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TAP TRACKS

**The Newsletter of the National Federation of the Blind of
Kansas**

Spring/Summer 2019

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Associate Editors**

Please submit materials for the Fall / Winter 2019 issue of TAP TRACKS by August 15th 2019 to:

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From the President's Desk

By: Tom Page

Greetings fellow federationists and friends. I hope this mailing finds you cool and dry. It is hard to believe that last month

Kansas received more rain than has ever been recorded. Despite these monsoons the work of the NFB of Kansas has not slowed.

Across the state our chapters are meeting regularly, hosting social events, and continuing our advocacy and fundraising activities. Many of our members serve on local advisory as well as boards advising various state agencies. In On these boards important work is progressing in the areas of policy reform, access enhancement, and, encouraging braille literacy.

I am pleased to announce that Envision Inc. has committed to continue supporting NFB-Newsline in Kansas for the next year. This funding will allow the blind and physically handicapped residents of Kansas to have access to a wide variety of news and information resources. We will be increasing our affiliate involvement and I hope to have more announcements on the growth of the program in our next newsletter.

Kansas is set to have a record setting number of national convention attendees in Las Vegas next month! I think we can also set a new attendance record at our state convention in Salina this November. Please join our listserv home-on-the-range@nfbnet.org, visit the national website www.nfb.org, the state website www.nfbks.org, attend your local chapter meetings, and join us on Facebook at NFB of Kansas to keep up with all of the activities happening in Kansas and around the nation. Thanks for all you do to support and grow our movement!

2018 Kansas NFB State Convention By Cheryl Miller

Our National Federation of the Blind State Convention rolled around as it always does in November, but this time it was special – a milestone really. This was our fiftieth anniversary. The Wichita chapter hosted our 2018 convention at the historic Hotel at Old Town in Wichita on November 2-4, 2018.

For those interested in technology and the difference it is making in the lives of the blind, Rob Tabor and Mika Pyyhkala facilitated a technology seminar on Friday afternoon. It was an enthusiastic group who participated in learning and sharing about the tools that are available to help the blind with everything from navigating their environment to watching TV. The evening hours of Friday found us mingling with our friends and enjoying a delicious appetizer bar. As always, our nominating and resolution committees met to do their hard work.

Our national representative for our 2018 convention was Anil Lewis, Executive Director of the Jernigan Institute. On Saturday morning he presented a national report, followed by a state report given by Tom Page, President of the Kansas National Federation of the Blind. Much of Saturday afternoon's agenda revolved around education as it relates to blind students. Our day concluded with our annual banquet which featured Anil Lewis as our key note speaker.

The convention wrapped up on Sunday morning as we took care of necessary business. As we left, we carried with us the strength that comes from uniting with our blind friends and a sense that we are making a difference in the quest to live the lives we want to live.

Editorial note: You can find a short YouTube video on AIRA. It will explain NFB-like attitudes on blindness.

AIRA AND YOUR TRAVEL TOOLBOX

By Sharon Luka

A great time was had at our November 2018 state convention at the Hotel Old Town in Wichita, Kansas.

We were blessed with a great technology seminar on Friday, November 2, 2018.

It was at this seminar that I downloaded some GPS smart phone tools, and took my first adventure with AIRA. Whether you travel with a dog guide or long white cane, please enjoy the rhythmic ride of route exploration. It has been said that technological tools cannot replace traditional travel tools. At the close of the Friday seminar, I decided to call AIRA and be remotely guided to the Convention Center across the street. It was fascinating.

AIRA views the blind person as an explorer, hindered not by lack of sight, but by public attitudes about blindness.

My adventure, guided by my white cane and a person from the east coast, taught me some intriguing things. First, the guide saw parts of the hotel from a map on her computer screen.

Without Aira glasses, I needed to move the iPhone camera to various positions. This brought the space around me into view on AIRA's screen. I was often told to "scan" straight, left or right. It's interesting that we can scan both environment and the printed word. Second, the hotel route became quite exciting.

