

"Sightings"

Wyoming Council of the Blind

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

June 2026

President: Cheryl Godley, Casper.

Vice President: Gary Olson, Powell.

Secretary: Sara Sexton, Buffalo.

Treasurer: Tom Smyth, Casper.

Directors: Bonnie Harrison, Cheyenne. Sherry Leinen, Newcastle. Robin Loen, Cody. Debra Thompson, Rock Springs. Linda Woodruff, Sheridan. Gregg Burroughs, Torrington.

President's Address By Cheryl Godley

Hello Folks,

It has been a busy spring for WyCB. I hope everyone enjoyed a beautiful spring and that you are well.

One of the goals of WyCB is to advocate on state and local governmental levels on behalf of B/VI-related issues. On May

1, 2026 I, and three other Board members, Gary Olson, Sarah Sexton, and our new Board member, Greg Burroughs, had the opportunity to testify before the Joint Appropriations Committee (JAC) in Rawlins. Senator Tim Salazar and the JAC is reviewing the current status of services provided to deaf and B/VI individuals in Wyoming, and to determine if there is a need for a State Commission for the Deaf and Blind.

State agencies that were there to represent themselves included WY Department of Health, WY Department of Workforce Services (Vocational Rehabilitation), WY Department of Education (Vision Outreach Services), and WY Department of Family Services. WyCB and Deaf Intervention Services were also invited to address the JAC.

We were able to talk with the JAC about services provided by VOS. It is exciting for us to have had the opportunity to have a voice in this important event in our state. My hope is that this type of representation may continue through WyCB on behalf of individuals with B/VI in Wyoming.

What is Advocacy? Advocacy involves activities by an individual or a group intending to influence decisions within political, economic, and social institutions. There are many forms of advocacy including grass roots organizing, media campaigns, lobbying, strategic litigation, and coalition

building. It aims to change laws, budgets, institutional practices, and public opinion.

My focus in speaking to the JAC was to discuss the fact that blindness and visual impairment affect every aspect of a person's life, and to discuss the necessity for developing skills through training. I focused also on explaining the service delivery system at VOS and the vulnerability of that system, given the number of individuals requesting services, the number of consultants available to provide services, and the effect of any changes in the service provision system on the waitlist and the amount of time it takes for services to be provided. For example, if a consultant is unavailable (for illness or family emergency) the stress load on other consultants increases in order to cover the consultant who is out, and the waitlist and the time for service delivery increases. It was stated that one thing that would help stabilize the system would be to have more consultants so that the service delivery system is not so vulnerable. Questions were asked and the final point was made when Senator Salazar asked how many consultants would be helpful, and I gladly stated it would be great to have two to three more consultants. When he asked what the cost of this would be, I referred him to VOS for that information. It was a wonderful experience. The JAC appeared to be genuinely interested in this topic.

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Speaking Before The JAC by Gary Olson

When it was my turn to address the Joint Appropriations Committee, I decided to interject a little humor into the meeting. I told of my first meeting with a gentleman from the Wyoming Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), which took place when I was a sophomore in high school. My mother accompanied me then. I told of how my counselor asked me about my plans for the future. I stated that I had replied that I intended to go to college. The gentleman then said, “What if I told you, you can’t go to college?” I said my reply to him was that I would tell him in a very nice way where he could go. I then mentioned that I had met with this same gentleman a few years later when I was a student at the University of Wyoming and he thanked me for my response to him. He told me it made a difference in the way he worked with clients.

I didn’t know what it means to be a self-advocate when I was in high school, but that is, of course, what I was doing. On May 1, 2026, those of us who were fortunate to have the opportunity to address the JAC filled the role of advocates for blind and visually impaired people throughout the state. This is a role I do not take lightly. Whenever I am in public, I am educating others around me about what it means to be blind.

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Speaking Before The JAC by Sarah Sexton

Being invited to testify at the JAC caught us all off guard. Getting to contribute to the conversation about funding decisions that could affect services for low-vision and blind people in Wyoming was incredible and made me feel seen, pun intended.

Listening to the lived experiences of the hard of hearing and deaf community was intense. Their community had a large amount of testimony in support of a commission for the deaf. Their stories were raw and very informative. After listening to their attestations, I felt immense gratitude for the services that I have received as a person with blindness in Wyoming.

When it was my turn to speak at the JAC, I said, “Nothing about us without us.” And I thanked them for asking for us to represent the vital vision services in our state. Knowing that the JAC was loaded to the brim with information about the deaf community and the blind community, I decided to change what I planned on sharing and instead asked something that had not been brought up yet. I asked when a decision would be made about the formation of a commission and how we would be informed. Mr. Salazar stated that they were hoping

for a decision in mid-June and that they would likely reach out over email or phone. To date we have not heard anything and hope to have some answers from the JAC soon.

