

Winter 2023

THE BLIND CALIFORNIAN | 1

THE BLIND CALIFORNIAN

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In accepting material for THE BLIND CALIFORNIAN, priority will be given to articles concerning the activities and policies of the California Council of the Blind and to the experiences and concerns of people who are blind or have low vision. Recommended length is 900 words, 1800 max.

The deadline to submit material for the Spring 2023 issue of THE BLIND CALIFORNIAN is noon, March 15, 2023.

Non-members are requested and members are invited to pay a yearly subscription fee of \$10 toward the production and support of THE BLIND CALIFORNIAN.

Shop at Amazon, donate to CCB. Access <https://smile.amazon.com/>, log on to your account and select California Council of the Blind as your charity.

Please send all address changes to the Executive Office.

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Editor's Corner

By Mike Keithley

Welcome to the winter, 2023 Blind Californian. As we rid ourselves of the drought here in California, set time aside to read the BC, you'll love it!

Transportation for visually impaired and blind people is becoming more and more problematic. Old transit models need to be reformed or perhaps abandoned so we can get around easily, independently, productively, and also have fun.

Much of this BC revolves around the effort, described by Daveed Mandell to update outdated models, and "The Worst

Trip Yet,” by Elena Thomason, which shouldn’t have happened. It’s all an escalating threat to those wanting to travel safely and independently.

We have an optimistic report from the Governmental Affairs Committee, and Frank Welte continues his series on the future CCB. Will us old people recognize it in 2050? I wonder!

And there’s quite a bit more. So sit back and enjoy!

CCB Convention Announcement Convention Committee

**California Council of the Blind
Is pleased to announce
The 2023 Hybrid Conference &
Convention**

When: March 31-April 2, 2023

**Where: Hilton Sacramento Arden West
2200 Harvard Street, Sacramento, CA
95815**

And on the Zoom Webinar platform

**To secure your room registration you can
call:**

(916) 922-4700 Extension 1

mention group rate code "COB"

Or by visiting

<https://bit.ly/3BSFDwH>

**Group Name: CA Council of the Blind
2023 Convention**

Group Code: COB

Room Rate including tax: \$139.37*

***Reflects cost per night at check out
after \$10.00 complimentary subsidy by
CCB.**

**Last day to get this room rate is March 9,
2023. After this date, the group rate will
not be available.**

**More about the CCB Conference and
Convention...**

**The Hybrid Main Event will again be
preceded by a virtual pre-convention**

that will include meetings and activities hosted by our fantastic CCB Chapters, Affiliates, and Committees. The hybrid main event will include exhibitors, great panels and speakers, and of course good friends!

Come back often to get the latest on partner & exhibitor opportunities, registration, activity announcements, and more!

Governmental Affairs Report By Jeff Thom and Regina Brink

The title of this article could certainly be “Never A Dull Moment,” because that was really the case in 2022 with respect

to CCB's advocacy efforts. It was a year of some deflating setbacks, but some incredible victories. The one common thread was the great work of so many members of the California Council of the Blind. Let's start with the valley and then turn to the peaks.

We were unsuccessful in acquiring an author for our resolution to create a state task force on accessible drug labeling, with the goal of bringing all of the parties together to work on legislative and regulatory recommendations for narrowing the huge gaps in access to prescription drug labeling for those who are blind or have low vision. However, as with other areas

where we didn't achieve what we had hoped, it is worth noting that close to 2/3 of the Legislature will be new in 2023, and that may give us an opportunity to build new relationships that will result in members who will work on issues of concern to CCB and the blindness community, including accessible drug labelling.

The second blow came with respect to SB1480, the bill sponsored by Disability Rights California and for which CCB members gave strongly supportive testimony, that would have allowed the Secretary of State to certify online ballot return systems if she determined it to be effective and secure. We knew this was

going to be controversial, but we were encouraged by its passage in the Senate, despite anti-internet voting opposition. However, on the eve of the bill's hearing in the Assembly Committee on Elections and Reapportionment, the anti-internet cavalry lowered the boom. They convinced the Secretary of State to come out against the notion of online ballot return, which in turn convinced the author's office to withdraw the bill from committee, knowing that the opposition from the Secretary of State would doom it anyway. In this case our enemies were on both the left and the right. We are working with Disability Rights California and Disability Rights Advocates on next steps in this battle. Your input is crucial,

and if you have been reading the CCB Happenings, you will know that a survey has been designed to find out about your voting experiences, no matter what option you use to cast your ballot. If you voted in the November 8 election or in other recent ones, please take the time to fill out the survey.

Our third bit of doom and gloom was probably the most unexpected. Due to a relationship established in the Fresno area by First Vice-President Sarah Harris, two of our bills, including the one we are about to discuss, were authored by Senator Joaquin Arambula, from Fresno. AB1999, which would have established pilot projects under Medi-Cal for the

provision of mental health services targeted to people with vision loss, sailed through the Legislature with barely a ripple of opposition. However, the bill did not contain any funding to pay for it, and the Governor seized upon this as a reason to veto it. With the prospect of far less state revenue being available next year, it may be difficult to get money in the 2023-24 fiscal year budget, but we are already working with the Assemblymember's office on a game plan for bringing this issue back to the Legislature next year. We are thinking that next year we will not limit the scope of action to Medi-Cal, which would hopefully open up services for people with vision loss regardless of income.

Now, let's turn to our triumphs. The other bill authored by Assemblymember Arambula, AB2480, will allow funding to be expended by the Department of Rehabilitation, through contracts with private providers throughout the state, on vision rehabilitation services for those currently ineligible under the federal Vocational Rehabilitation Act. Perhaps the largest group that the bill will benefit are those individuals who are blind or have low vision who are under 55, but do not yet have an employment goal, and are thus ineligible for the Older Individuals who are Blind program, as well as for vocational rehabilitation services. Although the bill did not contain any funding, it is my

understanding that there may be some limited funds to begin implementation of this bill. As to how the bill will be implemented and whether this funding is sufficient to fulfill the requirements of the bill, stay tuned!!

CCB has long been active in the California SSI Coalition. Building on the successes of the past year, this year the coalition sponsored AB 1941 that implemented the restoration of funds from the 2011 budget cuts to bring SSI recipients back to previous funding levels with a one-time supplement equal to the expected increase in 2024. As a result, recipients will not have to wait a whole year for it. This will happen

January 1, 2023. The Coalition also worked to make CALFresh benefits (food stamps) and Medi-Cal more responsive and to allow for longer periods to correct eligibility redetermination paperwork. The coalition is also working to assure that applications for these programs are made more accessible to people with disabilities on the web as well as assisting case workers in making sure clients receive the benefits for which they are eligible.

