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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.

Article deadlines for the Blind Californian are:

Winter: November 15 of previous year

Spring: February 15 current year

Summer: May 15 current year

Fall: August 15 current year

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.

Please send all address changes to the Executive Office.

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Editor's Corner

By Omni Glass and Susan Glass

"So Mom, I want to start this column by recommending a book to all BC readers."

"Is it a dog book, Omni?"

"No, but it's an animal book. We don't feature enough animals in the BC."

"True. But this is a magazine for blind Californians, and most of them are blind people."

"Yeah, but they have dogs and cats and birds, and we fall asleep listening for content that's rarely about us."

“OK. What’s the book?”

“You’ll be happy to know that in part, it’s also a holiday read, as well as an old chestnut, as in roasting by the open fire.”

“Ha, ha. Proceed, dear doggy.”

“The book is Kenneth Graham’s ‘The Wind in The Willows’, DB24592. It’s also available in braille on Book Share.”

“This is a children’s book, right?”

“Of course, Mom. They’re best at Christmas time. It’s about English animals (Mole, Water Rat, Badger, Toad) and their adventures in the woods, on the byways,

and on the river. You can also read these animals as Edwardian gentlemen.”

“Edwardian gentlemen! Since when did you become a scholar of English literature?”

“Since I learned how fond the English are of their animals. Anyhow, the best winter holiday chapter in this book is the one where Mole sniffs out his home after being away from it for half a year, and he and Rat make supper there and feed a bunch of Christmas Caroling field mice. I also recommend the chapter where Mole and Rat lose their way in The Wild Wood and end up spending the night in Badger’s underground home. It’s all about coziness and firelight and good smelling sausages, and bread, and

staying up as late as you like at night, and then sleeping late in the morning.”

“That’s a good endorsement. We’ll take it.”

“Good. Now you can tell them what else is in the Winter BC.”

“I’ll do that. Linda Samulski shares some lovely reflections on spiritual spices and how they enrich every day of every year. Nelly Emerson and Olivia Ostergaard offer healthy food tips and a recipe to get us through the holiday season without picking up ten extra pounds. Debee Armstrong discusses how access issues have changed over time from grappling with print to traveling with ease. Frank Welte introduces BC readers to the newly established CCB

Housing Committee. Christy Crespin encourages CCB members to pay goodness forward by serving CCB, and she also interviews Ed Crespin on his long-time career working for the State Department of Rehabilitation. There are more treasures too: read on to find them."

Spices

By Linda Samulski

For those of us who like to cook, the holidays are a wonderful time of the year. We go through our spice cabinets, looking for spices such as cinnamon, cloves, and sage, to enhance our favorite scrumptious

dishes. What about our spiritual spice cabinet? Do we have the spices we need in our emotional and spiritual spice rack? From time to time, I check mine to make sure that I am grounded and not depleted of them. Oftentimes though, I find that I am, so I try to replenish.

Several years ago, when going to college, I took a class regarding health and well-being. I still remember to this day how our teacher talked about the spices in our spiritual and emotional spice rack. The acronym actually spells out SPICES, so here they are.

S: Sensuality: What or who fills our senses and makes us feel that there is something

so special about our universe? Is it the birds that are singing, or the smell of the flowers that gives us that special feeling? For me, I love to sit outside with the smell of mesquite, and the mocking birds singing in the background. I love counting the different songs they sing, and I think they are just singing for me, although I really know it's for the whole world that surrounds me.

P: Physical: Are we taking good care of ourselves so that we can be in our best health? I believe that lifestyle changes need to be made incrementally for this to happen, since habits themselves develop incrementally. We need to get back to basics.

I: Intimacy: Who is the person who knows and loves us better than we know and love ourselves? Is it someone from our CCB family, or our partner? Who do we connect with the most?

C: Cognition: What fills our minds? What cleanses our minds? How do we get rid of the stress in our lives so we can live better? I love to read, but I love reading things that are positive and inspirational.

E: Emotional stability and well-being: How do we manage ourselves so that our emotions are stable? How can we do better? In a world filled with anxiety, we need to find balance. I find this balance through meditation, and not listening to the media

so much. If you are feeling overwhelmed with stress, anxiety, and depression please talk with someone, either a good friend or a professional counsellor.

Last but not least:

S: Spirituality: Who do we trust to keep this universe going, who blesses us with the aforementioned spices? Who is it that we feel grateful to for blessing us with such a wonderful life?

Only we can look at ourselves and answer these questions. We shouldn't have to suffer all of the negativity in this world. We should be able to find joy and peace.

This is my wish for all of us for the holidays, and upcoming year. May we all find the joy and peace for which we are searching.

Slow But Steady Progress, Good News: SSI and Social Security Benefits

By Regina Brink, Assistant Director of Governmental Affairs, CCB

I am writing this article to let you know about some progress made concerning SSI and SSA benefits. Progress in this arena is slow and there is much more to do here. However, when we make progress, the

biggest hurdle is making sure everyone knows about it.

First, concerning the appeals process when benefits from the Social Security Administration are denied or terminated, the time to file the appeal and receive continuing benefits has greatly increased. A lawsuit filed in New York, Amin v. Kijakazi, resulted in this period going from 10 days from the receipt of the notice, which is calculated automatically to be 5 days after the letter was sent, was found to be in violation of the due process clause of the Fifth Amendment of the US Constitution. The time is now 60 days after receipt of the letter to appeal and for benefits to continue.

