

"Sightings"

Wyoming Council of the Blind

<https://www.wycb.info>

307 629-1916

October 2024

President's Address By Cheryl Godley

Greetings WyCB Members,

I am happy to report that WyCB has been increasingly active and has been steadily gaining new members since our last newsletter in June. We now have 29 members.

On August 13 we had a booth at the 4th Annual Senior Citizens Day at the Senior Citizens Center in Casper. This event had information booths from a variety of healthcare companies and organizations, and educational organizations. We met some really interesting people and we have gained some new members as a result of attending this event.

On September 9 WyCB held its first Low Vision Support Group at the Senior Citizens Center at 1831 East 4th Street in Casper. Unfortunately, no one came, but on our second meeting on October 14 three people attended. We hope attendance will

continue to grow. We will be hosting this Low Vision Support Group every second Monday of the month at the Senior Citizens Center from 10 AM to noon. Please get the word out about these regular monthly meetings. If you are unable to attend, but you are interested in possibly attending virtually via Zoom please contact us. At this time, we do not have the means to meet virtually, but if there is enough interest we will look to see how this may be possible.

On September 28 WyCB held its annual convention at the Pineview Elementary School in Casper. We had 12 people attend in person and 8 people virtually attended via Zoom. We had some excellent presentations which are summarized below and we gained Bonnie Harrison (Cheyenne), Robin Loen (Cody), and Linda Woodruff (Sheridan) as new Directors on our Board. Welcome all of you and we look forward to your collaboration with us. Sherry Leinen finished her term as an excellent WyCB secretary, and she will stay on to serve as a Director. Sarah Sexton has agreed to serve as our new Secretary. Thank you, Sarah! Tom Lealos who has provided unsurpassable effort, dedication, and leadership to WyCB for many, many years completed his term as Vice President. We will greatly miss having him on our board and we are deeply grateful for all he has done for our organization. Gary Olson has graciously accepted the position of Vice President. We welcome Gary's energy and expertise.

On October 4, WyCB, with the help of other low vision advocates, held a White Cane Day Proclamation in Cheyenne. More on this important event below.

On October 15 and 16, WyCB had an information booth at the Association for Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) Northern Rockies Conference in Lander. We were able to provide information about our organization to professionals who provide services to individuals in Wyoming with blindness and visual impairment.

On October 17, I met with the Casper Women's Business Network at their monthly luncheon to inform their members about WyCB. At the end of this lunch their members made a generous donation. Their donation is very much appreciated.

Keep your eyes and ears open for our upcoming events on our Facebook page and on our website wycb.info.

President's Address from the WyCB 2024 Convention by Cheryl Godley

Last year's motto was "Revive, Strive, and Thrive." This year our motto is "Moving Forward."

During the last year, our organization has become rejuvenated. As you will see by our Standing Committee reports, the Board of Directors and Officers have accomplished a great deal. My

hope is that this motto, “Moving Forward” will be maintained by WyCB becoming better known, not only to the B/VI community, but to all communities within the state of Wyoming.

I would like to commend our Board. They are strong and active. They have effectively and efficiently addressed projects and have worked together as a team. What a great job you each have done!

This year we have acquired financial stability in a way not known before to WyCB. Between the Thankful Thursday fundraiser last year, a grant being awarded by the Natrona Collective Health Trust, and a significant personal donation by Mr. Dan Grace of Casper, we have been able to gain some financial security which will allow us to move forward to better serve individuals with B/VI in Wyoming. For example, we were asked to start a Support group in September at the Casper Senior Center. Our hope is that additional opportunities evolve where we may serve our members and individuals with B/VI, their families, and friends.

We continue to strive to increase our membership numbers. We are developing partnerships and networking with other organizations to assist us in getting the word out that we are here.

Other ways we are making our presence known is through our website. We have developed a Resource Page that allows anyone to access resources available for individuals with B/VI anywhere in Wyoming. The resources listed include information about how, and who to contact regarding training programs, financial resources, assistive technology, orientation and mobility training, and so on. Similarly, we have developed a Facebook page that lists upcoming activities and events.