Clearly our biggest victory, in terms of the obstacles we had to overcome, was AB371, authored by Assemblymember Jones-Sawyer. This bill, the first such state law in the nation, requires renters

of e-scooters to have insurance that will cover pedestrians suffering injuries as a result of negligence by the scooter user, and e-scooter manufacturers are to install braille and tactile signage on the scooters so that people with vision loss will know where they can report an accident. Not only was the e-scooter industry and the bicycle coalition adamantly opposed to the bill, but a number of cities who make money from the permits they grant to the scooter manufacturers as well as policymakers who believed that a new type of insurance was not an appropriate policy goal also expressed opposition. Last year, we had to remove the bill from consideration because we would not

accept amendments that would have made the insurance completely optional. However, we never gave up and despite very strenuous opposition from both Lyft and the bicycle coalition, the scores of letters to the Governor from CCB members and friends supporting the bill ultimately won the day. It is definitely not the ideal solution to the problem of the proliferation of these devices, but it certainly is a great first step and it has helped to galvanize even those outside the disability community around concerns with the operation of e-scooters.

We should never delude ourselves into thinking that we are powerful enough to

accomplish everything we set out to achieve, but the enactment of AB371 clearly demonstrates that, through committed action and hard work, we can accomplish some amazing things. With your help, we will do even more in 2023.

2023 Northern California Regional Braille Challenge Saturday, March 4th, 2023

Each year blind and low vision students, families, teachers, and community members from all over northern California gather for a day dedicated to braille literacy through the Braille Challenge. This gathering will have blind and low vision youth demonstrate their

braille skills in a series of contest ranging from reading and comprehension, speed and accuracy, spelling, proofreading, and tactile graphics.

The challenge this year will be held in person on Saturday, March 4th, 2023, at the Headquarters of the Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired in San Francisco.

For general information or to sign up for updates and announcements about this year's challenge, please contact Jamey Gump by email at:

jgump@lighthouse-sf.org or by phone at 415-694-7372.

ACB 2023 Scholarships

The American Council of the Blind (ACB) offers educational scholarships ranging from \$2,000 to \$7,500 for entering freshman, undergraduate and graduate students, and students attending technical college. This program awards students with scholarships to help with educational financial needs such as tuition, fees, room and board, and assistive technology.

To be eligible for a scholarship, applicants need to be legally blind, maintain a 3.0 GPA to be eligible for most scholarships, be a full-time student or a part-time student who works at

least 32 hours per week, and be involved in their school and local community.

Students must submit their application by February 14th, 2023. For more information about ACB's scholarship program, visit ACB's Scholarship page at: <https://acb.org/scholarships>

Learn more about ACB's 2022 scholarship recipients through a series of videos on our YouTube page at: <https://tinyurl.com/22-acb-scholarship>

Getting to Know Everything California Low Vision By Valerie Ries-Lerman

Please join us for our California Council of Citizens with Low Vision (CCCLV) chat the 1st and 3rd Sunday of each month at 4 PM Pacific. Everyone is welcome! Membership in CCCLV is not required.

We are revitalizing CCCLV to meet the needs of those in California with low vision, as well as to address the concerns of individuals who have an interest in low vision. We are working currently to finalize our by-laws and constitution with board elections soon to follow.

Our chat group is just the beginning. We plan to have meetings covering various topics of interest, from transportation, to technology, to social issues.

Please consider joining us to enhance our resources, thus enabling us to move forward in addressing the needs of low vision Californians.

Our Zoom link and phone number are below:

<https://tinyurl.com/ccclv-zoom>

One tap mobile:

+13126266799,,85926690965#,,,,*282367#

1(669) 900-6833 (or your local Zoom number)

Meeting ID:

859 2669 0965

Passcode:

282367

To contact us, please email:

ccclvchat@gmail.com

My Escape from Alcatraz By Gabe Griffith

I moved to the Bay Area in June 2006. A few months later I saw on the news one morning, where a bunch of folks were getting ready to swim from Alcatraz back to San Francisco. Having been a

swimmer all my life, I was fascinated by the idea of that swim, but knowing how cold the water in the bay was, I couldn't imagine actually jumping in that water and making that swim. As the years went on and I was out of the water longer and longer, the idea of actually doing that swim fell further and further away from my mind.

I wrote several years ago about my experience with Guillain-Barre. As a result of that and the physical therapy, I got connected with a group swimming in a Trans Tahoe relay swim. Since 2017, my friend Corbin and I have made up the core of a group doing that swim. We've now done it together 5 times.

Now you're probably asking yourself what Guillain-Barre and swimming across Tahoe have to do with swimming from Alcatraz to San Francisco. The answer is that my health condition has been diagnosed as being chronic. I get monthly IV infusion to help combat the fatigue, and swimming helps with the nerve pain. After participating in the Tahoe swim several times, the idea of swimming from Alcatraz started creeping back in to my consciousness. I had a couple of near misses matching up with a guide to do the Alcatraz swim, but for various reasons they all fell through.

Last summer I was matched up with a guide named Erika. I never met her until

she and one of the other guides for our relay team came to pick me up and drive to Tahoe the day before the relay swim. On the drive I mentioned that I'd always wanted to do the swim from Alcatraz. Erika said she'd always wanted to guide someone on that swim. We decided to see how we swam together the next day and go from there. Erika is a wonderful guide and our pace is very similar, so we decided to go for it and start training for the swim from Alcatraz scheduled on September 5th.

Training for a swim is much different from just going to the pool and swimming for fun, the way I've done most of the time for the last several

years. I started doing sets of sprinting a time or two a week in addition to actually swimming the long distances. The distance from Alcatraz back to Aquatic Park in San Francisco is a little over a mile and a quarter. Therefore, I wanted to be able to swim further than that in the pool. I worked up to being able to swim 2,500 meters (a little over a mile and a half) in the pool. In addition to all that, I went in to San Francisco and met up with Erika to go swimming in the bay several times. We swam in the cove at Aquatic Park on Saturday afternoons which we hoped would be similar conditions to the open bay on the morning of the swim.

The morning of Monday September 5th dawned bright and hot as the Bay Area was in the midst of an almost historic heat wave. The water conditions were absolutely beautiful. In case you're wondering, I did decide to wear a wet suit, but in retrospect it was almost too warm. Corbin and one of our other guides were also doing the swim, so the four of us were going to ride the ferry together. My girlfriend Shanna was going to meet Erika and me at the Alcatraz shore when we finished. Everything was all set.

I've always had a habit of getting nervous before any kind of swim ever since I was on the high school swim

team, and this was no different. As Corbin, Julia, Erika and I separated from Shanna to get on the ferry, my stomach was in knots. As the time got closer to jump in the water, I felt like I could hardly even talk. Suddenly the boat was cleared and we were jumping.

Even with the wet suit the shock of hitting the water combined with my nerves made even breathing difficult. Erika lined me up with the direction to face, and we started swimming. As I said before, the water and air conditions were almost perfect. Because Erika and Julia were classified as angel swimmers, we jumped at the last of the roughly 400 swimmers and just before the rest of the

angel swimmers. Even though we started off swimming in a relaxed fashion, we started passing folks. Just under 50 minutes later, Erika tapped me on the shoulder to let me know we had made it into the cove at Aquatic Park, and the swim was coming to a close. A few minutes later my hand hit the sand, and I all but crawled out of the water. As planned, Shanna was right there to meet us. Erika got herself out of the tether, and Shanna assisted me through the arch that all swimmers had to go through so as to verify that everyone who jumped in to the water was safely out. This, also gave the official time for each swimmer.