More information concerning this case can be found here:

<https://tinyurl.com/SSA-Appeal-Case>

Next, the exclusion of pandemic related resources is indefinite. These will not and should not ever count toward an SSI recipient's resource limit, no matter how long they save them. This includes the 3 stimulus checks and many other such resources. Justice in aging has a fact sheet with more information. You can find it here:

<https://tinyurl.com/SSI-FAQ>

There are many more online tools available to SSI and SSA recipients now. You may still use paper forms or request an appointment for help filling these forms out as well.

However, for those who find online easier, more and more SSA forms are becoming available.

You can now begin the application process by making an appointment to do so online after a few screening questions to pre-qualify you. The advantage is your application date starts when you use this new Online Protective Filing Tool. This means your benefits will be calculated starting with the time you file using this tool, provided your appointment happens within 60 days of this filing. This was recently expanded to include SSA as well as SSI benefits and has a special provision for people with visual disabilities. You can read more here:

<https://tinyurl.com/Online-Filing-Tool>.

You can now also authorize SSA to share your information or to receive your information from third parties online and fill out disability redetermination forms using the website. A recipient can also make an appointment online and receive a number for a same day appointment. A text will be sent to a mobile phone when your number comes up.

Two more changes are worth mentioning. Non-disability related appeals now go to a specialized office that will potentially deal with them more efficiently. ABLE accounts that allow disabled people to save for specific expenses are now available to

individuals whose onset of disability is age 46. This is a substantial change since the onset of disability previously had to be age 26 to qualify for an ABLE account.

If any of these new changes or other problems with compliance arise, it is best to contact the California office of the Regional Communications Director, Patricia Raymond, in San Francisco at least 30 days before the compliance period ends. You can find all 10 regional directors and their contact information on the SSA website. If this does not work, Justice in Aging provides resources to enforce compliance.

Equity For People with Disabilities: Fact or Fiction?

By Daveed Mandell

How often have you heard the words “diversity,” “inclusion,” and “equity?” Now compare that to the number of times you have heard the word “accessibility.”

I have read scores of articles and have attended hundreds of meetings talking about the first three terms. The articles and meetings concerning the fourth term have been far fewer.

I contend that for people with disabilities, diversity, inclusion and equity have become

meaningless buzz words. Accessibility is often discussed in very broad, abstract and general terms. In too many cases, it is minimal at best and nonexistent at worst. Far too often, the largest marginalized group in the country isn't even part of the discussion.

I want to focus on equity, because during the past several years, talking about equity has become the new fad. The Webster's English Dictionary defines equity as "fairness or justice in the way people are treated". Ask yourself, are all of your needs met? Do you have the necessary income, assistive devices, education, employment, housing, transportation and healthcare to maintain a decent quality of life? Or do you

find life to be a constant struggle to make ends meet? How easy was it for you to find housing? Can you easily get around town and beyond, fill out forms, make medical and other appointments? How fair or just is society treating you?

Let's look briefly at transportation. Why is it that the Americans with Disabilities Act doesn't require every signalized intersection in the country to be accessible? After all, if a jurisdiction believes that installing a pedestrian signal would make an intersection safer, shouldn't it be just as safe for everyone, not just for able-bodied and sighted people?

I contend that the current model of ADA paratransit is unfair and unjust. Yet, ironically, for the past 33 years, we people with disabilities have sat passively by, allowing transit agencies to claim that they are protecting and upholding our civil and human rights, while they actually violate them. What a scandal that is! We have allowed these agencies to severely limit our activity and have accepted serious inconvenience and lack of spontaneity as part of life. Question: Where is this elusive equity that we've been promised? Answer: It doesn't exist! It has never existed!

Then there's fixed-route transit. How easily can you locate and identify bus stops or light rail stations? Can you easily navigate

subway stations and know where you are within them at all times? Probably not! Again, we find the lie about agencies protecting our civil rights while actually violating them!

How long are we people with disabilities willing to be treated so unfairly and unjustly by society? How long are we willing to be duped into believing that society protects our civil and human rights, when we know that's a lie? How long are we willing to accept laws that are outmoded, inequitable, discriminatory and even cruel? When will we finally decide that enough is enough? When will we begin to fight to ensure that our civil and human rights are truly protected and upheld? When will we have

the nerve and the courage to demand that society treat us fairly and justly and truly offer us the diversity, inclusion, equity and accessibility that everyone deserves?

Rethinking Access Through Cultural Shifts

By Debee Armstrong

Accessibility for us blind folks always combines gains with losses. For years, my employer issued a large purple telephone directory listing every employee with their department, title and phone number. But a few years ago, they decided that was just too expensive.

So instead, they published the directory on the web. They made it searchable too, and accidentally it became fully accessible. No longer did I need to ask a co-worker to look up a last name or phone number. In saving costs, my employer had inadvertently advanced accessibility.

I grew up in Hayward, where I learned my O&M skills in middle and high school. I could explore the downtown sidewalks sniffing out the bakery and doughnut shop, the grocery store and burger joint. I could listen through the open doorways of the many establishments to locate the record store, book shop, cobbler, stationery vendor, soda fountain, five and dime, hair

salon and dry cleaners. I learned to ride the bus with students, seniors and mothers with infants. As a teen, I could independently shop and spend my allowance in the first half hour.

I trained with my guide dogs in downtown San Rafael, which being a bit more upscale than Hayward, had health food stores, French bistros and espresso bars. Instead of Montgomery Ward, the mall had Nordstrom. But there were sidewalks, with plenty of odors and sounds to orient me.