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How ACB Community Can Make You a Star By Abbie Johnson Taylor

I'm standing on stage in front of thousands of people. Hearing the band play my song's introduction, I take a deep breath. Then I open my mouth and start singing.

At first, I'm nervous. What if I forget the words or miss a note? But as I get into the song, I'm in my element, doing what I love and realizing a lifelong dream. Can you believe a small-town gal from Sheridan, Wyoming, can make it to the big time through the magic of ACB Community Karaoke?

In 2020, during the COVID-19 lockdown, American Council of the Blind (ACB) Membership Engagement Coordinator Cindy Hollis saw a need for virtual programming that would allow people to socialize, have fun, and learn new things. Thus, the ACB Community was born. It started with maybe one or two activities a week, and the number of programs has grown steadily over the years. Now, there are more than 100 calls each week.

All activities are held on Zoom, with some also broadcast on Clubhouse and ACB Media and later made available as podcasts. Each week offers a variety of activities, including social calls, technology and crafts classes, games, and much more—not to mention karaoke. To stay in the loop about what’s happening, email community@acb.org and ask to receive the daily schedule.

No email? No problem. Activities can also be accessed by phone. Call 800-424-8666 and press 1024 to hear the weekly schedule, including all the dial-in information you’ll need.

As I mentioned earlier, some activities are also broadcast on Clubhouse, a social media app that can be downloaded on a smartphone, tablet, or computer. Once it’s set up, you can click the corresponding Clubhouse link in the daily schedule or tap a notification on your phone to join an event.

I also mentioned ACB Media, a network of internet radio stations produced by the American Council of the Blind. There are ten stations, numbered 1 through 10. Visit <https://www.acbmedia.org> to learn more about each station and view schedules. Most ACB Community programs are broadcast on ACB Media 5, while Community Karaoke airs on ACB Media 4.

You can listen to these programs first to get a feel for how they work. When you're ready to participate, email community@acb.org or call 800-424-8666 and press 1024.

Over the years, ACB Community has helped me learn many new skills, including using Audacity to record the music I use for karaoke, copying Zoom links into my calendar for easier access across devices, and shopping online with Instacart. As a result, I've gained more confidence using technology.

Besides karaoke, I enjoy social calls, a weekly trivia activity, and a twice-monthly poets' corner, among other things. I've met some great people. I now facilitate my own call, Abbie's Alcove, where we reminisce about a variety of topics each month.

Even if you don't sing, ACB Community can help you become a star in whatever you do. No matter your hobby—knitting, crocheting, cooking, or anything else—you can network with others who share your interests, learn new skills, make friends, and have fun. You won't feel alone. Best of all, you don't even have to be a member of the American Council of the Blind to participate, though anyone who is a WyCB member is also a member of ACB. So, give ACB Community a try and see

what you think. For more information and schedules, visit <https://www.acb.org/acb-community-events#main-content>.

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Join Us for the 2026 WyCB Summer Retreat! By Bonnie Harrison

July 16–19, 2026

The Wyoming Council of the Blind invites members, family, friends, and supporters to join us for a weekend of fellowship, recreation, learning, and fun. Whether you are blind, visually impaired, or sighted, everyone is welcome!

Can't Stay for the Whole Weekend? You can still be part of the fun! If you can't attend the entire retreat, consider joining us for the day on Saturday, July 18. Saturday features many of our favorite activities, delicious meals, and an evening of music and entertainment.

Throughout the weekend, you'll have the opportunity to enjoy a variety of activities, including:

- * Team-building games**
- * Crafts**
- * Cornhole and bocce ball**

- * Nature walks on the Braille Trail**
- * Mindfulness and relaxation activities**
- * Evening entertainment**
- * Plenty of time to visit with old friends and make new ones**

Accommodations are dormitory-style, and all meals are included from Thursday dinner through Sunday breakfast. Participants should bring their own bedding (sleeping bag or sheets and blankets), towels, toiletries, pajamas, and any other personal items they may need for the weekend.

The cost is just \$30 per person for the entire weekend, and the registration deadline is July 13, 2026.

If you need transportation to or from the camp, please let us know. We'll do our best to arrange a ride for you.

To register or if you have questions please call me Bonnie Harrison at 307-640-0454.

We hope you'll join us for a memorable weekend of friendship, laughter, and adventure on Casper Mountain at the Allen H. Stewart Lions Camp. We look forward to seeing you there!

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The Loss of a Good Friend By Tom Smyth

“Tink, tink, tink.” It used to drive me crazy. “Tink, tink, tink, tink.” My college roommate John would sit at his desk and tap an insulin needle against his diet soda can. He wouldn’t be studying, he’d be pondering, more like brooding, as he stared out the window, or at his skiing posters on the wall. While I was struggling to sort out gender agreement with German adjectives, John would sit there tink, tink, tink away.

Otherwise, John was an ideal roommate, good-natured, witty, smart, and he had introduced me to a fun group of friends he had known in high school. Early in our first semester, John’s vision began fading as a result of diabetes and it was very upsetting to him. Until then his vision had been excellent.