The Board has worked on blindness related activities and projects that promote awareness of unique issues associated with B/VI. Some of these include working with Governor Gordon's office to make a proclamation about White Cane Awareness Day in Wyoming, the inclusion of blindness related information specific to drivers in the WYDOT Driver's manual and inclusion of this information on the driver's test, looking into concerns associated with transportation issues, and looking into the challenges of counterfeit service animals.

So, as you can see, we are here. We are active. And we are moving forward. Where are we going? It is time to develop activities and projects that will benefit our members and the B/VI community. What do you, as members, want?

Please think about what you desire from WyCB that would be helpful to you, someone you know, or family members and friends. Please take a moment to let us know what your needs

are by letting anyone on our Board know what you would like. We would like your feedback so we may move forward in a meaningful way for the B/VI community in Wyoming.

Where are we going? Here are some ideas.

- 1. Start support groups around the state**
- 2. Develop “pods” of individuals with B/VI and their families/friends in different towns that may be a resource to individuals within that town, or that may develop activities with others who are B/VI.**
- 3. Increase awareness about B/VI related-issues, activities, and needs throughout Wyoming.**
- 4. Provide educational opportunities to the communities in Wyoming about B/VI and related issues (etiquette, information about white canes, dog guides, etc.).**
- 5. Continue developing financial resources for projects.**

As stated last year, a primary focus for our organization is increasing our membership. It is through building this membership that WyCB will become stronger. There is strength in numbers when it comes to addressing difficult issues that may arise within Wyoming regarding B/VI related issues. It is through strength in numbers that we may better

advocate on behalf of us. It is through strength in numbers that our advocacy will be heard. As our membership grows, we will be better able to advocate on our behalf, and we are more likely to be heard and to be taken seriously. I am certain that in the future the B/VI community in Wyoming will face challenges and if we have a strong organization behind us, we are likely to be more effective in asserting what is in our best interests, to others. Please let others know about WyCB and encourage yourself and others to become active members and to take part in representing individuals in Wyoming with B/VI.

WyCB 2024 Annual Convention by Tom Smyth

Our 2024 Convention was an informative, productive, and enjoyable event. A special shout out of appreciation to Leslie Van Norman with Vision Outreach Services for providing the use of their conference room at Pineview Elementary, and to Jenna Rector with Wyoming Independent Living who expertly managed the virtual aspects of our convention. Having this virtual capability with Zoom over the internet enabled people to join us who otherwise would not have been able to attend. And it allowed us to have presenters from around the country. With the exception of Tina Bennet, all of the presenters met with us via Zoom. We enjoyed the following presentations:

Don Olson, head of the Customer Services Division for the National Library Services Braille and Audio Reading Download program in Washington DC, spoke on “New Innovations at

BARD & NLS.” He discussed what free literary materials are available to the B/VI community through them. He also explained how technology is improving how they are able to distribute those materials.

Claire Stanley, Director of Advocacy & Governmental Affairs for the American Council of the Blind in Alexandria, VA discussed “Advocacy Within ACB.” She stressed the importance of the B/VI community advocating for themselves and how this is the best way for positive changes to be enacted.

Shelby Kappler, who is an Assistive Technology Program Specialist with WATR in Laramie talked about “Assistive Technology for the B/VI.” In her own words: There are so many ways to make the world accessible when you are low vision or blind. Starting with low-tech ideas, bump dots and small Velcro rounds can help indicate specific items or certain locations. There are large print board games, Brailled playing cards, and lighted crochet hooks to make everyday recreation accessible. Smart phones have in-depth accessibility options and there are phones distinctively designed for the low vision and blind community. Those products are: the Blind Shell Classic 2, the Real Sam Pocket, and the lively flip 2. There are several apps created to increase accessibility and those are: Seeing AI, Envision, Be My Eyes, and Voice Dream Scanner. Libby, Audible, and Bard are also great apps that provide access to books and other written materials. There are other

types of technology that can be rented on a short-term basis through Wyoming Assistive Technology Resources program. They can be reached at 307-766-6187.

Tina Bennett from Gillette is the ADA and Accessibility Coordinator for WIL. She discussed “The Latest Aspects of the ADA that Affect the B/VI.” Tina discussed the various challenges that some public entities, especially small businesses, face with becoming ADA compliant. While she was clear of the need for all to be compliant, she stressed a collaborative approach instead of using dictatorial mandates at gaining compliance. Tina also urged people not to be shy about alerting her office about potential violations of the ADA or if they have an accessibility issue in their neighborhood.