I recently found out that my official time was 54 minutes and 58 seconds. I managed to finish in the top 50% of all swimmers. I'm so thankful to Erika for her willingness to guide me, and it was such a blessing to have Shanna meet me at the finish. The whole experience was so special, and I'm looking forward to doing it again next September.

The pandemic was hitting right as I was becoming CCB President, and it was so easy to be on conference calls all evening long. In this second term, I'm trying to focus on some of the experiences like the one I've written about here. I love CCB, but have also learned that having balance and other

activities and relationships is also important. As I write this, it is mid November and we are entering the holiday season. I want to wish everyone a very happy and safe holiday season, and let's make 2023 a great year for all of us individually and for CCB.

Enlist in the CAAVLry for 2023! By Frank Welte and Christy Crespin

The California Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss is continuing to grow, and to make our presence felt as we move into 2023.

In 2022, we continued our outreach to older blind and visually impaired Californians through our weekly support group, our informative programs, and our ongoing advocacy to improve services for older blind adults. With your help, we can accomplish even greater things in 2023.

There is still a critical need for greatly increased funding for services for older blind adults. We anticipate significant opportunities to move forward on this front, both at the federal and state level in the coming year. We'll need all hands on deck to secure our objectives. If you're not too young to vote, you're not too young to join CAAVL. Every one of us

is an older adult, or we will be sooner than we think.

Here's how to join California Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss.

To join, send your \$25.00 dues to our Treasurer, Denise Weddle, at the following address.

Denise Weddle

4058 Moore St.

Los Angeles, CA 90066

You can also call her at (310) 306-8149.

By joining CAAVL or renewing your membership prior to January 31, 2023, you will be included in a drawing to win a gift card. We will award one gift card to

a renewing CAAVL member and one gift card to a new member.

Also, we'll need your contact information for our member roster. We need the following information.

Name:

Home address:

Preferred phone number:

Preferred Email address:

Vision status (totally blind, legally blind, low vision, fully sighted):

Your preferred alternate media format (braille, large print, audio, Email):

Disclosure status: (disclose, do not disclose):

You may elect to share your contact information with CAAVL committee chairs for their use in the conduct of official business, or to keep this information private. However, we are required to submit this information to the CCB office.

You may also share your gender and ethnic identity information with us if you're comfortable doing so.

Please send this information to Denise Weddle at the following email address:

deaniew21@verizon.net

For more information, please contact Christy Crespín, CAAVL's Membership Committee Chair, by email:

blind.lcsw@gmail.com or by phone at (909) 800-7189.

Where Am I Going?: Accessible Wayfinding?

By Daveed Mandell

Many public transit advocates around the state and throughout the nation are voicing concern about the problems they encounter when trying to navigate their transit systems. They refer to this issue using the term "wayfinding." These people talk endlessly about the need to improve signage, mapping, branding and

color coding. Transit agencies are responding to their demands by designing wayfinding plans and projects. However, they rarely include accessibility for people with disabilities as integral to these efforts.

Five years ago I obtained funding from the San Francisco Foundation to conduct extensive research on accessibility best practices in this country and abroad, especially in Europe, Australia and Israel. An intern from UC Berkeley's Transportation Studies Institute assisted us with this research. He found that, unlike the United States, many other countries have adopted a more systemic, integrated approach to accessibility,

requiring the development and promulgation of strict standards rather than mere guidelines.

At this time there exists no legal accessible wayfinding standard in this country. While many other countries are still grappling with accessible wayfinding, they have made much more progress than we have. As an example, for at least two decades, Australia has been embedding tactile directional bus stop indicators in city sidewalks, so that blind people can readily locate bus stops. The United States is only now beginning to experiment with these indicators.

I have recently delivered presentations on accessible wayfinding to San Francisco's Senior and Disability Work Group as well as to AC Transit's Accessibility Advisory Committee and associated staff and Directors. (AC Transit is the largest transit district in the East San Francisco Bay Area and operates much of this region's bus service.) I look forward to delivering a presentation early next year to the Equity and Access Committee of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's Policy Advisory Council.

Outlined below are definitions of accessible wayfinding, along with descriptions of its basic components. I

have received invaluable information and assistance from transit accessibility consultant and ACB member Ron Brooks and from orientation for mobility authority and researcher Dr. Billie Louise (Beezy) Bentzen. I hope this material will be helpful to both CCB chapters and members throughout the state.

What is Accessible Wayfinding?

Websites, mobile applications, printed materials and/or signage, including tactile and large print maps, that provide information and schedules regarding the location of bus stops or routes, and the location and/or status of transit vehicles.

Textures, electronic beacons, design concepts, or any other product, service or procedure that is utilized to provide navigational assistance to, from or within a transit network.

Websites and electronically prepared documents must meet all applicable provisions of Section 508 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act or, Level AA success criteria set forth in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, whichever offers the greatest accessibility for people with disabilities.

Printed information that is designed to be public-facing, or that is likely to be requested by a member of the public,

must be made available upon request of a person with a disability in an alternative format that is accessible to that individual. In accordance with ADA requirements, consideration should be given to providing the document in the format requested by the individual making the request, but if providing a document in the requested format is not practicable, the agency should work with the individual to provide the document in a format that is accessible to that individual.

Facilities and signage must meet applicable guidelines set forth in the ADA Accessibility Standards, as promulgated by the US Access Board, and/or

California Title 24—whichever standard offers the greatest accessibility. Other products and technologies must meet all appropriate and applicable accessibility standards. However, at this time there are no comprehensive legal national accessible wayfinding standards.

All wayfinding information technologies and strategies, whether based on products, services or procedures, must be developed with ongoing input from all communities intended to be served by the agency, including traditionally underserved communities, communities of color, economically disadvantaged communities, older adults, people with disabilities, individuals and organizations

who provide support or services within these communities, and professionals with expertise in areas relevant to accessible wayfinding.

Basic Accessible Wayfinding Components

Bus Stop Placement: Bus stops should be placed near accessible, safe intersections. They should be easy to locate, and should not be jammed up against news racks, parking signs, trees, garbage cans and other obstacles. They should have clear paths of travel and should not be placed in congested areas. AC Transit must insist that jurisdictions comply with these requirements. It is the

ultimate responsibility of the District to ensure that riders have easy and efficient access to all bus stops. The District must provide one standardized pole for all bus stops.

Bus Stop Displays: All bus stop displays should be easily reachable and fully accessible. They should provide both visual and audible information. The audible information should be identical to what is offered visually. The information should be provided in several languages.

Bus Stop Locations: Customer Service agents must be adept at giving clear, accurate information about where bus

stops are located, including transfer points. Wherever possible, they should provide cardinal compass directions. They must also give information about transferring from one bus to another and at what stop.

Automated Computer/Phone Information Systems: In addition to accessible websites and mobile applications, several transit authorities offer automated computer/phone information systems, such as Transportation Authority of River City (TARC) in Louisville, Ky; Minnesota Valley Transportation Authority (MVTA) in Minneapolis; and Valley Transit Authority (VTA) in Santa Clara County. Using such

systems, riders can obtain a list of all routes, choose a route and follow it virtually in either direction, and choose a stop to hear expected arrival times. Those systems are available 24/7/365.