After gaining proper camera positioning, the representative guided me around the facility. My trip took me outside the building, down a sidewalk, around the corner to Mosley street. After crossing the street, I arrived at the Convention center. We exited the hotel through different doors than we usually access.

I can't tell you how we did it; I did not write that particular route down. However, it was quite interesting, and I got an enjoyable outdoor walk in the process.

Remember, technological tools cannot replace traditional travel tools.

The trip with AIRA reminded me that we all explore new routes. We should not place embarrassment on getting lost. I once attended a nutrition convention in Saint Louis, Missouri. My sighted friends found themselves getting lost several times. Losing one's way is normal, even for sighted people.

On November 25, 2018, parts of Kansas endured a great snow blizzard.

I did not sign up for continued AIRA access on the phone. Thus, I decided to try Sound Scape to locate the mailbox at the end of the snow blown, snow packed driveway. Recall again, technological tools cannot replace traditional travel tools. With Sound Scape, I set a locator sound beacon on the mailbox, forgetting about the second mailbox on the house door. I never made it to that driveway box.

The wind was so fierce, and the snow so heavy and thick that one could not traverse too far from the porch. It was necessary to place a Bluetooth music-playing speaker in the mailbox on the door to help relocate the house. The best thing to do is to try these tools in good weather conditions, track the necessary cardinal directions to the desired landmark, and set the desired beacon at a more productive time.

Please enjoy the rhythmic ride of route exploration! It can teach us many things! Recall once more that technological tools cannot replace traditional travel tools.

Johnson County Chapter Report

By Susan L. Stanzel

This is a report of our chapter activities during the past year. The chapter is growing. We have five new members: Cornessa Cherry, Bethany Bennington, Logan Campbell, and Jodi and Don Mulik. Six members: Susie Stanzel, Ashley Neybert, Tom and Linda Anderson, Bethany Bennington, and Logan Campbell attended the National convention in Orlando.

Again, this year we joined the Kansas City chapter's walk for independence. Walkers were Susie Stanzel, Ashley Neybert, Tom Anderson, and Randy Phifer. Almost everyone donated money. We made a little over \$2,000. The highlight of the day was our transportation being provided by Jacobus TenBroek's Grandson Peter.

Almost everyone in our chapter attended the 2018 fall state convention. Attendees were Susie Stanzel, Randy Phifer, Tom Anderson, Pila Mahoney, Ashley Neybert, Martha Kelly, Jodi and Don Mulik, Kerm and Kathy Kerchhof, Cornessa Cherry, and Margaret and Raymond Peed.

We had our annual Christmas party at the Stanzel home. We had around 40 people and a good time was had by all.

Tom Anderson was the Kansas Coordinator for our third annual BELL Academy. This year we joined Missouri and the location was Kansas City. He will again coordinate the Bell Academy and went to Baltimore for training.

Tom Anderson is very active on Kansas councils. He continues as Secretary of the Statewide Independent Living Council of Kansas. His position as a member of this council was appointed by the Governor. He is also a member of the State Rehabilitation Council and has been elected as their Vice-Chair. Tom Page and Tom Anderson were members of a subcommittee of the Services to the Blind Advisory Committee charged with looking at our state's policy of taking 75% of the client's disability check while the client is either going for rehabilitation training or in college to pay for services. We really wanted nothing to be collected. Ashley Neybert's public testimony to the State Rehabilitation Council was invaluable. Now nothing is collected if the Kansan is going to a rehabilitation center and only 30% is being collected from college students.

Tom Anderson and Ashley Neybert attended the Washington seminar on January 27th. Our delegation met with our new Congresswoman Sherice Davis herself.

On February 15th Tom Anderson and I were scheduled to again participate in the regional Braille Challenge at the Kansas School for the Blind. We were unable to do this because of snow.