I studied at U.C. Berkeley, where you could walk up and down the avenue to buy everything from used records to hand-crafted ceramic tea pots. Street vendors

read your fortune with tarot cards or sold fresh flowers and jewelry. And you could hear the souvlaki sizzling a block away from Steve the Greek, where the most delicious odors wafted through his open door. And as you passed, Steve would grab you literally by your cane and scream “Hey there blind lady. Come inside for the best falafel on the planet; and the stuffed grape leaves are half-price today”. After all, he figured the blind lady couldn’t read the sign and Steve never missed a chance to close a sale. In those days, people didn’t worry about micro-aggressions or political correctness. But they interacted in ways we do not experience today.

Throughout all of this exploration, whether I was chowing down at Fondue Fred's with my besties, or out on my own trying to locate size 4 knitting needles, I felt connected with my community and very independent. My real handicap wasn't blindness, but the inability to read print.

Now the inability to read print rarely matters. I have the internet, where bills can be paid online, Amazon stocks everything and NFB newslines have all the newspapers I'd ever want to read. I have a smartphone which can help me navigate, read the occasional print menu out loud and entertain me in a myriad of ways.

But my greatest handicap has now shifted to the inability to drive. If I need to visit a brick-and-mortar store, my sighted husband has to drive me unless I want to spend an entire afternoon waiting for and riding on paratransit for a round trip. The buses which used to be filled with people just like me now attract passengers who are so down and out they seem slightly dangerous. Of course, Lyft and Uber offer opportunities, if I feel like spending half my paycheck simply traveling to and from work. Sidewalks have disappeared, and my work and home neighborhoods have huge Walmarts and Targets separated from the street by the asphalt desert of a parking lot.

In the downtowns of my youth, the parking lot was properly located behind the establishment and the door was always open. Today, stores like to keep the air conditioning within, so their doors are closed, limiting the sensory experience for the blind traveler. If I do want to shop, I feel like I am the last pedestrian in America; I can walk for miles and meet nobody except perhaps a gardener waging war on weeds with tools so loud they block out all traffic noise, making it impossible to safely cross the street. And all parking lots feel, smell and sound the same; finding your store, whether it's an office supply, a craft store or a pet emporium is nearly impossible with so many parking lots guarding their entrances.

Maybe when we all move about with self-driving cars, we'll gain equality with the sighted who will also stop driving. But another limitation is bound to rear its ugly head. As we conquer one accessibility challenge, sometimes through no effort on our part, others will take their place. Such is the shifting landscape of our changing culture and the way it affects us as blind folk.

Introducing The CCB Housing Committee

By Frank Welte

The CCB Housing Committee has been formed to address the housing concerns of blind and visually impaired Californians. We held our first meeting on Tuesday, September 12, and we will hold regular meetings on the first Tuesday of each month at 7:30 PM.

The Committee has identified three focus areas:

Advocacy: We will advocate to improve the accessibility, availability and affordability of

housing, particularly for blind and visually impaired Californians.

Assistance: We will develop and implement strategies to assist blind and visually impaired individuals and families to obtain housing.

Information: We will gather and provide information about statewide and local housing resources.

As of this writing, the committee consists of the following individuals.

Chair: Frank Welte

Secretary: Patty Nash

Christine Bailey

Warren Cushman

Nelly Emerson

Sheela Gunn

Daveed Mandell

Shana Ray

Linda Samulski

Joshua Saunders

Because housing is a statewide issue, we are seeking to add members from every region of California. If you have the desire to help blind and visually impaired people to obtain the housing they need, consider joining the committee.

For further information, contact Frank Welte at:

(510) 541-1442

or send email to:

Frank.A.Welte@gmail.com

Seeing The World Together with Be My Eyes

By Siobhan Meade

From the tech-pi email list. Original link:

<https://tinyurl.com/Seeing-World-Together>

See the world together.

Introduction

As a blind person living independently, I have always relied on others for various tasks that required sight. However, thanks to the Be My Eyes app, my life has undergone a remarkable transformation. This innovative app has granted me a

newfound level of independence that I never thought possible.

Through the selfless assistance of sighted volunteers, I have been able to continue living life on my own terms. The Be My Eyes app, which is free to download on your smart phone, has opened up a world of possibilities for me and countless others in similar situations.

Enhanced Independence in Daily Life

The Be My Eyes app has become an invaluable tool in my daily life. From reading cooking instructions to putting together outfits or locating dropped items, I can now accomplish tasks that were once challenging or impossible for me. By simply using my

smartphone, I can connect with a sighted volunteer who can assist me in real-time. This level of support has given me the confidence to tackle everyday challenges independently, enhancing my overall quality of life.

The Power of Virtual Volunteers

Expanding Support with Corporate Beta Partnerships

The Be My Eyes app has also caught the attention of leading brands and organizations committed to improving accessibility. Four prominent companies, along with The National Federation of the Blind, have joined Be My Eyes' Virtual Volunteer Corporate Beta Test. This

collaboration aims to revolutionize customer care by leveraging the power of virtual volunteering. By working together, these partners are striving to ensure that blind people receive the support they need when interacting with various products and services.

A Global Community

Be My Eyes has become a global platform that connects blind and low-vision people with sighted volunteers and companies through live video. The app's reach extends worldwide, offering 24/7 support from trusted and caring people. The community-driven nature of Be My Eyes allows blind people like me to access visual information

and assistance at any time, bridging the gap between those with sight and those without.