Tactile Bus Stop Indicators in the Built Environment: Countries, such as Australia, have for decades embedded tactile directional bars in city sidewalks to alert blind people that they have reached a bus stop. These bars, which are easily felt under foot or cane, lead to adjacent bus stop poles that contain accessible displays. The U.S. is just beginning to adopt these essential tactile bus stop indicators.

Smart Phone Applications: Many countries, and several U.S. transit authorities, have adopted smart phone applications that map bus stops digitally and give easy-to-follow, accurate audible directions for locating bus stops.

Accessible Websites and Mobile Applications: It is essential that websites and mobile applications be fully accessible and work with all screen readers and magnification programs on computers, tablets and smart phones.

Braille and Raised Print Plates: It is possible, but not always necessary, to affix braille and raised print placards on bus stop displays. Because braille and

raised print take up much more space than regular print, the most pertinent and relevant information must be included, which is not an easy decision to make.

High-contrast Indications and Large Print: People with low vision require high-contrast bus stop indicators and large print information on bus stop displays.

Bus Stop Signage for Wheelchair Users: Bus stop signage should be low enough to allow wheelchair users to easily read it. In most cases, redundancies should be provided, so that ambulatory riders don't have to bend down to read it.

Bus Stop Information for Cognitively Disabled Individuals: Some people with cognitive disabilities require symbol- or pictorial-oriented bus stop information.

Bus Stop Information for Deaf People: Many deaf and hard of hearing people prefer video-oriented bus stop information, as opposed to document-oriented information.

Wayfinding References and Information

The latest fixed-route transit wayfinding accessibility information is obtainable from transit accessibility consultant Ron Brooks, whose Phoenix-based company

**is Accessible Avenue. You can reach him
via email at:**

connect@accessibleavenue.net.

**Orientation and mobility authority and
researcher Dr. Billie Louise (Beezy)**

Bentzen, Ph.D.,

COMS Director of Research

Accessible Design for the Blind

Fairbanks, AK

Email:

bbentzen@accessforblind.org

Worst Trip Yet

By Elena Thomason, Capitol Chapter Member

I'm motivated to write this article as I firmly believe some changes to our existing paratransit services may be in order. I'm sharing my worst trip with you not as a complaint, but to ask for your help and suggestions.

I've been using PT services since the late '70's. As a matter of fact, when I scheduled my first ride, the service was called Careful Coach. I had just moved to Sacramento to start my job with the Department of Rehab. Since I hadn't had time to learn the public transportation

service, a friend recommended contacting Careful Coach. It was a fantastic service and I used it until it became Paratransit.

In my 44+ years of using Paratransit services, I have utilized several services including Access Service in Los Angeles, San Diego, and Reno Nevada. I am presently registered with SacRT-Go in Sacramento, Paratransit in San Francisco, and Redi-Wheels in San Mateo County. And, I've been stranded by all three of them. Hence, my story.

I was traveling from my home in Sacramento to my mother's home in Pacifica. This trip required that I take

SacRT-Go from my home to Greyhound, Greyhound to SF, and Redi-Wheels from SF to my mom's front door. The first two legs of my trip went great. My Greyhound arrived in SF at 11:45 AM. I had a scheduled pick up at 12:15 PM so at noon I called Redi Wheels dispatch to let them know I'd arrived in SF and to remind them to let the driver know I was totally blind and could not watch out for the driver; the driver would need to look for me. I told dispatch I was standing between two blue disability signs, and that the area was white curbed for loading and unloading disabled passengers only. Unknown to me at the time, I must have accidentally hit the mute button on my phone when I put it

back into my pocket. Dispatch told me the driver was running a bit behind schedule but he'd let her know I'd called in. When we were ready to terminate the call, the dispatcher chuckled a bit and said, "It is a huge bus. You'd have trouble missing it." As I put my phone away, I wondered to myself, "what part of total blindness do you not get?"

Well, I waited another 30 minutes and then I called dispatch back. I was informed that the driver had been there and couldn't find me so she left me. I panicked. I was 35 miles from my mom's home and knew absolutely no one I could call. What to do. When I asked dispatch to please send the driver back

to get me, he told me he couldn't do that. He said he'd tried to call me and had already wasted enough time on me. I became upset and told him he just couldn't leave me stranded like this. He informed me that he wasn't obligated to send the driver back to me because Redi Wheels had not driven me there. I found it unbelievable that a woman with a large bright red suitcase and a 65 pound guide dog at her feet could not be seen by their driver. Did she ever get off the bus and look for me? Who was the blind one here after all!

I could hear folks walking around me. I tried to get several pedestrians to stop and help me, but they would not. So I

called 911. Within minutes a SF police officer arrived. And, within minutes he'd helped me get an Uber ride to my mom's home. Two and a half hours later, I arrived at my mom's home. Every muscle in my body was screaming with pain as I had spent the entire time on my feet. (Did I mention I'm 73 years old), I was sick to my stomach, and started crying every time I thought about the experience. It had such a profound impact on me that it took me nearly 7 months to be able to write about it and even now it brings tears to my eyes. I vowed I'd never travel independently on any PT services again in my life. Of course, this is crazy thinking, crazy

thinking fueled by pain, frustration, and fear.

I tell this story in hopes that you might share yours. I think this present policy of drivers waiting 5 minutes and then leaving their passenger needs to be revisited. Here's just a few suggestions I propose:

If possible, a picture of the passenger should be provided so the driver knows what their passenger looks like.

The driver should know that their passenger is totally blind and unable to look for them.

The driver should be able to come into a building to look for their passenger.

The way it is now, we are forced to wait outside. During the 20- to 30-minute window in which the driver is to arrive, we may find ourselves standing in pouring down rain, snow, or 117-degree heat. I experienced 117-degree heat last summer and it just about killed my guide dog.

I'm convinced that most drivers never get out of their bus to look for us. I think they scan the folks at the curb, and when they don't see a walker or a wheelchair and no one approaches their vehicle, they depart. I challenge all PT providers

to check cameras from stranded trips and see if their drivers ever left the vehicle to look for their passengers before leaving them stranded.

I would appreciate your input on this matter. I'm sure there are other suggestions regarding unsafe and unfair travel that might make our lives safer. If you have a similar story, please reach out and share. Together we can make a better world for those who come after us.

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CCB Vision 2050: Parts 5 and 6 By Frank Welte

Part 5: Let's Grow CCB Statewide

In the last two installments in this series, I showed how each of us can build up our local blind community and then turn that community into an active CCB chapter. Now let's talk about how we can spread CCB's influence into every community in California.

As I write this article, I understand that we have roughly 500 members organized into 20 local chapters in 13 counties and nine statewide affiliates.

I envision a future where the CCB has a membership of at least ten percent of our state's blind and visually impaired population and an organized presence in every one of our state and federal legislative districts; in every one of our 58 counties, even in tiny Alpine County; in every one of our cities having a population of at least 100,000; and in all of our larger colleges and universities.

How can we grow from our current size to spread our influence throughout California?