A Small Step Forward for The Blind of Kansas

By Tom Anderson

Over the past several years, the quality of services provided by Kansas Rehabilitation Services, (KRS) generally continues to move in a downward spiral. There are many possible reasons why this is so. Some would say that the decline in services is due to KRS being a part of an umbrella agency rather than having separate and identifiable services for blind persons in this state. Others might say that Michael Donnelly, Director of Kansas Rehabilitation Services has, single-handedly brought on the demise of programs of rehabilitation for blind Kansans. The agency takes pride in reducing the number of days it takes to open a case, but unfortunately, consumers find themselves in an adversarial relationship with their counsellors, especially when they wish to pursue comprehensive training in another state, which is a right of choice under the rehabilitation act. The relationship should be one of partnership between the consumer and counsellor rather than what is, too often, the pattern in this state.

In the past, blind residents of Kansas who wished to obtain rehabilitation training, whether it be in Kansas or another state were able to obtain this training, without charge to them personally. This policy came to an abrupt end in 2013, when Kansas Rehabilitation Services fell out of compliance with what is required by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Kansas Rehabilitation Services regained its compliance in part with RSA at the expense of blind persons who desire to better their lives, moving out of the shackles of poverty towards remunerative employment. This burden came in the form of requiring each consumer who desired to receive rehabilitation training to pay 75% of their monthly income from SSI or SSDI to receive this training. This policy serves as a financial disincentive for those who wish to make significant changes requiring high expectations in their lives. To my knowledge, no other state in the union has this onerous requirement. This policy of taking 75% of a person's SSI or SSDI

check each month also applies to disabled college students under the broad classification of maintenance.

Blind persons who wish to pursue comprehensive rehabilitation training or help with college are faced with two choices: have 75% of one's check taken, or report to the counsellor how every nickel and dime is spent - truly unenviable choices for the consumer of services from Kansas Rehabilitation Services.

On April 7, 2017, a subcommittee of the Kansas Advisory Committee for the Blind and Visually Impaired was established to consider whether it was appropriate to modify the maintenance policy which has been in existence since 2013.

On March 2, 2018, The Kansas Advisory Committee for The Blind and Visually Impaired developed a recommendation to modify the state's maintenance policy. According to federal regulations, maintenance means monetary support provided to an individual for expenses, such as food, shelter, and clothing, that are in excess of the normal expenses of the individual and that are necessitated by the individual's participation in an assessment for determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs or the individual's receipt of vocational rehabilitation services under an individualized plan for employment.

The recommendation addressed how maintenance is calculated for persons attending comprehensive rehabilitation training and post-secondary education. Specifically:

Cleaning supplies, personal hygiene supplies, extracurricular activity expenses: Individuals attending comprehensive rehabilitation training programs and/or post-secondary education will be responsible for their own costs for the items identified.

- All costs associated with attending a comprehensive rehabilitation program, including food and housing will be exempt from financial participation. (Note: food and housing falls under the maintenance definition per federal regulations.).
- Individuals attending post-secondary Education will be responsible to contribute 30% of their actual SSI and/or SSDI benefits toward the cost of housing and food.

On June 7, 2018, Reinhard Mabry, Chairman of the Advisory Committee for the Blind and Visually Impaired, presented testimony in support of this committee's recommendation at the meeting of the State Rehabilitation Council. Mr. Mabry said: "The committee is deeply concerned about the unacceptably low number of persons who are blind or visually impaired who have successfully secured gainful employment in the state of Kansas. The number of persons who are blind or visually impaired achieving employment in Kansas has been declining in recent years, which is a troubling trend. This past year we witnessed an alarming 37% decline in outcomes (59% in 3 years). A mere 22 Kansans who are blind or visually impaired secured gainful employment in 2017 and they earned just \$12.31 per hour in jobs where they were placed."