Judy Jones, from Sedro-Woolley, WA was our keynote speaker. She is a retired Regional Office Manager and Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant for the Idaho Commission for the Blind. She gave a wonderfully upbeat and inspiring presentation entitled, “The Perfect Recipe, Combining Attitude, Philosophy, and Resources.” In her own words: The key to successfully snatching your life back if vision loss tries to claim it is a recipe with these ingredients: the simple decision to develop a problem-solver attitude, a positive philosophy, seeking peer support, and building a tool box of alternative techniques of daily skills. When these things are combined, you will be well on your way to success.

Following these great presentations, we held our business meeting and elected our new Board members. Thank you to all who attended either in person or virtually. We look forward to having all of you and many others at next year's convention in late September. Stay tuned for the date and place.

Breaking News for the Blind by Sarah Sexton

The company Script-Talk is offering a trial period for the label reading device that they sell. There is now a Script-Talk mobile app available for download on your smart phone. If you are interested in trying out their device or in their mobile app, contact them at 800-890-1180.

RayBan is partnering with the volunteer app Be My Eyes for an innovative step in accessibility. People who use RayBan smart glasses can now make totally hands-free assistance calls to Be My Eyes, allowing the dialed volunteer to see what the user is looking at through their glasses. This allows the user to be more easily guided by the volunteer because a smart phone no longer has to be the conduit for the camera; the camera lens on the smart glasses provides the information to the volunteer. Check out the Be My Eyes app or the RayBan website for more information about this exciting development.

White Cane Awareness Day by Sara Sexton and Cheryl Godley

On October 4, 2024 a proclamation was read identifying October 15 as being White Cane Awareness Day in Wyoming. The proclamation was read by Jerry Henderson, a policy analyst from Governor Mark Gordon's office. WyCB president Cheryl Godley was interviewed by ABC/FOX affiliated in Cheyenne, and aired on K2 TV. Cheryl introduced and explained the purpose of White Cane Awareness Day. There were approximately 20-25 people in attendance: WyCB members and spouses, several Lion's Club members, representatives of Wyoming Assistive Technologies Resources (WATR), Vision Outreach Services, a Cheyenne preschooler and his family, a Wheatland second grader and his family, an occupational therapist, a physical therapy assistant, and a new White Cane user who recently moved to Wyoming. This event was sponsored by Cheyenne Sunrise Lion's Club. Following the ceremony attendees walked around the Capital Square led by the second-grade student.

White Cane Awareness Day Proclamation

PROCLAMATION

Wyoming

WHEREAS, the white cane, which every blind citizen of Wyoming has the right to carry, demonstrates and symbolizes

the ability to achieve a full and independent life and the capacity to work productively in competitive employment; and WHEREAS, the white cane, by allowing every blind person to move freely and safely from place to place, makes it possible for the blind to fully participate in and contribute to our society and to live the lives they want; and WHEREAS, every citizen should be aware that the law requires that motorists and cyclists exercise appropriate caution when approaching a blind person carrying a white cane; and WHEREAS, Wyoming law also calls upon employers, both public and private, to be aware of and utilize the employment skills of our blind citizens by recognizing their worth as individuals and their productive capacities; and WHEREAS, Wyoming, through its public agencies and with the cooperative assistance of the Wyoming Council of the Blind, can and should facilitate the expansion of employment opportunities for and greater acceptance of blind persons in the competitive labor market:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Mark Gordon, Governor of Wyoming, do hereby proclaim October 15, _____, as

WHITE CANE AWARENESS DAY

in Wyoming and do call upon our schools, colleges, and universities to offer full opportunities for training to blind persons; upon employers and the public to utilize the available skills of competent blind persons and to open new opportunities for the blind in our rapidly changing society; and

upon all citizens to recognize the white cane as not only a symbol of independence, but also as a mobility tool for blind pedestrians on our streets and highways.

In witness whereof I hereunto set my hand and cause the executive seal of the Governor of Wyoming to be affixed to this

(signature)

**The Honorable Governor Mark Gordon
33rd Governor of the Great State of Wyoming**