First, I encourage each of our local chapters to study the previous two articles in this series to learn how to

build up our local blind communities and thereby strengthen our chapters.

Second, let's borrow an idea from our major political parties. Each of the major parties has a central committee in each county to carry on its activities at the local level. I propose that CCB should organize a county committee in every California county. That's 58 counties including 45 counties that don't have a single CCB chapter! Is that an audacious goal? Sure! Is that something we can do over night? Of course not! However, it's something we could start working on in 2023. Here's how.

As I see it, each county committee would consist of from three to nine members. No more than two members of each committee could reside outside of the county. That means we could start a committee with as little as one CCB member living in the county, but over time, the committee would operate under local leadership.

Each committee would be organized by the CCB Board of Directors, and each Committee would be funded by CCB.

Each county committee would have the following responsibilities.

*** Cultivate contacts with blind and low vision county residents.**

- * Cultivate contacts with government officials and with leaders in education, business and the nonprofit community.**
- * Represent CCB's interests before local government bodies.**
- * Publicize CCB.**
- * Support CCB's fundraising efforts.**
- * Work to establish one or more chapters in the county.**

As chapters are established in each county, each chapter president, or their designee, would hold a seat on the county committee. At this stage, the county committee would focus on coordinating the activities of local chapters. In the event that a county has more than nine chapters, the county

committee would expand to accommodate all local chapters.

To start this system of county committees, we will first need to amend the CCB Bylaws to define the functions and structure of the county committees and also, of regional councils (see below). This could be done during the 2023 CCB Conference and Convention. Once the Bylaws are amended, we could begin organizing county committees. Here's how.

1. The CCB membership database would be modified to include the county of residence of each member. This task could be carried out by the Technical

Operations Group and by the CCB Membership Committee with support by our office staff.

2. A list of possible members for each county committee could be drawn up. Along with residents of each county, the list of potential county committee members could be bolstered by experienced CCB leaders and by representatives of strong local chapters that could “adopt” an adjacent county’s committee.

3. In 2023 we could organize county committees in the 13 counties hosting CCB chapters.

4. Starting in 2024, we could set a goal to organize at least three county committees per year. At this rate, we would complete the roll-out of county committees in 2038. If we assume that each county committee could organize a local chapter within five years, we would have a chapter in every county by 2043. At this point, we would be within striking distance of organizing a chapter in every state and federal legislative district by 2050.

Third, in addition to working on county committees, each chapter could strengthen the communities it serves by organizing local low vision support groups in every city within their local

area and also at local high schools, colleges and universities. California has over 400 incorporated cities and towns. It would be wonderful if every one of them had a low vision support group sponsored by CCB.

Fourth, in our larger metropolitan areas, such as the Los Angeles Basin and the San Francisco Bay Area, the area's county committees could form regional councils to coordinate activities across county lines.

This series of county committees and regional councils would function like the district and regional bodies of Lions

Clubs and other large membership organizations.

In my next article I'll focus on things we can do to provide places for people who may not currently feel fully included in CCB.

Part 6: A Place for Everyone

In the last installment in this series, I showed how we can spread CCB's influence into every community in California. There are also things we can do to provide places for people who may not currently feel fully included in our organization.

Many individuals live too far away from a local CCB chapter to comfortably participate in the group. Others have different reasons for not being involved in a particular chapter. Sometimes, it's better to bring a group to the person than to bring the person to a group. Thanks to modern communication technology, we can create virtual communities that people can join wherever they are. Several ACB state affiliates have started virtual chapters that hold regular meetings and activities via conference call or Zoom meetings. We should do the same here in California. I propose calling this group the CCB Golden Bear Chapter, GBC.

As I envision it, GBC would hold a monthly business meeting on Zoom. Ideally, it would have other activities every week. GBC would be organized pretty much like any other chapter with officers, a board of directors, committees, etc. One of its primary goals would be to support our county committees' efforts to build up local chapters. As I see it, each county committee could encourage local members to join GBC, so that each person would have immediate access to the benefits of chapter membership until the time is right to organize a local group. It would also be a training ground for future CCB chapter and statewide leaders. The experience gained by these

new members in GBC would prepare them to take on leadership positions in future local chapters.

As a statewide group, GBC would be in a position to support CCB committees or take on other projects that a local chapter wouldn't be as well position to do.

To be sure, it would be important to incorporate language in GBC's bylaws prohibiting the group from competing with other chapters or poaching their members. We might even want to organize GBC as a statewide special interest affiliate with a fixed number of convention votes to discourage poaching.

The last thing we want is a statewide group that cannibalizes local chapters.

Geography isn't the only thing that can keep a person from finding a home in a chapter. Language and culture can also create barriers to inclusion. I'd like to see the creation of a committee or a statewide special interest affiliate for Spanish speakers. This group could also be organized within Inclusive Diversity of California. However we do it, I think we all agree that we need to do more to make CCB the best place to be for blind and visually impaired Spanish speakers. Anglos like me shouldn't take the lead in this effort.

As California continues to be an increasingly diverse state, I trust that we will have opportunities to organize chapters or committees for other language communities; Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese, Tagalog, etc.

The American Council of the Blind has organized affiliates for people in the LGBT community, young adults and families. As CCB grows, I hope we can organize places for members of each of these and other distinct demographic groups.

There is a growing effort to unionize workers in the nonprofit sector. Is the time coming when CCB should consider

forming a union for workers in the blindness field? I'll have more to say about that in a future column in this series.

The next article in this series will continue this theme of inclusion by taking a closer look at outreach to younger people.

I welcome your feedback on this and future articles in this series. Send questions, ideas and criticisms to Frank.A.Welte@gmail.com.

Teaching Your Guide Dog a New Route

By Deborah Armstrong

I'm handling my seventh guide and I work at a 112-acre community college which seems perpetually under construction. This means just because I and dog number five knew a route before, that it hasn't drastically changed since then. Plus, the facilities folks took advantage of the pandemic to remodel many buildings and alter pavement and even ramps and flights of stairs. So learning new routes continues to challenge me.

Since I've used guide dogs now for almost forty-six years, it seems high time for me to share a few tips about dealing with the unfamiliar.

First, develop some symbiotic friendships. You cannot be a fully independent traveler alone. In life, to be successful, you often learn that it takes a village, and you need to build your village by creating relationships that nourish both you and your friends. I have co-workers that depend on me just as much as I depend on them. For me my skills are computer competence, a willingness to listen and mediate issues and also to do jobs that others find unpleasant. In my single, younger days,

I often cooked for friends, or helped out with volunteer work. To build friendships you need to know what you can best give to that relationship.

Assuming now you have those friendships, when you need to navigate an unfamiliar route, ask one of your friends to walk it with you describing what they see along the way. You might use a digital recorder, or an app on your phone to record with their permission the turns along the route. But as a friend walks you through this route, remember you too will have questions. For example, ask if there are both shorter and longer ways to get there. If someone walks you up a ramp, ask if there are

also stairs that go the same direction. And ask what you will encounter if you make a wrong turn. For example, when turning right I often ask, "Suppose I miss this this and turn too late or too early".

