

"Sightings"

Wyoming Council of the Blind

<https://www.wycb.info> (307) 629-1916

October 2025

Note: To navigate to the beginning of next article use "# #" without the quotes.

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#

President's Address By Cheryl Godley

Hello Folks,

In our last issue of Sightings, I wrote about change that is occurring in our lives, whether it be due to federal, state, or local governmental decisions or other factors that directly affect us. In that article, I discussed the importance of managing our responses to change, things that are out of our control, through engaging in self-care.

Now, I would like to address change from our increasing personal awareness of taking care of ourselves cognitively, emotionally, and socially. These ideas are related to what WyCB and ACB may offer us in recognizing what is in our control.

Cognitively, our newsletter, Sightings, offers us opportunities to keep our minds stimulated through writing, reading, and learning about issues of concern, and the experiences of others. They provide ideas for problem-solving in difficult situations or may fuel creative processes in considering how to address potentially difficult issues. In addition to our newsletter, ACB offers Dots and Dashes, and the Braille Forum serve as sources of information describing national events, activities, technology information, and so on. These sources and others help us to remain informed.

Our annual convention also offers us the opportunity to learn through a variety of speakers. Similarly, ACB has their annual convention. They also identify legislative issues for which each individual may become involved through advocacy. We may think that it would be too difficult for us to take on legislative efforts. However, ACB typically does the work for us, composing letters advocating for B/VI issues, and all our voices may be heard by selecting a letter that interests you, and signing it through their website. Anyone who is interested in this may find the information on the ACB website under the ACB Advocacy tab.

How do we ensure that we are meeting our social and emotional needs? It is important not to isolate. During times of change, it is easy to step back and disengage. However, this is the time to engage. WyCB has support groups in Sheridan, Buffalo, Powell, and Casper and you are encouraged to join these groups. They are a wonderful forum to share our experiences, concerns, solutions, and so on. We may learn all manner of things from each other. If there is not a support group in your area, please contact me and we will find a way for you to join one of the established support groups either through telephone or video communication. We may engage in activities with others, through ACB affiliates that have different

areas of focus and interest. Since the pandemic, many of us now interact through online platforms such as Zoom.

Another way we take care of ourselves emotionally and socially is through empowerment. As addressed earlier, we may empower ourselves through legislative letters available on the ACB website under Advocacy. We may educate the public about B/VI related issues. We may build skills as individuals with B/VI that offer us opportunity for independent functioning. It is important for each of us to identify ways we may help ourselves and keep ourselves healthy. Reach out to others for support and encouragement when you are challenged. Be available to others when they are challenged.

Ensuring that we are healthy cognitively, emotionally, and socially helps to ensure that we may endure changes we experience with the least impact. Allowing yourself to develop these ideas for your life so that they are second nature, may assist in feeling better about yourself despite the external changes that may be occurring around you in our world today.

WyCB sponsored Low Vision Support Groups are for people of all ages who are losing or who have lost their sight. Their families, friends, and caregivers are also strongly encouraged to attend. These are wonderful opportunities to learn about Assistive Technology, resources available to us in Wyoming,

B/VI events/concerns in our communities, and to gain support and meet with others who are living life with vision loss.

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. 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 attend 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.

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50th Anniversary of the Braille Trail in Casper

By Sarah Sexton

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the creation of the Braille Trail, on Saturday July 19, 2025, the Casper Mountain Lions Club held a ceremony and trail tour of the Lee McCuen Braille Trail on Casper Mountain. It was held close to the trail head, and detailed the history and reason for the development of the Braille Trail. It was humbling and inspiring to hear about how much effort and time went into creating this accessible trail.

The Braile Trail affords people who are low vision or blind an opportunity to hike independently through a section of the

high-altitude forest on Casper Mountain. A stout nylon rope and metal fences lining the trail from start to finish allow the visually impaired to safely navigate the trail. There is a steep grade up and then a steep grade down, providing a true hiking experience. There are frequent points of interest along the way with braille and printed signs detailing information on plants, moss, and rocks that are within arm's reach. Hikers are encouraged to reach out and touch these objects of interest to more fully appreciate the natural world around them. Elk Horn Creek intersects the trail, providing a delightful trickling sound on several parts of the hike. The bridges that span the creek were welded by local high schoolers and their incredible welding teacher.

The smell of the trees paired perfectly with the cool breeze accompanied by sweet bird songs, made for a truly magnificent experience for me. I would absolutely recommend that everyone, low vision or not, to take the time to enjoy a pleasant hike along this labor of love and accessibility.

#

The Unfortunate Cancelation Of This Year's Adult Blind Camp By Bonnie Harrison

Lions Clubs have a proud mission to be Knights of the Blind. Years ago, the Lions Camp on Casper Mountain hosted a meaningful annual camp for adults who were blind or visually impaired. In 2025, we made an effort to bring that tradition back.

The Adult Blind Camp is an important program of the Lions of Wyoming Foundation. It offers visually impaired adults the opportunity to connect, learn, and gain valuable skills for independent living.

