

"Sightings"

Wyoming Council of the Blind

<https://www.wycb.info>

307 629-1916

June 2025

President: Cheryl Godley, Casper.

Vice President: Gary Olson, Powell.

Secretary: Sara Sexton, Buffalo.

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President's Address By Cheryl Godley

Hello Folks,

As I was thinking about what to write for this Newsletter, the word that kept coming to me was "change."

So much of what we have known and depended upon throughout the years is changing. I am hearing about changes

being made on governmental levels that affect many aspects of our lives in general, and also our lives as people with Blindness/Visual Impairment. Funding sources that have supported programs, assistance, etc. are changing, and I am hearing of concerns being expressed through national organizations as well as state councils and agencies. At this time, how the changes will shake out is unknown.

I will focus on the things in which we do have choice or control on a personal level. During these uncertain times, it is important for us to take extra special care of ourselves and our health. It is important to support one another to an even greater extent than is typical. Make sure that if you are struggling with changes that are occurring, that you reach out to ask someone for their ear in listening. You may plan to participate in an activity that may be nurturing and uplifting, or that may also revitalize your thoughts and choices for a period of time, even if that time is short. Nurturing ourselves gives us energy for coping with stressful events we may encounter.

Optimism can be learned. If we focus on what is not going well, our energy for coping will be zapped. If we are to be supportive of ourselves, we may seek to find healthy individuals who tend to look at the bright side of things, and who are problem solvers. This will assist us in moving through change in a more positive manner.

So, despite all the changes, let's focus on living our lives as fully and positively as we are able, as compared to bringing ourselves down with negativity. No matter what the change is around us, we have the choice to live our lives to the greatest extent possible.

If you find yourself being affected by change, remind yourself of how much you have already done to live life well as a person with blindness or a visual impairment. You may discover that you already have developed effective skills for addressing change in your life.

As a reminder, WyCB is focusing on developing Low Vision Support Groups across the state for individuals of all ages who are losing or who have lost their sight. Their families, friends, and caregivers are also strongly encouraged to attend these meetings. These support groups are wonderful opportunities to learn about the latest in Assistive Technology, resources available to us in Wyoming, learn about events/concerns in our communities related to B/VI, and to gain support and meet with other individuals living life with vision loss. Let us not forget about the empowerment and fellowship we experience in meeting together as a group!

Buffalo Low Vision Support Group

**Meets the second and fourth Monday of the month
at 11:00 AM at:**

Buffalo Senior Center

671 W. Fetterman Street Buffalo, WY 82834

307-684-9551

Casper Low Vision Support Group

**Meets the second Monday of the month from
10:00 AM to 12:00 PM at:**

Central Wyoming Senior Services

1831 E. 4th Street Casper, WY 82601

Group Facilitator: Cheryl Godley 307-629-1916

Low Vision Support Group of Powell

Meets the second Tuesday of the month at 1:15 PM at:

Rocky Mountain Manor

140 N. Cheyenne Street Powell, WY 82435

Group Facilitator: Tom Lealos 307-764-3664

Sheridan Low Vision Support Group

Meets the third Thursday of the month at 1:00 pm at:

Cascades of Sugarland Ridge

1551 Sugarland Drive Sheridan WY 82801

Group Facilitator: Linda Woodruff 208-313-3987

These meeting times and places are also listed on our WyCB.info website under the “Resources” tab, and “Events” tab. If you are interested in developing a new support group in the state, please contact Cheryl Godley at 307-629-1916. If you would like to be in a support group but there is not one in your area, please call and we will try to find a way for you to join a group by telephone.

The Voice in the Corner By Gary Olson

When I attended the Wyoming Lions Summer School for the Visually Impaired as an adolescent, Mr. Jensen, my educational consultant with what was then known as Services for the Visually Handicapped, took me aside one day. He had noticed that I was not using the white cane I was given some time before the summer school took place.

“Why aren’t you using your cane?” he asked.

Earlier that summer, I had gone for a walk using my cane with my 5-year-old brother, Tod, who became very upset when he noticed that people were staring at me. He was in tears after our walk, and he told our father about this when Dad asked him why he was crying. I was totally embarrassed. I explained to Mr. Jensen that this was why I was not using my cane. Mr. Jensen then asked, “What do you think people would think if

you should fall down while you were walking because you were not using your cane?”

“I suppose they would think that I had fallen down because I am blind,” I told him. “They might think you were drunk,” he said. I had not considered this. In fact, that thought had never crossed my mind. I decided to start using my cane and did so as long as I was at the Lions Camp.