At the college where I work, I find if I'm lost asking students for directions doesn't bring success because most of them are new. So instead, when a friend assists me, I ask them to read the signs along the way. Later, if I'm lost and ask a student what sign I'm standing near, they might reply that the sign reads "Mediated Learning Center". But I know this is actually the back of the library building and that helps me stay oriented.

So don't forget that knowing landmarks and signage is just as important as knowing when and where to turn.

I also focus on alternatives and not let my friend make all the decisions. For example, the shortest route to the grocery may be across the parking lot. But the easier route to follow is longer, around the block, and up a driveway that leads directly to the back entrance to the store. Asking my friend about alternate routes helped me learn this one which was much easier, even though my helpful friend thought the shorter route would be less complex because there were fewer turns to remember. Unfortunately, there were moving cars to

navigate around so crossing the parking lot was not simple.

A current co-worker showed me a route which was very long and windy because she wanted to avoid steps, having worked for many years with people in wheelchairs. As soon as I let her know I could go up and down steps, we had a much shorter route we could take. So remember you and not your friend are the expert on which route is best.

You should be heeling your dog so he begins to see the environment but do not expect him to memorize it—he's only a doggy. Knowing where to go is your job.

Next try the route with your cane. If your friend can tag along, so much the better, but if not, be sure to have your phone with you so you can call if you get lost. You can always use apps like Aira or Be My Eyes, to get sighted help. Or you can zoom, skype or Facetime on your phone with a friend or family member to help you get oriented.

If you do make a wrong turn, try to determine where you landed. Ask any passerby where you are. If nobody's there, try to take a photo with your phone or mark its location with a mapping app. And if you don't have any technology, just wander around until you

find someone who can tell you where you are.

One of my students took the wandering around to extremes. With limited vision he was embarrassed to admit how bad his sight had become and instead of asking for help, he passed out from heat stroke after wandering around in the upper 90-degree sun for an hour. He should have gone inside an air-conditioned building and begged for help. Remember too much pride is a sign of dependence, not independence!

Pay attention to landmarks on your route you can identify. Does the air conditioner rattle emanating from a building you

pass have a particular grating noise? Does the walkway slope slightly upwards? Can you hear sounds from a highway on your left while you hear a quieter street just ahead? Can you smell a dumpster baking in the sun or bread baking in a nearby shop? Do you hear children playing or the jingling of playground equipment when you approach the school? Do crows caw at you when you enter their territory? Do you notice a particular bush or tree as you pass? Do not let these observations slip through your short-term memory like grains of dust; grab them and insert them in to your permanent recollections of this route.

You might need to do this route multiple times, getting lost multiple times as well. In O&M and later guide dog training I was always taught on neat, clear sidewalks, with intersections and stores with different sounds and smells. But in the real world, I've worked at business parks full of parking lots, locked buildings, no pedestrians and no sidewalks. I now work at a college where none of the paths are straight and all of them lead in different directions and not at precise right angles. Construction continues making familiar routes no longer passable. Half the students are even more confused than I am!

I used to expend a great deal of stress on this situation and felt like my O&M skills deserted me completely. Then I learned I simply had to cultivate new skills—to rely on my own coping abilities—in a word, to adjust.

Getting lost is something to not fear. Consider each time it happens, it develops your travel competence. If you are confident with your dog and cane you are going to be safe, just lost. If you lack confidence with dog or cane, go out and practice somewhere safe, like an indoor mall or even a large Walmart or Target store. Or practice in an outdoor shopping area with nice straight sidewalks. Before tackling difficult routes, be sure you have

that mobility confidence under your belt first.

Another thing to try is doing that route in stages. Suppose you must cross a field, then walk a little, cross a road, then walk a little, then cross a parking lot. First master the field crossing. Practice it with your cane. Practice it with your dog. Do not try to do the rest of that route until you can shoot across that field and end up on the road you need to follow.

Next work at finding the crosswalk from the road. Listen carefully to the sounds around you. Is there anything that indicates where to cross?

And lastly learn to locate and cross that parking lot. Try to practice that separate from the other route. Rely on a friend or a phone app if you are still stuck, but take things a few baby steps at a time. Maybe you will need to take a bus, paratransit or Uber for the difficult part of the route, and only walk part of it. Or maybe you walk part, turn around and return to your starting point.

Now that you can do that route with your cane, you want to show the route to the dog in stages too, unless you have one of those gung ho dogs. My previous dog loved to get out and explore, but my current guide likes to go familiar places. So with this dog, I'm careful to do just

pieces of a long route at first. We walk the part that's new and I give him lots of treats. Next day we walk a little further. Eventually the route is familiar and he's happy to walk it.

Try to give your dog treats or praise at various junctions in your walk. My dog has certain places on our routes where we stop and he gets reinforced. On sidewalks, dogs get reinforced at every curb. If your route is twenty minutes of walking without a curb, you still need to stop and give your dog a treat and pet to reassure him he's going the right way and doing the right thing. You may need help at first to know if you are on the right route, and again using a friend to

assist may be the only way to be sure your dog is getting reinforced for continuing in the right direction.

Sometimes when I am doing a route in pieces, I use my cane for parts of it and my dog for other parts, because I don't want my dog to stress or remember when I make a wrong turn.

Never punish your dog for making a mistake which causes you to get lost. If he turns too late or too soon, it's simply an opportunity to learn what you might encounter if that happens again. For example, on the route I'm currently trying to master, turning too soon has me ending up at stairs with a fountain.

Turning too late, I encounter an impassible prickly hedge and a chain-link fence. But I now have more landmarks to tell me where I am, so I see it as a positive development in my learning this complicated route.

Pack your patience and stuff your emotions. Feeling stressed about getting lost will dull your perceptions, blunting your navigation and recollection skills. Plus, most guide dogs are very sensitive. If you seem upset, your stress will communicate to them that they are not doing a good job. I try to remain upbeat even when I feel frustrated because I want my dog to enjoy the adventure. And the frustration clues me in to the reality

that I need to practice more, to take this route when I don't need to be on time or to practice this route when I don't need that destination at all!

Think of yourself as an explorer rather than a failure.

Seniors Corner

By Robert Acosta and Denise Weddle

We welcome you to read Seniors Corner. This column is an attempt to give our senior blind and low vision friends practical tips on how to survive during the Covid era and after.

We urge our readers to submit ideas or full articles on surviving as a senior blind and low vision citizen in California.

We encourage our readers to consider joining the California Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss, the largest advocacy organization for the senior blind in California. For more information, please contact our Treasurer, Denise Weddle at: (310) 306-8149. Her email address is: deaniew21@verizon.net.

In this November column, we feature one major item for your consideration.

Visiting Angels has been providing compassionate senior care to families across the United States since 1998. The

network of home care franchised agencies is committed to providing families with the best possible in-home care services.

Most seniors prefer to stay in their own homes, but sometimes it can be difficult when they live by themselves and need daily help. Home care can promote dignity and independence with professional assistance. You will receive dedicated care to maintain daily routines and continue the activities you have enjoyed in the past, with help from an Angel.

Your first step to starting home care should be an in-person meeting with a

Visiting Angels care coordinator to discuss family and/or client needs. This meeting includes a detailed review of care needed, schedule (if known), specific requests, and any other concerns.

