact WIL and/or go to our website wilr.org.**

Previewing This Year’s WyCB Convention By Tom Lealos, Committee Chair

This year's WyCB Annual Convention will be held on Saturday, September 28. We will again be holding it as a "hybrid" event, with online via zoom and in person attendance options. This allows those who have transportation issues to attend. The "in-person" venue for our convention will be in one of VOS's conference rooms in the old Pine Valley School located at 539 S. Payne in Casper.

The theme for this year's convention is "Breaking Barriers." It is intended to focus on trying new things in order to stay-in-the-game. The presenters on the program will be speaking on topics related to this theme.

Due to Dan Grace's very generous donation we are able to forego the registration fee for this year's convention. Hopefully, his gift will entice even more folks to join us.

The lunch break will be an hour and fifteen minutes. As in past years, anyone who desires to bring their own lunch is welcome to do so. We do, however, plan to order in some pizza and soft drinks, which we will be charging only \$5.00 for. Details will be included within the registration packet which will be mailed out in early August.

We will again be holding four \$25.00 door prize drawings during the day which were donated by WalMart.

Refreshments and goodies will also be available for all “in person” attendees.

The convention will start at 8:00 AM, and after the pledge, prayer, and housekeeping items the first speaker will be introduced by emcee, Gary Olson at 8:30 AM. A summary of the day’s presentations is as follows:

- Don Olson, head of the Customer Services Division for the National Library Services’ Braille and Audio Reading Download program in Washington DC, will speak on “New Innovations at BARD & NLS.”**
- Claire Stanley, Director of Advocacy & Governmental Affairs for the American Council of the Blind in Alexandria, VA, will discuss “Advocacy Within ACB.”**
- Shelby Kappler, who is an Assistive Technology Program Specialist with WATR in Laramie will talk about “Assistive Technology for the B/VI.”**
- During the lunch break, Director Debra Thompson will award our annual scholarship to this year’s recipient.**
- Judy Jones, from Sedro-Woolley, WA is our keynote speaker. She is a retired Regional Office Manager and Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant for the Idaho**

Commission for the Blind. Her presentation is entitled, “The Perfect Recipe, Combining Attitude, Philosophy, and Resources.”

- **Tina Bennett from Gillette is the ADA and Accessibility Coordinator for WIL. She will be discussing “The Latest Aspects of the ADA that Affect the B/VI.”**

Our Annual Membership Business Meeting will follow the afternoon break. President Cheryl Godley will preside over the meeting featuring committee reports, a financial report, new programs, and the election of new Officers and Directors. Please consider throwing your hat into the ring and joining our Board. We are always looking for new faces and ideas.

Prior to adjournment, we will hold a very candid, open post-convention discussion to critique the day-long event. This has proven to be very productive and beneficial in past years.

Please mark your calendars and plan to attend this year’s very informative and exciting convention. The WyCB Board looks forward to spending the day with you.