Mabry indicated that the AFB reports that there are more than 32,000 working age people who are blind or visually impaired living in Kansas. The unemployment rate among people who are blind or visually impaired is 70%, so that the outcomes are woefully inadequate given the numbers who remain chronically unemployed. Mr. Mabry continued: "While there are many contributing factors to this decline, one matter that we believe is impacting outcomes is the current maintenance policy, which requires clients to contribute a portion of their income for their rehabilitation services or to attend university. While intending to ensure that clients and students have 'skin in the game' we believe the policy has gone too far and is instead limiting the vocational potential of persons who are blind, as well as persons with other disabilities." "The committee devoted more than a year to reviewing the application of the maintenance policy adopted by the Kansas Rehabilitation Services. In its review, the committee conducted formal and informal surveys of states across the country and enlisted the advice of trusted advisors and the general public. What is evident from this review is that Kansas is unique in its application of the maintenance policy. Kansas is an outlier by requiring SSI or SSDI recipients to contribute as much as 75% of

their subsistence allowance for rehabilitation services or to attend a university for a degree program.” “As one private citizen explained to the committee in our public meeting in March, students who depend on SSI and SSDI have normal customary expenses that are not being considered by the current policy such as, business clothes and incidentals to attend an interview for a job. The meager resources that remain to an SSI or SSDI recipient after continuing their rehabilitation services or education are inadequate for such pursuits, leaving them less competitive than their non-disabled peers.”

Mabry urged that Kansas should amend its policies to insure its residents who are blind or have other disabilities are on a level playing field to compete with their peers so they can achieve their potential. Mr. Mabry simply stated the policy and then indicated “while this policy change has budgetary implications, it should be noted that substantial majority of the funding for these services is supplied by the federal government. So, the impact on Kansas budget is modest. And, if by this change in policy, more people with disabilities secure gainful employment they will become tax payers who will contribute to our economy and realize a return on the tax payer investment in them.” Mabry urged the council to add their voice to that of the committee to amend this practice for the betterment of Kansas residents who are blind or have other disabilities. The Kansas Rehabilitation Council deferred its decision on this matter until its next meeting in September.

On September 21, 2018 the State Rehabilitation Council formally reviewed the recommendation of the Advisory Committee of the Blind and Visually Impaired. Leaders of the Federation including; Susie Stansel, Board member of the NFB of Kansas and Ashley Neybert, a college student and graduate of the Colorado Center for the Blind attended this meeting and made public comments. The Kansas Rehab Services presented documents regarding maintenance from the rehabilitation services administration. Public comments were given and were found to be very persuasive by the council members. Council members gave

considerable credence to the comments of Ashley Nybert. A motion was made by Tom Anderson and seconded by Mike Burgess that the State Rehabilitation Council recommend that the proposed policy change be implemented. A vast majority of the council approved this motion. KRS has requested technical assistance from the Rehabilitation Services Administration to review the recommendation and determine if it complies with federal requirements.

THE CANE AND THE BAT

By Sharon Luka

I trailed the walls of the old school halls,
One hand held in front of my body.
To the sighted soul the scene on the whole
Was that of a strange oddity.

I walked down the street, my friend Freeda to meet,
One foot following the lawn.
A new way to travel began to unravel;
To the cane I was suddenly drawn.

In mobility course we began to endorse
The long white cane as we walked.
A tap to the left with a step to the right,
From its rhythm we never balked.

To test my zeal and interest appeal
My travel teacher made me wait,
For the long white cane which would ease my terrain,
And free each step of my gait.

At home that night I indulged in my right,

And freely walked to Freeda's.
For want of a cane I used a baseball bat,
and even launched to Aunt Leeda's.

The very next day in mobility course
I received my long white cane!
Through snow and ice and nature's force,
It smoothes the roughest plain.