I did not use a cane to get around when I was in high school because I knew the school and the campus like the back of my hand. However, once I began attending the University of Wyoming, my cane became my constant companion, and I wouldn’t dream of being without it. One would have thought that I would never again need to be reminded of the importance of carrying my cane with me at all times and using it when in the community. Not so.

One day last winter my wife Ilene commented while we were downtown, “When you do not use your cane, it makes you look blind. You don’t appear at all confident. I wouldn’t have thought I would need to remind you of this.” I don’t recall my reply. I just remember growing quiet.

Sometime later, I needed to go somewhere with Ilene. As I approached the front door, it was as if I heard a voice from the

corner saying, “Gary, remember me, George, your white cane? Please take me with you! You used to take me everywhere. Now that you are retired, I guess you think you don’t need me anymore. That really hurts my feelings! It makes Ilene mad. In case you haven’t noticed, she is very disappointed in you.”

Since then, I’ve been trying to do better about taking George with me and relying on him. We’ve been traveling a bit lately, and I’ve been reminded how nice it is to have George with me, especially when I need to make use of public restrooms. I’ve also been reflecting on many conversations I had with my blind and visually-impaired clients during my working years about the importance of using a white cane. Suffice it to say, I’ve been sufficiently called to repentance, and it didn’t happen in church!

The Good, the Bad, and the Frustrating: An update about service animal signage in Johnson and Sheridan counties. By Sarah Sexton

In our last newsletter I wrote about the trials and tribulations of businesses being ignorant to the laws and other ramifications of allowing pets into their establishments. Now, a few months later, I have updates of all sorts!

Let's start with the Good:

The Albertson's in Sheridan, WY has a spectacular sign on their front doors stating what type of dog is permitted into that store. This signage has been recently posted thanks to a close friend of mine advocating for the proper signage following an incident where one of the store managers witnessed a leashed pet dog urinate on some bread in the bread aisle. When this new signage was posted, it was brought to my attention. Thrilled by this development, I called the store and spoke with the store manager and thanked him profusely.

Another good development to mention: The independent grocery store in Buffalo called DJ's has a clearly posted sign on their front doors that states: "No pets allowed. Service animals only." When I called to speak with the store manager, she told me that they "police the store when they suspect an illegitimate animal may be in the store," and that they do confront people who are in violation and then ask them to leave the store. These glimmers of support and safety are spectacular!

Now, for the Bad:

The grocery store that is near my home in Buffalo, WY and that I go to no less than three times a week, told me that they

would not be posting any signage regarding service animals or the prohibition of pets.

This statement came from their corporate headquarters and was presented to me with the disclaimer “I know this is NOT what you want to hear but...” I then explored with the manager all of the problematic possibilities of having pets allowed in their store. The only answer he would provide me with was, “If that happens, we will deal with it then and ask the patron to leave the store.”

Finally, the Frustrating:

When I finished my phone conversation with the manager mentioned above, I immediately called the Wyoming State Attorney General’s office. After a lot of explaining and being transferred around, I finally reached several humans that live in the county and can be called upon if needed. I also now have the phone number to file a complaint against an establishment when a violation occurs.

But the frustrating part is that here in Johnson County, the county health inspector and the county agriculture inspector have to be called in to actively witness a pet in violation of a health code. These inspectors then have to get to the store or establishment while the pet is still there. The customer and

their pet may have left by the time the inspectors arrive which then makes the violation report moot. Furthermore, even a witnessed and reported event may not garner any repercussions.

All in all, this journey has taught me a lot. And I will continue to educate local businesses and people about service animals. I will remain committed to reporting violations as I encounter them and I will hope that more accommodation and understanding will occur as education and awareness increases.

In Memory of Lois Jean Boyd

February 1, 1931 – April 22, 2025

Lois Jean Boyd of Casper, Wyoming passed away Tuesday, April 22, 2025. Lois lived in Casper for nearly 7 decades. She had three children, eight grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. Many of her grandchildren sweetly referred to her as “Granny blue eyes.”

Lois was active in the Casper Service League, St. Mark’s (Altar Guild) and St. Stephen’s (Vestry) Episcopal Churches and volunteered at the Nicolaysen Art Museum for 25 years. Lois was appointed to Metro Planning and worked with the city of Casper to install talking stoplights downtown. She was also

active in Daughters of the Nile, Mended Hearts, and devoted much of her later years to low vision support in Wyoming.

Lois was a longtime member of Wyoming Council of the Blind and was president for nine years. Lois lost her vision from macular holes starting in her early 60s and was an inspiration to many in the low vision community as she continued to socialize and volunteer.

Lois and her husband JC were active in the Casper Shrine Club and traveled extensively in their motorhome with a group of Shrine friends. They also traveled in the US and abroad. One of her favorite pastimes was sitting in her patio and listening to the birds. Lois will be greatly missed by her family, her friends, and her blind and visually impaired community.