Simplifying Tasks with Volunteer Support

The Be My Eyes app not only benefits blind people but also provides an opportunity for sighted volunteers to make a meaningful impact. Volunteers have the power to simplify tasks for people with low vision, helping them achieve a greater sense of independence. From checking expiry dates and distinguishing colours to reading instructions and navigating unfamiliar surroundings, volunteers play a crucial role in empowering blind people to overcome everyday challenges.

Joining a Supportive Community

Be My Eyes is built on the foundation of a supportive and dedicated community. By sharing stories, providing informative blog posts, and hosting engaging podcasts, the app fosters a sense of belonging and connection. Users from all around the world come together to learn, inspire, and support each other on their journey towards greater accessibility and inclusivity.

Conclusion

The Be My Eyes app has revolutionized the lives of blind people, including myself, by providing instant visual support and fostering a strong community spirit.

Through the eyes of sighted volunteers and the introduction of Virtual Volunteers, this app has opened doors to independence, empowerment, and a sense of possibility. With its continuous innovation and partnerships with leading brands, Be My Eyes continues to break down barriers and create a more inclusive world. I am grateful for this transformative app, which has allowed me to lead a life of choice and independence that I never imagined possible.

AIRSLA Introduction

AIRSLA (Audio Internet Reading Service of Los Angeles) produces a wide variety of

recordings for the print impaired, i.e., blind, low vision, and cognitively impaired. Printed material is read by a dedicated cast of volunteer readers. AIRSLA also records lectures and talks on eye diseases, new treatments, low vision aids, adaptive technology for the visually impaired, and coping strategies. Additionally, AIRSLA records articles from popular magazines such as Braille Institute, Time Magazine, and The Week, just to name a few. Today, with the advent of the World Wide Web, AIRSLA reaches a global audience; not just its local Los Angeles listeners from its humble beginnings in 2005.

For more information join us at

<https://airsla.org/>

Email:

airslafeedback@gmail.com

Voice/Text:

(747) 217-1325

California non-profit, public benefit corporation and has a 501(c)(3), public charity designation from the Internal Revenue Service.

Our Tax ID number is 11-3774209.

Ways You Can Help: Collecting Data, And Getting the Word Out

From the Inclusive Diversity of California, (IDC) and California Council of the Blind, (CCB) state Membership Committees

This year has gone by so fast and soon the holidays will be upon us. Shortly after the holidays, around the first of the year, CCB chapters and affiliates will be collecting dues and updating their rosters. Hopefully CCB will obtain new members to help strengthen our state organization, affiliates and local chapters. One way you can help

this happen is to describe the activities of CCB at life skills or senior centers you attend. Tell them about our wonderful organization and how we work in advocacy, education, peer support, and mentorship.

At the last convention the CCB membership passed resolution 2023-05 regarding the collection of aggregate data. According to the IBM website, the definition of aggregate data is the “process where raw data is gathered and expressed in a summary form for statistical analysis.”

As chapter and affiliate officers begin to update their rosters for the upcoming year, consider yet another way you can help by voluntarily filling out the informational form

regarding membership. The form has questions such as: name, address, whether you are totally blind or with partial vision, age, gender, ethnicity, and media of choice for receiving the Blind Californian. The only people that will read the information you list on the form are the officers in your chapter who collect it, Lisa Thomas, our CCB treasurer, and Nicole Pacheco, our CCB administrative assistant. Otherwise, this information is confidential and will not be traced back to the person who voluntarily filled out the form.

Here are three principal ways that this will help us by filling out the information:

1. The information helps identify unmet needs and underserved communities where people who are blind and with low vision may reside.

2. By receiving this information, CCB is able to seek and procure grant and donation funding even though we don't have nonprofit status. This is as long as funders understand that we don't yet have it, but we are still working toward achieving that goal.

3. Our ACB parent organization requests it for their statistics, which then trickles back down to our state organization, which helps to strengthen it.

The CCB state Membership Committee, and IDC Membership Committee are working in

a collaborative manner to get the word out regarding the collection of data. Soon after the first of the year, we will hold an informational/listening session to discuss this issue. Please stay tuned for the time and date by reading the “happenings” for further information.

From the Inclusive Diversity of California, and California Council of the Blind Membership Committees: have a wonderful holiday season.

[Editor’s note: You can find the audio recording of 2023 convention resolution at: <https://tinyurl.com/CCB-Collecting-Data>

The Library

[Editor's note: This edited article is by David Goldfield and is part of a larger piece from the Tech-vi email list.]

I have many fond memories of wandering through shelves of braille and recorded books in the libraries of two schools for the blind that I attended as a child. For me even traveling from my class down to our library always filled me with such joy and excitement. I never tired of exploring the braille card catalog and then just wandering through shelves of books where I could browse titles, pull books out at random and

take a look at what was inside. I always borrowed books and read constantly whenever I had the chance. While my mainstream high school did not have a library of braille materials, I continued to receive braille and recorded books from my local NLS affiliate. I think I was a member since I was around nine or ten years of age.