JAYHAWK CHAPTER NEWS

By Rob Tabor

In October 2018 the Jayhawk chapter held an historic first trivia tournament fundraiser at a local Irish pub called Conroy's. We raised \$400 which we consider to be a very solid showing for the first endeavor of this kind. At the outset of the contest and during the break we introduced those in attendance to the positive philosophy and work of the Federation. A good time was truly had by all, and we are looking forward to doing it for a second year, most likely during this coming fall.

Our meeting home is still the Lawrence Douglas County Public Library, but we have moved our meeting date and time slot to Mondays at 4:00 pm in order to accommodate the work schedules of 2 of our officers.

I heard from several firsthand sources that our vice president Renee Morgan did very well in representing the Jayhawk chapter at the 2019 Washington Seminar.

This spring we are planning our fifth NCAA men's basketball tournament pool fundraiser. We customarily ask a donation of \$5 to participate and we raise an average of \$150 by recruiting participants from outside the chapter.

Our officers for 2018-19 are president Rob Tabor, vice president Renee Morgan, secretary Tamara Kearney, and treasurer

Brenda LA Tare. Our next regular meeting will be held on Monday, March 18, 2019 from 4:00pm to 6:00pm at the Lawrence Douglas County Public Library, 707 Vermont Street, Lawrence. Our April meeting will take place at Conroy's Bub at 3115 W. 6th Street, where we will enjoy some social time as well. Inquiries about the Jayhawk chapter may be sent via email to Rob Tabor at rob.tabor@sbcglobal.net, or by call or text to 785-865-9959.

BELL Advanced Training Seminar By Tom Anderson.

Federation leaders from several states participated in the advanced BELL training from February 8 and 9 at the National Center for The Blind in Baltimore.

Welcoming speeches were given by NFB President Mark Riccobono, Anil Lewis, Executive Director, Blindness Initiatives, Jernigan Institute, and Carla McQuillan, NFB BELL Academy Coordinator.

President Riccobono reviewed the history of the BELL Academy since its founding in 2009 to the present. The program has steadily expanded. He emphasized the need for the program to grow responsibly and not just quickly.

Anil Lewis encouraged participants of this training to submit stories about the accomplishments of students of the various BELL academies to bell@nfb.org. He assured us that names would be redacted. These stories are helpful for funding sources, showing the success of the BELL Academy. He expressed his appreciation for the time, talent, commitment and sacrifice of all who make the BELL academies in each state a success.

Carla McQuillan, NFB BELL Academy Coordinator described how the state of Oregon instituted its BELL Academy training. She also described a fundraiser called Bowling for BELL. In this fundraiser, 25% of funds would go to Seedlings, a

producer of Children's books, 25% would go to the local chapter, and 50% would be for the BELL Academy in the state. Numerous facets of BELL training were discussed with Seminar participants. These included but were not limited to: incident reports, background checks, contacts with parents and teachers of the Visually Impaired, and many other documents. Site visits may be conducted by national BELL leadership.

Anna Givens, BELL Coordinator for the District of Columbia described the first day learning shade training. In this training, the birth of Louis Braille is celebrated.

Melissa Riccobono, BELL Coordinator for Maryland spoke about, and led a discussion about the final day activities for the BELL academies. Patricia Maurer spoke about the BELL Academy and BELL X training for older students.

The afternoon session began with a panel discussion regarding travel training for BELL Academy students. Stephanie Martin from Louisiana Tech, and Maurice Peret emphasized the fact that one does not need to be certified in travel training to teach travel. This discussion was followed by two breakout sessions: one conducted by Al Manneki, CEO E.A.S.Y. Seminar participants learned about the use of an In Tact Sketchpad, drawing an airplane and a sand castle. Each student will be given a sketchpad as a take away for their training in the BELL Academy. The other session addressing the need for parent education was conducted by Carla McQuillan, NFB BELL Academy Coordinator. Parents need to know the importance of reading and writing Braille for their children.