Visiting Angels' elder care incorporates what are commonly known as activities of daily living for older adults. Their service coordinators are trained to create a personalized care plan for you. Visiting Angels provides families with:

- * Respite Care**
- * Companionship**
- * Personal Care**
- * Hygiene assistance**
- * Meal planning and preparation**

- * Light housekeeping**
- * Laundry assistance**
- * Medication reminders**
- * Assistance running errands**

With your personalized home care plan, you can customize their services to meet all your care needs.

Assisted Living facilities and nursing homes aren't the only options for care services. With Visiting Angels as your in-home care provider, you can continue living at home.

Contact your nearest home care location today or call:

800-365-4189 with any senior home care questions. Their home care assessments are offered free and with no obligations.

Note: Each Visiting Angels agency is a franchise that is independently owned and operated. The Franchisor, Living Assistance Services Inc., does not control or manage the day-to-day business operations of any Visiting Angels franchised agency.

Post-AFB Leadership Conference Thoughts: Blind Leaders Development Program Challenges and Rewards By Chris Fendrick, a fellow in the Centennial Cohort of the Blind Leaders Development Program

This last year I was fortunate to be chosen as a Fellow in the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) Blind Leaders Development Program. This unique program in the blindness community was an opportunity to grow both professionally and personally. As a teacher of students with visual

impairments (TVI) I have had the pleasure of working within the wonderful world of blind and visually impaired (BVI) community over the last ten years. I have also been fortunate to attend conferences such as the California Transcribers and Educators for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CTEBVI), and the Association for the Education for and Rehabilitation for the Blind (AERBVI), the CSUN Disabilities Conference, and the California Council of the Blind (CCB) conventions. So I have grown to know the BVI community, but these previous experiences have never provided an opportunity to formally train and engage with others in this specific line of work.

The idea behind the Blind Leaders Development Program came out of a small group of people, including AFB Chef Program Office Sylvia Stinson-Perez, who were connecting informally after a conference. The group believed that there needed to be formal professional development and inclusion for blind and visually impaired professionals to grow in their careers. The concept was to match a fellow with a mentor to collaborate over a nine-month period to work on goal setting, clarifying values, and implementing the concepts and lessons in the book *Leadership Challenge* by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. This book and curriculum are

based on over 40 years of research and practice of what makes a great leader.

Neva Fairchild and other AFB staff oversee the program. The team worked with a research specialist who had created a comprehensive survey to help match fellows (myself included) with mentors. I was fortunate to be matched with Jeff Blair, a retired IBM professional who had several different project management and strategic planning roles within IBM. He also led a federal health policy advisory committee to define the information infrastructure for healthcare providers, which was passed into law in 2009. Jeff was totally blind when he played these leadership roles.

On the surface, why would someone match an educator and a health care and data policy genius? But Jeff and I were perfectly matched as we got to know one another, the synergy of the relationship grew, and we were able to develop and collaborate on my goals. Jeff has often mentioned that he has grown tremendously from our conversations as well.

The program's Centennial Cohort began in Fall 2021 and we immediately began to get acquainted with one another. Frameworks were provided to us for goal setting, resources were provided to help develop our pathways, and open office hours were available with Neva to help

keep us on course. A monthly component of the program was the “Spotlight on Success” seminar, in which they brought in successful blind and visually impaired professionals to talk about their journeys. The third and most impactful aspect of the program was beginning the training and completing the lessons from *The Leadership Challenge*.

Lee Nasehi, Executive Director and CEO of Vision Serve Alliance, conducted the training. We were asked to have our co-workers, managers, and other colleagues complete the Leadership Practice Inventory Assessment (LPI) to gather baseline data about our individual leadership practices based on five

criteria areas. After this data was collected, we used it to examine where we needed to develop our goals. The process was very positive and helped me look a little closer at how I could grow.

I also took the Meyers-Briggs Personality Assessment to drill further down into what my values look like, and whether that was correct. It was spot-on and helped me focus on other short-term goals that could lead to longer-term goals and more growth. I was also fortunate to have read Steven Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and applied some of those concepts to the teachings of the program.

During this process, between January and April, 2022 Jeff and I would be in contact every two to three weeks to review how the short-term goal accomplishments were shaping up. Other mentors and fellows did the same with their own dynamic of how they wanted to achieve their goals.

Then came the in-person Leadership Challenge in-person training with Lee, Neva, Sylvia, and the AFB support staff in Washington D.C. As my colleague, Ken Meeker, spoke for many of us, that was a transformative experience.

Many of us were not frequent travelers, especially by air. As a part of the

“Spotlight on Success,” we had a group present to us on best practices traveling while blind. This was pushing me and others out of our comfort zones, but we had to trust in our orientation and mobility skills, guide dogs and canes. Barring a few hiccups and teachable moments for the sighted world, we all made it to Washington D.C. and back home fine.

A day after arriving in D.C., the training kicked off with a 7:30 am breakfast and all-day training from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. Some of us were still on Pacific Time, but the coffee was flowing and from pure adrenaline I was so engaged with Lee’s

presentation that sleep was the last thing on my mind.

After Friday's all-day training, we were off to a Washington, D.C. Dine-Around. We grouped up in small groups to head out to different restaurants where we were able to get to know each other in a more intimate group. To break bread with each other and share in our common blindness was amazing.

Saturday morning came very quickly, and we were all right back downstairs ready for Lee and our work. Again, coffee, adrenaline, and communal energy flowing. The day flew by, and then it was time for dinner with the AFB board of

directors. Everyone was dressed in business attire and ready to meet the board. It was great as we were matched up with board members that we might know, such as my colleague Diane Fazzi from California State University. We all were able to network and share our experiences so far with the Blind Leaders Development Program.

Sunday was here already, and we were all back in the room for more training early at 7:30 am. Lee wrapped up the in-person session, and we all reveled in the shared experience.

After our Sunday training, we had an opportunity to experience Washington

D.C. either in groups or on our own. Groups went to the Smithsonian, Old Town Alexandria, and other Washington, D.C. favorites. I was fortunate to attend the new Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture. After the museum, we decided to walk to a restaurant a few blocks away. We had one sighted assistant, but mentor Cortney Mazzola took command and led the way with her cane. She got there ahead of us and had our table waiting.

During this walk, we realized we had just crossed 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. and were a few blocks away from the White House. So, after dinner we took another walk to check out the White House and

take some selfies. It was great fun, but I must admit I put AIRA in my ear and our agent led the way. As it happened, the agent was from Washington, D.C., and gave us an audio description of our walk to the White House. Afterward, we piled back into an Uber and back to the hotel for much-needed rest.

Monday morning was fast approaching, which would kick off the AFB Leadership Conference. The AFB team had coordinated our training so we were able to attend this conference that attracted over 300 professionals from the blind and visually impaired community. Many of us volunteered for hosting sessions. The conference was highlighted as the

Mentors and Fellows also networked with the corporate sponsors. At the closing of the conference, Blind Leaders Mentor Rachel Longan was awarded the Llura Gund Leadership Award for outstanding leadership for our cohort. I was honored to have her and her Fellow Angie Kimball at my table for the training and call both friends.