In the late 1980s I was an assistant manager at an adaptive equipment store which existed at that time at Associated Services for the Blind in Philadelphia, which has since become VisionLink. ASB used to share space with the local Philadelphia NLS library, and as it happened, my basement office was just a few feet away from part of the library's braille book collection. I could

once again experience the joy of walking through shelf after shelf full of what seemed like a countless number of braille books. Hardly anyone went down there when I was there, so I had the amazing privilege and freedom to browse through and explore book after book without being interrupted. A kid in a candy store could not have been any happier than I was when exploring the braille collection. When I found something that I wanted to read I could bring it upstairs, walk to the check-out desk, and it was mine to borrow. It may have been one of the best perks of that job.

Later, starting in 2002, I would find myself back at ASB as their computer class instructor, where I would be for over 13

years. While working there as their computer instructor, I was living out of state and was receiving books from my local NLS affiliate, but I still sometimes borrowed braille books from the Philly library.

I had always subconsciously believed that blind people should seek out material from their NLS affiliate library and mistakenly assumed that libraries for the sighted had little or nothing to offer members of our community. Fortunately, I began to think differently about this when I attended a local convention of the Delaware Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

One of the guest speakers was a local librarian from Delaware. He told us that

many blind people believed that they should separate themselves and only seek out materials from a blindness specific library. He encouraged us to not accept this and to take advantage of the many services offered by our public library.

I was so inspired and excited by his presentation that I obtained a library card from my local public library and began to learn about its services which could benefit me as a patron, such as borrowing TV shows on DVD and accessing a huge amount of material from their many online databases. There are many other services offered by your local public library that I encourage all who are reading this to investigate.

[Editor's note: Check out Deborah Armstrong's article: Accessing Free eBooks and Audio Books in the Summer, 2019 Blind Californian.]

AAVL: A National Resource for Aging Well with Vision Loss

By Frank Welte, President, California Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss

In the Summer, 2023 issue of The Blind Californian, I wrote about how the California Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss, CAAVL, can help you to age well with diminished eyesight.

CAAVL, in addition to being a special interest affiliate of the California Council of the Blind, is also affiliated with the Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss, AAVL, a national special interest affiliate of the American Council of the Blind.

Here is a list of useful resources provided by AAVL.

Community Calls

AAVL sponsors a weekly community call via Zoom for seniors, particularly those who are experiencing vision loss for the first time later in life. These calls take place on Tuesdays at 1:00 PM Pacific time, 4:00 PM Eastern time.

AAVL also holds an additional community call on the fourth Monday of each month. This call features presentations of particular interest to seniors with vision loss.

For more information about these and other ACB community calls, write to community@acb.org.

AAVL Convention Programs

Like many other ACB special interest affiliates, AAVL holds informative program sessions during ACB's Annual Conference and Convention.

Recordings of AAVL's convention sessions and their monthly community calls are also available as podcasts at the

www.acbmedia.org/

website and on the ACB Link smartphone app.

Hourglass Magazine

The Hourglass is AAVL's quarterly magazine. It is distributed to AAVL members via email.

For more information about AAVL, visit their website at:

www.aavl-blind-seniors.org/

When you join the California Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss, you also become a member of AAVL. For more information about the California Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss, write to

ccb.caavl@gmail.com

or call

510-255-1732

If you wish to join CAAVL, you can do so by contacting our Treasurer, Denise Weddle, by writing to her at:

deaniew21@verizon.net

or calling her at:

(310) 306-8149

Pay It Forward

By Christy Crespin

We have come to the end of an eventful 2023. Much has happened to validate our thoughts and feelings, whether they be of

fear, sadness and woe, or of joy, peace, and the goodness of humankind.

I believe we will always have reason to feel all of these emotions that will feed our thoughts in both directions. However, in recognizing how powerful gratitude is, I want to focus on the title of this article, 'Pay It Forward'.

I was very moved when a friend indicated the desire to meet for lunch and give me an Amazon gift card to present as a door prize for our California Diabetics in Action (CDA) program and meeting. This person also indicated he would be praying for the sick members and families in the Active Blind

Inland Valley Chapter. I heard and felt the compassion in his voice.

We met for lunch with this donor and I received the gift card. The amount was significant enough that it was offered at the very end of our program and meeting. I publicly wish to thank Jordan Mirander for this gift and his compassion toward others.

My husband, Ed Crespin, has retired from the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) after 32 years of service. I consider him to be one of the most influential counselors I have worked with, and I believe his clients would concur. He has what I call a social worker's heart without the social work degree. He has shown kindness, compassion

and courage for his clients throughout the years. He has had a profound effect on the lives of clients and DOR staff.

I always joke and say seriously that I would have considered it an honor to be supervised by Ed. I was a vocational counselor for almost four years and know how it felt to be a client as well as a counselor. He applied for promotion to supervisor, and I believe it was their great loss that they chose others instead. It is my hope that those who were assisted by Ed as their vocational rehabilitation counselor will continue to pay forward what they have received.

Finally, it is time to renew or apply for membership to CCB chapters for 2024. CCB is a membership-driven organization. We often complain that we see the same people doing all of the work, so we choose to pull back or drop out instead of paying it forward by becoming involved. We ask “What’s in it for me?” With the “what’s in it for me” mindset, we fail to recognize all of the history, legislation, policies and benefits that have been granted because of those who chose to pay it forward through their tireless work, both unsuccessful and successful. We say, “I’ll wait to see what happens before I (fill in the blank) join, help, participate, lead.” I ask you to join, participate, become involved, give a gift of time, talent and/or treasure, and lead in

your own way. There is a list of chapters and affiliates available on our website, ccbnet.org at:

<http://ccbnet.org/drupal7/node/4>

Please pay it forward with your time, talent and treasure by being a part of the California Council of the Blind.