Unfortunately, this year's camp had to be cancelled due to:

- **A late start in planning, caused by other commitments.**
- **Low registration — only three applications were received.**
- **A scheduling conflict with the start of the school year that limited the availability of certified staff.**

While the cancellation was disappointing, it clarified what we can improve to ensure success in 2026:

- **Set an earlier camp date — preferably in July to avoid back-to-school conflicts.**
- **Hire a camp director as soon as possible — to allow time for staff recruitment and widespread outreach to potential participants.**

With early action, strong leadership, and focused outreach, we hope to bring the Adult Blind Camp back in 2026 — and make it the enriching, life-changing experience it is meant to be.

#

The 2025 Wyoming Council of the Blind Convention By Gary Olson

The Wyoming Council of the Blind held its annual convention on Saturday, September 27, 2025. We held a hybrid convention; with some attending the convention in person at the Pineview Elementary School in Casper, while others joined us online via Zoom. We would like to thank Jenna Rector of Wyoming Independent Living Rehabilitation for generously sharing her technical expertise and her time running our Zoom platform. We would also like to thank Leslie Van Orman of Vision Outreach Services for making the VOS offices in Casper available to host us. I believe it is fair to say that our convention was a great success. We were treated to some very wonderful and informative presentations.

Our first speaker was Cindy Hollis from the American Council of the Blind's national office. Cindy spoke to us about the ACB Community Platform, which was developed during COVID and allows people to connect with other ACB members. It provides

information on many subjects and hobbies via the internet as well as via smart speakers. Through ACB Community, people can stay informed about what is happening with the American Council of the Blind. Cindy pointed out that when she first developed the platform, she had no idea how well it would be received or how much it would grow.

Our next speaker was Laurel Henry, who is a Vision Outreach Consultant for the Vision Outreach Services Outreach Casper office. Laurel's presentation on kitchen tips and cooking skills provided several helpful tips on working in the kitchen safely as well as cooking. Laurel began by stating the importance of having good organizational skills and knowing where things are kept in the kitchen. She mentioned that it is also important to know the layout of the kitchen. She gave helpful ideas on ways to label appliances as well as utensils and ingredients so they are identifiable to the visually impaired. Laurel mentioned that she likes to use a tray when putting ingredients together. She said the tray helps to keep spills contained.

Laurel said she prefers to work alone in the kitchen so that she always knows where items are located. She cautioned how sighted people will often move things around without thinking about how that could impact a blind person. This brought to my mind some humorous as well as frustrating experiences I have had with sighted family members.

Since I have been a member of WyCB, there has been much discussion about ways to promote the use of the white cane. Therefore, when Bonnie Harrison, who serves on our board of directors mentioned two people who have written a book titled “Grandpa’s White Cane,” we decided to ask Jim Hoxie and Joanna Jones to speak at the convention. Jim is a retired forester and lives in Spearfish, South Dakota. He has been legally blind for thirteen years and was visually impaired before then. He learned to use a tall white cane at the VA Center in Chicago. He and Joanna, who is a retired teacher who lives in New Mexico, travel around the country giving presentations about blindness and the use of the white cane to school children, mostly in the elementary grades. Jim and Joanna said their book has been shared with people in several countries and is being promoted by the Lions organization. Copies of their book were given or mailed to everyone attending our WyCB convention.

During lunch a WyCB \$1,000.00 scholarship was awarded to Kaitlyn Ryan of Casper, who is pursuing her Ph. D. in Occupational Therapy. She is currently taking a couple of prerequisite courses at Casper College.

Karen Shrawder was then our keynote speaker. She gave a very interesting and inspiring presentation about her life as a

totally blind person, as well as her career as a Spanish teacher, and most recently as a technology instructor at the Center for the Blind in Albany, California. She loves her current position so much that she is willing to commute three hours each way five days a week. That is real dedication! Karen told us that she has also learned various forms of sign language so she can communicate with clients who are deaf-blind. Karen also stressed for all of us to think about what actions we may all take to make our futures brighter.

We were pleased to receive an update on what is happening with Vision Outreach Services, from Leslie Van Orman, who is the program manager for VOS, which operates under the Wyoming Department of Education. Leslie stated that VOS is currently providing services to almost 2,300 blind and visually impaired people of all ages throughout Wyoming. Leslie informed us that new digital talking book players are now available and will soon be sent to interested persons who qualify to receive talking books. She said these machines have wifi connectivity, which means that digital talking books can now be downloaded via the internet without the use of a computer or an NLS cartridge.

Leslie indicated that her superiors at the Wyoming Department of Education are very supportive of the work being done by

VOS. She indicated that state and federal funding for the talking book program appears to be stable at this time.

The annual business meeting was conducted by WyCB president Cheryl Godley, who also gave the president's address. She said that it is especially important for those of us who are blind or visually impaired to guard against isolation. She stated that there is a natural tendency for us to want to withdraw and become more isolated, especially as we grow older, and that this is not good for us. She emphasized the importance of social contact, stating that support groups are one way for people to connect. Therefore, it would seem that the theme for this year's convention, Strong Voices, Bright Futures, was most appropriate.