Wyoming Council of the Blind wishes to share our condolences to Lois's family and friends. To date WyCB has received seven memorial donations in Lois's name and we are deeply honored by their generosity.

Dave Steele, The Blind Poet, shared by Sherry Leinen

Dave Steele lives in Manchester, United Kingdom. He is an award-winning poet, author, speaker, singer and advocate for

the blind. He was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) in 2014 which left him “severely sight impaired.”

In navigating this transformative period, he struggled with the challenges of unemployment and financial strain for his family. Dave turned to social media seeking help for his RP journey and found a world of misconceptions and stories of injustice faced by the blind and visually impaired globally. In 2015 he founded the “Stand by Me RP” Facebook page, which has become one of the world’s largest social media RP groups. He also has “The Blind Poet Dave Steele” Facebook page.

Despite declining eyesight, Dave writes two to three poems daily about his struggles. These poems served as a therapeutic outlet for himself and is a source of inspiration for countless others navigating the blindness and low vision world. He has won numerous awards for his dedication to the blind and visually impaired.

His mission is to inspire others globally, transforming challenges into triumphant achievements, and resolutely proclaiming that “Disability isn’t an excuse to do less but a reason to be more.”

Dave Steele granted permission to share his story and his poetry. Copyright-2023-2025 by Dave Steele, The Blind Poet

Untitled Poem by David Steele

**There's silence in the darkness here,
A space where echoes start,
Where even though the world is loud,
It doesn't reach my heart.**

**The footsteps fade, the visits stop,
The phone stays cold and still,
And even when I smile and nod,
The emptiness can kill.**

**For sight loss isn't just the eyes,
It's doors that slowly close,
It's watching as the world moves on
While no one really knows.**

**It's hearing laughter far away
And wondering who stayed,
While days blur into nights alone,
And colours start to fade.**

**But I have learned through shadows deep
To sit inside the pain,
To wait until the storm rolls past
And light returns again.**

**I've built my strength from every tear
That loneliness has grown,
And though I walk this path alone,
I know I'm not alone.**

**There's power in the reaching out,
In stories we can share,
In knowing someone else out there
Still breathes the same thin air.**

**So if you feel the weight today
Of silence pressing through,
Just know I've sat in that same dark
And now I write for you.**

**For blindness took the light I knew,
But gave me this instead:
A voice to find the ones who feel
Forgotten, lost, or dead.**

**And if you've felt invisible,
Just know that you are seen,
Not only in the light of day
But also in between.**

2025 Peer Advocacy Conference

Get ready! The 2025 Peer Advocacy Conference is coming to Casper, WY August 13th - 15th, 2025 and you won't want to miss it! This year's theme: "Peers United: The Art of Advocacy." Whether you're new to advocacy or have years of experience, this is your space to grow, connect, and get inspired by your peers. The conference will be held at Ramkota Convention Center, 900 N Poplar St, Casper 82601. To book your room call 307-266-6000. Reference "Wyoming Independent Living Peer Advocacy Project Block.

Participants must register in advance. You may register online by going to the Wyoming Independent Living website at Wilr.org then go to the events tab, select the month of August and you should find 2025 Peer Advocacy Conference. If you have questions, please call WIL at 307 266-6956.

Wyoming Council of the Blind Annual Convention

Please mark your calendars for the 2025 WyCB hybrid annual convention! This year's theme will be "Strong Voices, Bright Futures." The convention will be held Saturday September 27, 2025, and may be attended either in person at Pineview Elementary School located at 539 S. Payne in Casper or online via Zoom.

Six great speakers will address us at this year's convention. Karen Strawder from Washington state will be our keynote speaker. She has worked in the blindness field for several years in a variety of positions. She has a wealth of experience to share as a blind professional.

Cindy Hollis of the American Council of the Blind will speak about ACB Community, a new resource ACB is offering. Leslie Van Orman, Program Manager for Vision Outreach Services, will provide us with an update on the services offered by VOS. Aubrey Helton, a visually impaired resident of Sheridan will favor us with some tips on cooking and working in the kitchen.

Jim Hoxie and Joanna Jones, of Spearfish, South Dakota, are co-authors of a children's book, "Grandpa's White Cane." They will give an informative presentation about Jim's introduction to the white cane and his experiences since becoming visually impaired thirteen years ago. They will discuss the benefits of presenting to young students and exposing them to their book and the white cane.

The convention will conclude with our annual business meeting and election of officers. For further details about our convention please visit our Convention tab on our website at WyCB.info. We will be updating it soon.