Interview With Ed Crespin

By Christy Crespin

Question: Because you were a client of Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) and a counselor you have a different perspective than a counselor without this experience and a client without the counselor

experience. What would you say is something you brought to DOR as a former client, and something you can tell clients through your counselor experience?

Answer: As a former client, now called consumer, with the DOR I did not have a good understanding of the process or purpose of the Department of Rehabilitation. I started out and did not follow through or finish with the Department, which resulted in an unsuccessful case closure. However, I was encouraged to re-apply and follow through by Frances Radcliff, who was an extraordinarily strong, tough, and understanding counselor and who advocated for the blind. Frances explained

the purpose and focus of DOR. My attitude toward DOR had been extremely negative.

After I followed through and completed my college education, I recognized how expensive my education was and knew I could not have graduated without the help of DOR. I also recognized that DOR was a great help to my friends who had other disabilities.

When Don Queen invited me to consider a career in the field of vocational rehabilitation, I was not open to his suggestion because of my negative attitude regarding DOR. However, some years later I received an opportunity to work with Nelly Emerson, providing orientation and mobility

services to her clients because she recognized how much I could help others even though I did not have a degree in orientation and mobility. At that time people with low vision could not qualify for the orientation and mobility program.

At the time, I was also working with the City Disability Advisory Council in Riverside, CA, and I became more aware of the Department of Rehabilitation. I then applied for the counselor/teacher position and was hired by John Buckner. I knew braille enough to teach it, could teach basic survival cooking, and already proved that I was successful in teaching orientation/mobility. Also, I held an extraordinarily strong position in advocating

for people to become independent. I believe that John Buckner recognized all of these attributes and I became the counselor/teacher in the San Bernardino district in February 1992.

After about 2-1/2 years, I was offered the position of Rehabilitation Counselor for the Blind (RCB) by Clarence Gilliard and John Buckner and had to make a decision "by the end of the day." Overnight, I began my work as an RCB and had other generalist cases, which helped in my understanding of working with people who had other disabilities. With the passage of AB 105 and initiation of Blind Field Services, I was finally given a "purist" caseload.

My perspective and view of being a rehabilitation counselor from being a consumer has drastically changed. I gained the knowledge and understanding of the regulations as well as the knowledge of opportunities that people have to be educated, and to have an opportunity to seek and obtain employment with the funding through the DOR to assist people hopefully get off SSDI/SSI, and to become more independent both financially and physically.

I have closed quite a few cases successfully with high end positions, from psychology, psychiatry, social work, teaching, and other non-entry, high-paying careers.

Question: What did you enjoy most during your 32 years with DOR?

Answer: In the 32 years that I have been with the Department of Rehabilitation, I really enjoyed the counselor/teacher position; but most of all, with the RCB vocational services, I really enjoyed going to consumers' homes, schools, training centers, and places of employment. I enjoyed meeting with people, talking with them one-on-one, and getting to know their issues and giving help and encouragement with their personal lives and adjustment to gaining skills and abilities for successful employment. Even if somebody has been blind since birth or is newly visually impaired, they have not had the opportunity

to receive exposure to social activities, be out on their own, and being successfully independent. There is a different quality that is gained by experiencing the independence of becoming self-reliant. I really am inspired by newly blind and the totally blind people who work with companies, selling products to others with visual impairments, and exhibiting at conferences such as the CSUN Technology annual conferences and conferences of blindness organizations such as ACB and CCB. I feel inspired knowing they are independent, competent, capable, and that they are good role models for others who are blind or visually impaired.

I really enjoyed going to the different training centers to meet with my consumers to see their progress. There is something almost magical about witnessing them at the training center, right in the midst of their training process.

Question: What is something you wish you could change in DOR?

Answer: DOR has lost the power of allowing counselors and consumers to interact in person. I believe that there needs to be one-on-one, on-sight, interpersonal interaction for a good connection between consumer and counselor. While Zoom, telephone, email, and other means of interaction are efficient and take less time, the ability to

truly connect, get to the heart of assessment for the need of skills acquisition or counseling, and much more, are lost without in-person interaction.

What I'd like to see changed in DOR for Blind Field Services is having a social worker in the four training center locations that DOR contracts with. People who are losing their vision especially, and some people who have been blind most of their lives, have adjustment concerns and need to talk with someone such as a social worker, who is competent in addressing adjustment concerns with the consumer. With fast-moving technology and communication changes, it can become very overwhelming to keep up with the changes competently

and confidently. I believe that adjustment, and sometimes psychiatric counseling, is necessary and appropriate for job acquisition and retention.

Years ago, back in the 'sixties, rehabilitation counselors provided the adjustment to blindness counseling to some degree, and more clients attended training centers where teaching about blindness was provided. However, now we recognize the limitations of RCBs to provide this adjustment counseling, and life moves much faster, overwhelming consumers with information and process.

Question: What was a good learning experience for you?

Answer: The learning experience that I gained was understanding the ins and outs of the state and federal regulations— Learning how to provide the services to the consumer and understanding how to make that service work meaningfully for each consumer. Regulations are there to guide the counselor; but at the same time, they can hinder the counselor if one is not willing to look around in different ways to make the regulation fit the person’s needs. Learning how to work with the system is especially important instead of fighting the system, as I did when I was much younger and a client of DOR.

Question: What will you miss most about your time with DOR?