The Saturday morning session opened with a discussion regarding field trips. Wendy Bybee, BELL Academy Coordinator and others shared their experiences taking students to Wells Fargo banks, where students learned about many facets of a bank's operation. They learned about sorting money, touring a vault, and using ATMs. MS. Bybee is the BELL Academy Coordinator from Utah.

Our next discussion was about the role of volunteers. The best volunteers are those who understand the capabilities of blind people, and have high expectations for the students in the BELL Academy.

Craig Cooper, a teacher with the Oregon BELL Academy discussed the residential BELL program at Oregon State University. Residential programs are more challenging since Academy staff are with the students 24 hours each day. Residential programs can have a positive benefit for the students due to the increased intensity of the training. Next, Mr. Cooper turned his attention to unpacking the One Minute message. Unpacking means, in this instance, making certain terms in this message clearly understandable for children participating in the Academy. The one-minute message is as follows: The National Federation of The Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people, because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back. The final morning session addressed what should be done with returning BELL Academy students. A review should be conducted to determine whether the student has retained what she has learned the previous year, see if the student has learned additional blindness skills during the year and press forward with additional training.

The afternoon began with meetings for state coordinators and teachers. We then discussed activities for students on rainy days. Many of these ideas can be found in the BELL curriculum. Finally, we discussed miscellaneous matters and topics for future BELL Academy seminars.

I always find the Advanced BELL Academy training to be quite instructive each year and I learn much from my colleagues participating in these seminars.

You and Your Cane

By Donna Wood

The relationship between you and Your cane is a very personal one. You love it at times and you hate it at times. The connection with your cane can and should become one of the closest relationships in your life. Your cane becomes a part of you. Think of it as an extension of you. Treat it as you would your leg or your arm. You would not take your right leg off and leave it somewhere and not remember. You would not take off your left arm and hand it to someone to put away for you. Don't do this with your cane either.

You need to know where your cane is at all times. If someone else stows it for you what happens when that person leaves and you need to take an important call but you can't answer while in the room. Worst case scenario, you have given your cane to someone else, they put it up and there is an emergency, you must get out of the room you are in, people panic and leave you, without telling you where your cane is. You are stuck and at someone else's mercy. If you keep track of your own cane then you are in charge of what happens to you.

When your cane is in your hand it is a part of you. It is inappropriate for someone else to grab or take hold of your cane, without your permission. Your cane should be so much a part of you that if someone else handles your cane they should be prepared to offer you marriage. Your relationship with your cane is that personal. Do not relinquish your cane to anyone unless compelled by law.

Your cane and you need to be respectful of those around you though. When stowing your cane make sure it is not in a walk way, where it can trip someone. On an airplane stow it along the

fuselage, if it is a straight cane. If it folds or collapses place it in your carry-on or in the compartment over your head. In a car slide it between the front seat and the door. On a bus or train, you may not be able to place it along the wall of the transport, so then you lean it against your shoulder, making sure the tip does not extend past your toes.

Most of all you and your cane should go on lots of adventures. Together you and your cane can “Live the Life You Want”.

North-Central Chapter Update By Rosa Bonnecarrere

The North-Central Chapter of the NFB of Kansas got its start out of the At Large chapter. On August 24th, 2018 we held our first chapter meeting. Since the North-Central chapter was constituted on our first chapter meeting, we have met and discussed NFB philosophy and held elections for officers for 2019. Those officers are Rosa Bonnecarrere, President: Anna Hindman, Vice President: Margaret Finger, Treasurer: and Sharon Luka, Secretary.

In our chapter meetings we have covered such topics as skill enrichment for cane use, technology and success in the community. In future our plans are to continue skills enrichment and focus on getting the word out about our meetings and growing the membership.

In October the chapter members participated in the White Cane Safety Day Walk. The first of December Margaret Finger passed out literature at the Shey Productions children’s magic show at the Salina Central Mall. Then on December 15th our members gathered at Korky’s Diner for our Christmas party. The party was a success and the staff stated that they enjoyed the members company.