Election of officers and board members was then held. Abbie Johnson Taylor of Sheridan volunteered to fill our vacant director position. All officers and directors were then unanimously elected which gives WyCB a complete board. President Godley thanked the board for its hard work over the past year and she was very complimentary regarding the progress WyCB has made in growing its membership and improving its community outreach.

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October 15th Is White Cane Awareness Day

On October 4th, 2024, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon signed a proclamation making October 15th White Cane Awareness Day. WyCB is committed to improving the public's awareness of the importance of white cane use and what it signifies. To that end we are reprinting Governor Gordon's proclamation.

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
The Honorable Governor Mark Gordon
33rd Governor of the Great State of Wyoming
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A New Partnership By Sarah Sexton

On August 24th, 2025, I flew from Wyoming to Michigan for guide dog school. There are several guide dog schools in the U.S. My preferred school is Leaderdog for the Blind in Rochester Hills, Michigan. They have been serving people who are low vision or blind for 85 years.

With the unfortunate and rapid retiring of my first dog guide, Sonny Boy, I was rather anxious about getting another dog guide. Sonny Boy and I were working in a crowded public space when he was attacked by an off-leash dog. He was physically unharmed, but he became very dog reactive after this event. Despite our best efforts, this reactivity was uncorrectable, which rendered Sonny Boy to be an unsafe mobility tool.

With the unsettling and sudden retiring of Sonny Boy I was apprehensive about getting a second guide. “What ifs” started bubbling up the moment I stepped onto the plane to Michigan. What if the dog they’ve matched me with is not a good fit? What if once we are matched, the dog decides that it does not actually want to work? And the most daunting and challenging to ignore: What if my new guide and I are attacked while working? However, with the assistance of years of therapy I know that “what ifs” are not helpful or productive, and therefore they should be allowed to pass through my stream of consciousness so that they do not hinder my present.

Dog distribution day is on a Wednesday, which means you have several days to work yourself into an anxious mess about what dog your Guide Dog Mobility Instructor (GDMI), has matched you with. Luckily, Leaderdog gives their clients several days on campus to process and work through past

feelings before they distribute dog guides. There was a class specifically geared toward talking about what it feels like to grieve a dog guide and how to be open and accepting of the new dog guide you will be given. We shared a lot of tears and laughter in that class. Hearing that I was not the only one struggling with anxieties and unknowns was so helpful and reassuring.

On dog distribution day, following a two and a half hour class about dog guide equipment and gear, clients head back to their rooms and wait for the GDMI to bring their dog match to their room. The nervous anticipation during this time is immense because you can hear other clients getting their dogs; the jingling of the leashes and the ticking of dog nails on the floors serve as auditory teases. The dog you hear coming down the hallway may be yours! But at the last moment, there is no knock on your door. Finally, after a few new misses there is a knock!

When you open the door, your GDMI is standing there with the dog they have trained for four months. This four-legged, fur-bearing creature is all wiggles and kisses. This was Evie, a yellow lab-golden retriever cross. I was blown away by how sweet and responsive she was. I sat down in a chair in and met my new dog with as much calm and composure as I could muster. My GDMI told me Evie's name, her breed, gender, and

color. I was asked if I had any questions. I didn't, so I was handed Evie's leash and the GDMI left to bring the next dog to the next client. We are encouraged to sit on the floor with our dog, play with toys with them, and just get to know them.

This emotionally loaded day sets the stage for the next eighteen days of intense training and bonding with an amazingly intelligent and motivated dog. Once Evie and I completed our dog guide school we were permitted to fly home to Wyoming.

We hit the ground running here at home and have been enjoying learning together and finding ways to connect and strengthen our bond. So far, she likes to dig all the water out of the kiddie pool, prefers finding sticks that are as long as she is, and really loves to work. I am so excited for all of the adventures we will get to enjoy!

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Important National News Regarding Department of Education Cuts

WyCB received the following email from American Council of the Blind. We believe it is important information for all people concerned with B/VI issues to be aware of. WyCB does not recommend or advocate for any specific action to be taken by its members. What follows is the entire text of this email.

“On Friday, October 10, hundreds of employees under the U.S. Department of Education were laid off. Specifically, programs that enforce the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and other civil rights were impacted. One number reported was the firing of 466 Department employees; almost all employees of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) were let go, leaving only a few head staff members. Included in the firings were staff of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). RSA oversees state vocational rehabilitation services (VR). As regular consumers of VR services, the blind and low vision community is nervous to see the impact of such firings.

ACB is investigating and collaborating with other disability advocates to determine next steps. Advocates have already begun to draft sign-on letters to the government to explain the detrimental effects of such changes. The blind community also plans to come together in the coming days to plan next steps. Please keep a look out for future instructions on steps you can take to advocate for these vital services at risk.

We are also hearing about similar firings at other federal agencies. We will follow this closely and share what we know.”

Claire Stanley, J.D.

**Director of Advocacy and Governmental Affairs
American Council of the Blind**

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