Answer: I will miss talking to my consumers and listening to their struggles, whether it is getting a job, seeking a job, getting an education, the frustrations of passing a course—and just encouraging them to keep up the struggle and not let the system beat them down. I am really happily excited to see people that I helped reach their vocational goals. It is really disheartening to see the unemployment rate so high. It is not the DOR that is failing the employment process; it is the attitude of employers and their lack of willingness to hire persons with disabilities, especially those who are blind. People who are legally blind have somewhat of a chance to be employed; however, it is sad to see how many people who are

visually impaired, or blind continue the cycle of job-seeking with no fair chance of becoming employed. I will really miss working with companies and encouraging them to hire people with disabilities.

Question: What is one piece of advice you would give to a person who is a current or future consumer?

Answer: I have noticed throughout my 32 years of service with DOR that high school students, in general, are not ready for continuing their education or for employment. It appears that students are not being given the opportunity to learn the soft skills necessary to become independent. Braille acquisition for people

with low vision is crucial for success in the workplace. Students are being taught to utilize paratransit and family members instead of independent pedestrian and public transportation bus/light rail travel. It is imperative that students be encouraged to participate in social activities at school and in their communities. It is common for students to have never interacted with other students or adults who are visually impaired/blind. Over-protection by well-meaning parents, family members and others cause behaviors such as having a sense of entitlement, lack of independence and self-reliance, fear, and unwillingness to make changes in their lives. I encourage high school students and adult consumers to attend a training center such as The

Orientation Center for the Blind, Hatlan Center for the Blind, Davidson Center for Independence, or Blindness Support Services. Some of these centers offer residential programs. Even if you have what you consider to be good braille, computer, orientation/mobility, interpersonal and/or living skills. Many consumers are either let go from jobs or are not considered because they lack the skills necessary for employment retention.

Advocacy is most important, and self-advocacy is necessary to be a part of the workforce. When students or adults “assume” things will be taken care of when they are in an educational or work environment, when they have a lack of

understanding regarding their accountability and responsibilities, and when they assume the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) will cover them hands down, and they assume that the employer “must” provide the reasonable accommodations they request, including transportation, guiding assistance, etc., this can spell disaster rather than success in their endeavor for success in education and/or employment. Further, it hampers success for others who succeed them because educators and employers may decide it is simply too difficult to work with our population based on their past experiences.

Question: Is there anything you would like to say in closing to encourage people to either remain with DOR and work with their counselors or to advocate for blind people to become rehabilitation counselors?

Answer: I encourage people before they apply to DOR to conduct their own research into jobs, education, and at least have some idea of what they would like to do. Be realistic about what you can and will do. Attending college is simply a steppingstone to employment so there needs to be a progression from school to job/career. Work to find a mentor in the field of interest. Check out [Career Connect](#) through the American Printing House for the Blind. Seek out someone who has successfully gone

through the vocational rehabilitation process and ask for guidance and counsel.

To become a vocational rehabilitation counselor, I would encourage you to get a good understanding of employment, attend the various conferences that the ACB, CCB, American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) and other organizations provide. Go to the CSUN Technology conference and at least attend the exhibit hall, which is free.

Interact with people and get to really know what kind of employment opportunities are available so that when you graduate with your master's degree in rehabilitation counseling and become a vocational rehabilitation counselor, you have seen other blind people in their various fields of

employment and interacted with those individuals who are blind, successful and know the struggles that they experience. It would help if you had some kind of groundwork like this to help you understand the population that you are going to be serving because it is a real struggle to help people seek and obtain employment, and successfully maintain employment.

Chapter And Affiliate of The Year 2023

By CCB Membership Committee

The CCB Membership Committee invites all chapters and affiliates to submit to the CCB

Membership Committee what they have done in 2023 to:

Outreach for potential members

Advocate for people who are blind or low vision

Promote CCB

Give back to our community

Organize Acts of kindness

Educate about vision loss

Learn about each other

Listen to each other

Lead

Innovate, Think outside the box.

Please stay tuned for the guidelines for the following awards:

Chapter of the Year

Affiliate of the Year

To be presented at the 2024 CCB virtual convention.

We look forward to all of your submissions.

Healthy Holiday Bites

**By Nelly Emerson & Olivia
Ostergaard**

The holidays are filled with traditional and tasty foods. Tamales, empanadas, turkey, dressing, yams, and various kinds of sugar and calorie laden pies are readily available at family gatherings. It is common for folks who enjoy such meals to gain as much as ten pounds during the holidays. If you want to consider a healthy alternative, there are options you can choose.

Food choices and portion control are key. You may choose to fill half your plate with

low glycemic vegetables such as green beans, spinach, mushrooms, and green peppers. One fourth of the plate can be meat either roasted or grilled. The remaining fourth can be potato or other root vegetable. Dessert choices can also be healthy. California Diabetics in Action have a collection of recipes available on request. Please e-mail us at cda.ccb22@gmail.com.

Livvy contributed the following yummy recipe for you to try.