He sought out some assistance; he got a tape player for the visually impaired and had some of his textbooks on tape. But I only heard him use it a few times. The player spent the rest of the semester under a pile of books, which were also mostly unused because he soon dropped most of his classes.

John spent a lot of his time brooding, and humming along to the Beatles song *Yesterday*. I remember being shocked when he’d reminisce about how great his life had been during junior high. I had never heard of anyone being nostalgic for junior

high before, and I don't think I have in the forty years since. But when John was fourteen, he could see perfectly and had his whole life ahead of him.

John's biggest lament was that it wasn't safe for him to drive at night anymore. This made him give up being on the volunteer ski patrol. Being a patroller allowed him to ski for free, and gave him a measure of importance and recognition that most young people crave. But since night came early in the winter, John wasn't able to make it back to campus safely on his own. His declining vision had forced him to abandon a treasured activity.

John was quick to join any of us in hijinks, but seldom, if ever, would he accompany us on our incessant trips to the library or computer lab. While we flailed and kicked to keep our heads above academic water, John floated, more like drifted, then sank, and settled on the bottom. During our first year John passed a few classes, but far from enough to become a sophomore. In our second year, John passed two classes in the first semester, then he quit halfway into the next semester. I think he stuck it out for as long as he could in order hang out with our group of friends. But our comradeship wasn't enough motivation for him to buckle down and accomplish anything academically. Instead, he'd be tinkering on his car and looking out the window with an excuse at the ready for why he didn't

go to class or finish an assignment. He never mentioned anything about seeking out better accommodations for his vision loss. Perhaps he was embarrassed to ask for assistance or to show any perceived “weakness.” Maybe he just didn’t want to acknowledge the reality of his situation.

In our group’s third year most of us lived off campus. One of my new roommates was Bill, who John had introduced me to during our first year. Bill and I had both changed majors and enrolled in the same intro-level history class. John, now a part-time student, had also enrolled. It seemed a great chance for the three amigos to ride together again.

After John missed a few lectures, Bill and I went to his apartment in the hopes of coaxing John to walk with us to class. John made some excuses about not feeling up to it, and we soon left without him. Bill and I were irritated. Why wouldn’t John just put on his shoes and come with us? He worked hard hours at the local pizza place. He wasn’t lazy. Was he embarrassed to admit he couldn’t see the board? We would have moved to the front, or shared our notes with him. He knew that. But he stayed rooted in his tiny apartment.

It was around that time Bill and I, and the rest of the group, pretty much stopped trying to motivate John. We had all tried numerous times in various ways to encourage him to keep

plugging away at his studies. We all wanted the best for him, but I got a sense that each of us reluctantly decided we were done trying to get him moving since he seemed so determined to mope in place. We still liked him and included him in our occasional hijinks, but we were done encouraging his academics. He was an adult and he could make his own decisions.

After graduation all of our group soon left the state to pursue our varied dreams. John stayed and worked at the pizza place. I lost touch with him after I left, though I heard he had become quite the regular at one of the local college bars. I saw John only once again, at an improvised reunion of sorts of some of our group on the other side of the country.

A few years later I heard John had moved out of state. I assumed he was taking steps to improve his life. Tragically it was short-lived. I got a late-night phone call from the friend who had hosted our reunion. John had died in a car wreck in a construction zone on an interstate offramp – at night. We were saddened and shocked. And we were both a little angry that he had died driving at night when he had known for fifteen years that he shouldn't. His obituary noted he had been working on his goal of getting his college degree. He did not leave behind a widow or any children.

From my perspective, John frittered away so much of his promising life lamenting about what he couldn't do. Instead of examining what he was still capable of, and making the best choices that were available to him, John tapped on his can and sang *Yesterday*. I'm not suggesting a college degree is the only path to a fulfilling life. But I can't help feeling such a great guy could have done so much more to find happiness, and to enrich so many lives.

John, I miss you buddy. Wow, it's been twenty-five years since your accident. Did you literally die of embarrassment? Were you too embarrassed or proud to ask for assistance that would have made your life better? I'm sharing your story not to criticize or blame you. Instead, I hope that others with vision loss might see how diminished their lives might be if they are too proud, or stubborn, or embarrassed to seek out assistance. Asking for assistance is not weakness, it is a means of accomplishing your goals and achieving your dreams. Lamenting about what is lost does nothing to fulfill your present or your future.

WyCB exists, in part, to provide information on services, products, and technology that may assist people with vision loss. Additionally, we look to foster social inclusivity among people with B/VI. There are innumerable ways people with B/VI

can live fulfilling lives. We just need to be motivated enough, and not be embarrassed, to find out how.

As a reminder WyCB sponsors Low Vision Support Groups.

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 just like to attend a support group, but there is not one in your area, please call us and we will try to find a way for you to join a group by telephone.