Six days after the training and conference I was still riding high on the experience. Some had to fly out Tuesday night and some were able to stay Wednesday due to flight times.

We all were buzzing with the afterglow of putting in challenging work,

networking, and exploring new environments. We were texting each other and basking in our new friendships and again the transformation that we all just had experienced as a group of blind people from across the United States with a vast continuum of experience in the blind world. The transformation for me was increased confidence of knowing my values, mission, and vision. The understanding that we can all be leaders in our respective fields with the proper practices and behavior. The intentional and strategic purpose by AFB to provide leadership training to blind and visually impaired people was the significant part of this program that must not be lost on our entire community.

We are now meeting to complete the Leadership lessons and complete our professional growth as The Leadership Challenge has shaped us. The call for new Fellows and Mentors has gone out and the third cohort will soon be announced. The Centennial cohort will graduate at the American Printing House (APH) in Louisville, Kentucky, on August 2, 2022. AFB has scheduled the third cohort to join us as they will be starting their Leadership Challenge at the beginning of their journey in this program.

Many of us have connected via text, email, and social media. Some have made plans to meet up again at a future

blindness-centric conference. Fellows have already put themselves out there to apply for career advancement and have secured new opportunities. We have grown as people who just happen to be blind as well. AFB made it possible for us to come together to grow personally and professionally, and I think a greater thing has happened here. It is a little like the butterfly effect: One change can influence an entire world. I am hopeful that more of us will take part in these programs, and we will not be limited by our blindness.

About Chris Fendrick

Chris is a teacher of students who are visually impaired in Bakersfield,

California. He was recently elected as the new President to the CTEBVI in April of 2022. He also serves as President of his local California Council of the Blind and affiliate of the American Council of the Blind. He is also the current chair of the state of California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) Blind Advisory Committee.

Comparing Two Microtransit Options

By Deborah Armstrong

Microtransit is the new buzzword for cities who want to become more environmentally friendly. More and more towns are now funding low-cost

rideshare services to move people to local businesses, public transit transfer points and shopping plazas. And a variety of companies, both national and local are competing in this space.

For us, these opportunities are a mixed blessing. It's great to have low-cost transit available to everyone, but every city has its own rules and policies. And towns in less wealthy areas who don't have a reliable tax base to fund microtransit will likely never offer it. Some cities limit microtransit to populations like seniors who need to visit their doctor. Other cities limit the rides to commuters, especially if a large employer is within the city limits. Most

cities do offer discounts for disabled riders and claim to have wheelchair accessible vehicles. Some cities require account holders reside or work in their city; others don't care where you work or live.

Unlike paratransit which is an ADA requirement for public transit agencies, microtransit services are optional benefits a city may decide to offer its residents. You can always try advocating with your local city council to encourage them to offer a microtransit option.

Roseville California has a microtransit service that has been up and running for nearly a decade. Users must create an

account but being a resident isn't necessary. There are disability discounts. Rides are schedule in advance over the phone just as paratransit is scheduled. You provide a requested pickup time, and the ride is curb to curb. You pay cash for your ride and must have exact change or a voucher from a booklet you can purchase with ten vouchers. Rides take place only within the city limits. But I discovered that it was nearly impossible to get an actual ride during business hours. After 7 PM was a different story. I could go anywhere in Roseville at night, but rarely could I schedule a ride before 7 PM. I was told that the popularity of the service had many people using it to go to and from

work and their capacity was limited, since the service was open to everyone.

By contrast, Via, in Cupertino, CA where I work is fairly new. Though it started up right before Covid, only recently are people beginning to use it. Rides are not schedule in advance: you use their app to pick your destination when you are ready to leave. It knows your starting point through the GPS on your phone. Though rides are shared, I have not yet ridden with another passenger, and I have been picked up literally a minute after I requested my ride. Via also has a disability discount, but even without the discount it is cheaper than paratransit. It is also confined to the city limits and

door-to-door service is available only if you are disabled. Otherwise, you are picked up near your location and dropped off near your requested address. These pickup points are typically bus transfer points, parking lots, shopping areas or street corners.

If you are unsure about transportation options in your city, you should investigate the city website, or call city hall. When a new service like Via is starting up, it may be featured in a local newspaper article and there may be posters inaccessible to us put up in public places to advertise its availability. Let your friends, family and co-workers know that you are on the lookout for new

transportation options in case one of them runs across such an advertisement.

Operator, Information We Are Holding the Letter Line!

By Regina Marie Brink

I haven't been a member of the California Council of the Blind for very long. However, I have heard about letter writing parties where Chapters gathered to write letters to their legislators and local officials. They sound like so much fun. Ever since high school, I have been passionate about political engagement and the need to involve as many American citizens as possible in this

almost 250-year experiment in democracy. I also love parties and especially the “Conga Line.” The Conga Line is a dance where everybody, even little kids, can participate. We all hold each other up, so you don’t even really have to know how to dance. If you get out into the center and cut up, it’s great, but if you don’t want to, that’s good too.

During the pandemic, many people were isolated. Many people felt there was very little they could do to change their situation. At the same time, there were major policy decisions being made in the areas of housing, accessibility, and sidewalk regulation in California that affected people with disabilities,

especially those of us who are blind or have low vision. There was a need for letters but organizing a letter writing party as we did in the past just wasn't going to work for many reasons. Also, many people, understandably, were not very excited about writing these letters or didn't have computer access to do so. Still, these regulations would affect building codes and tax incentives for ten years!

I often can't fall asleep or wake up in the middle of the night. One of these nights, it occurred to me that we could organize a letter writing party in our Chapter Zoom room and call it a "Letterline," reminding people of the way the Conga

Line could be so much fun. We could help one another write these letters and have a good time.

I floated the idea to our legislative committee, and they liked it. We organized a few “scribes” who were good writers to format the emails. We sent out some sample templates. We encouraged people to attend. We invited the whole Chapter.

That night, we generated almost 40 letters. We didn’t use breakout rooms because no one in our group knew how to do those yet. We just had a lively discussion about what to put in our letters, how to personalize them, and

encouraged each other. We shared experiences and anecdotes related to these regulations. People who did not have computers were able to dictate their letters to the scribes over the phone. People who could write their own did so. Overall, it was a resounding success and the Chapter felt good about it.

We have continued variations on this idea going forward. In the last statewide letter writing campaign, our Chapter generated many of the letters submitted to the legislature and the governor that resulted in passage of some very consequential legislation. Now that we can meet in person, we can come up with

even more innovative ways to energize our members and accomplish our advocacy goals at the same time. I encourage all of us in leadership to be innovative and keep sharing ideas like this. Let's empower each other through advocacy and have a good time doing it!

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If you, a family member, or a friend would like to remember the California Council of the Blind in your Will or estate planning, you can do so by employing the following language:

“I give, devise, and bequeath unto the California Council of the Blind, a nonprofit charitable organization in California, the sum of \$_____ (or _____) to be used for its worthy purposes on behalf of blind persons.”

If your wishes are more complex, please contact the executive office for additional information. Thank you.