Easy, Classic Roasted Root Vegetables

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Cook Time: 40 minutes to 45 minutes

Serves: 6 to 8

Ingredients

- **3 pounds root vegetables, such as carrots, parsnips, sweet potatoes, and beets**
- **1 small red onion**
- **1/4 cup olive oil**
- **1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt**
- **1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper**
- **2 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh rosemary leaves**

Instructions

- 1. Arrange a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F.**

- 2. Peel 3 pounds root vegetables, if desired, then cut them into rough 1-inch chunks. Cut 1 small red onion into 1-inch chunks. Place the root vegetables and red onion on a rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle with 1/4 cup olive oil, sprinkle with 1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt and 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper, and toss to evenly coat. Spread out in an even layer.**

- 3. Roast for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, chop until you have 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped rosemary leaves.**

- 4. Remove the baking sheet from the oven, sprinkle the vegetables with the rosemary, and toss to combine. Spread back out in an even layer. Continue to**

roast until the vegetables are tender and caramelized, 10 to 15 minutes more.

Recipe Notes

Storage: Leftovers can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

Have a wonderful and healthy holiday season.

Submitted by California Diabetics in Action. For more information, please contact us at cda.ccb22@gmail.com.

To join, annual dues are twenty-five dollars or if you belong to ACBDA, dues are fifteen dollars. We have a Zel account for your convenience.

Take Advantage of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) for Low-Income Internet Users

PCs for People - Monday, August 21, 2023

Link:

<https://tinyurl.com/ACP-Internet>

In an era where digital access is necessary, the lack of affordable Internet connectivity can create a significant barrier for low-income individuals and families.

Recognizing this challenge, PCs for People is proud to be an approved provider for the

Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), a federal initiative to narrow the digital divide and provide equitable access to the online world. Take advantage of this opportunity to stay connected and save money!

****Connecting Communities for a Brighter Future****

At PCs for People, we believe everyone should have access to high-quality Internet services, regardless of their financial situation. We understand that the Internet is a vital resource that provides access to education, job opportunities, healthcare, social services, and communication platforms. We are committed to empowering low-income Internet users by

offering affordable connectivity options. By connecting communities, we can create a brighter future for all.

****Key Features of PCs for People Internet and the Affordable Connectivity Program****

1. Our Internet Services offer low-cost Internet plans, comprehensive coverage to underserved areas, affordable devices, and educational initiatives for online safety and digital skills.

2. The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) benefit provides \$30 off monthly Internet service (more at: www.pcsforpeople.org/acp).

Through ACP, eligible households can receive up to \$30 off their monthly Internet bill. They may also qualify for a one-time discount of up to \$100 on a new device if they contribute between \$10 and \$50.

Combined with PCs for People's Internet service, a household can get connected to monthly Internet service for \$0/month after their one-time modem or mobile hotspot purchase, AND a discounted device starting at \$25!

3. Comprehensive Coverage: We work to provide affordable Internet access to underserved areas, both urban and rural. No one should be left behind. Check your coverage using the checker at:

www.pcsforpeople.org/internet/

4. Educational Initiatives: The program doesn't just offer connectivity! We offer lifetime customer support and resources to educate users about online safety, digital skills, and how to make the most of the Internet for education and personal growth. We also partner with local organizations to provide workshops, training, and events that empower users.

How to Enroll in the Affordable Connectivity Program?

Enrolling in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is simple. Individuals or families who meet the low-income guidelines can apply at:

<https://acp.pcsrefurbished.com/acp>

through our website. Upon approval, customers can select their affordable Internet plan and be eligible for device assistance (which includes desktop and laptop computers).

A Step Towards Equity and Opportunity

Join us in the mission of PCs for People to bridge the digital divide and bring the power of connectivity to those who need it the most. With the Affordable Connectivity Program, we're connecting devices and securing dreams, opportunities, and a brighter future for all.

Walmart's Commitment to Accessibility Empowers People with Disabilities

From Cool Blind Tech

Walmart is making a new push to better serve people with disabilities with a slew of adaptive products ranging from clothing to technology. Walmart recently introduced an adaptive channel on its website with a curated collection of items all created to be accessible.

The selection includes adaptive utensils and tableware, assistive devices, sensory-friendly toys, backpacks designed to work

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with wheelchairs, hearing aids, adaptive clothing and much more. Check out:

<https://tinyurl.com/Walmart-Adaptive>

Calling All Kids: Enter The Benefits of Audio Description in Education (BADIE) Contest

Sponsored By The American Council of the Blind Audio Description Project, and the Described and Captioned Media Program

Lights, Camera, Description!

The American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Project (ADP) and the Described

and Captioned Media Program (DCMP) are co-sponsoring an essay contest for blind and visually impaired young people (ages 7 to 21). It's a great chance for students to engage with accessible learning materials, unleash their inner film critic, and compete for fun prizes.

How Students Can Enter:

- 1. Browse the free DCMP library at <https://dcmp.org/>.**
- 2. Watch any audio-described film (there are more than 6,000 educational titles to choose from!).**
- 3. Write an evaluation of the film's audio description, commenting on the ways the**

audio description enhanced or detracted from your experience.

4. Visit

<https://dcmp.org/learn/657>

to submit your entry. There you'll also find guidelines and prize details, tips on writing a good review, and information about how audio description is created.

Categories:

Sophomore – ages 7-10

Junior – ages 11-15

Senior – ages 16-21

Alternate Assessment – students with non-traditional matriculation records

Deadline and Prizes:

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The deadline for contest entries is February 11, 2024.

Winners will be notified by the end of March 2024.

There will be first, second, and third place winners in each category, as well as a grand prize winner who will be awarded an iPad mini and invited to read his/her essay at the American Council of the Blind's National Conference and Convention in July 2024.

Teachers of first-place winners also receive prizes.

Go to

<http://badiecontest.org>

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for complete details and to submit your entry!

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July 1, 2023

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Donations

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.