In January of 2019 Rosa and Brian Bonnecarrere represented the North-Central chapter at the Washington Seminar. Unfortunately, due to inclement weather flights were canceled and rescheduled for an earlier departure. Therefore, they were only able to meet with one congressional representative, Roger Marshall. It was such a positive and learning experience that Rosa is looking forward to going again in the future.

The North-Central membership continues to grow at this time we have ten members. We meet at The McKensey Center at 308 W. Elm in Salina Kansas. The meetings are held the third Saturday of the month at 1:00 PM. If you are in our area please feel free to come and join us. For further details or questions about the meeting please call chapter President Rosa Bonnecarrere at Home 785-404-6759 or cell 785-502-0363.

The Washington Seminar Experience

By Ashley Neybert

There is truly nothing like the Washington Seminar experience. The Great Gathering In has a miniature National Convention type of feel where you get to see your friends and hear an update on the current happenings at our National Headquarters in Baltimore, but it is so much more than that. It is the chance to make a difference not just for yourself, but the blind of the nation and in some cases even in the world. For example, I went to the Washington Seminar that helped promote the Marrakesh Treaty which helps to share accessible books across borders. The Marrakesh Treaty is now active and it is a wonderful feeling to know that every time I pick up a book from another country that I had a part in bringing it here. It is nice to know that in that way I helped contribute to making the world a better place for blind people. When you go to Washington Seminar, you never know

whether or not your story is what will change the mind of a Congressperson towards accepting one of our proposed bills.

This Washington Seminar was especially cool for me as I got to be one of the team leaders. As the team leader it was my responsibility to make sure everyone got a turn to speak, knew their issues, make sure everyone made it to the meeting on time, and that if people got shy and didn't want to talk then I was to pick up to keep the conversation going. This was a first-time experience for me and honestly, I wasn't so sure of myself at the beginning. It is a truly empowering feeling when you are told by your state affiliate president that they believe you can handle it even when you are not sure yourself. That in mind, I decided to take a leap of faith and go for it and I am so glad that I did!

It is important to remember that even though you might not be able to tell if your representatives or senators agree with you or not and often times you might only meet with a staff person, but you never know what difference you might make with their experience regarding blind people in general. Even if they decide not to support these particular bills you should always know it was worth it because it expands their exposure to blind constituents and you will have an altogether good time!

It is also important to remember that the Washington Seminar experience doesn't just end with Washington Seminar. You should be in constant contact with your congresspeople throughout the year and you might even get a special encounter when flying back. On this particular trip on the way back from Washington Seminar I was seated next to Representative Cloud of Texas on my connecting flight to Houston where we got to talk a bit more about his questions on some of the bills and learn about his family as they're people too. The most important thing to remember is that no matter what you believe or your political affiliation, this is a chance to find unexpected alliances and realize that despite different viewpoints we're all trying to make the world into a

better place. Below you will find copies of the fact sheets that we presented to our Congressional Representatives.

Access Technology Affordability Act
THE COST OF CRITICALLY NEEDED ACCESS
TECHNOLOGY IS OUT OF REACH
FOR MOST BLIND AMERICANS

The high cost of access technology creates a difficult economic reality. Most access technology ranges from \$1,000 to \$6,000. For example, a leading screen reader is \$900, a popular Braille note taker is \$5,495, one model of a refreshable Braille display is \$2,795, and a moderately priced Braille embosser is \$3,695.

According to the United States Census Bureau 71 percent of blind Americans are either unemployed or underemployed.

Consequently, most blind Americans do not have sufficient financial resources needed to purchase these items. These financial barriers can ultimately lead to a loss of employment, insufficient education, or even isolation from community activities.

Medical insurance will not cover the cost of access technology. Current definitions of "medical care," "medical necessity," and "durable medical equipment" within common insurance policies do not include access technology. These definitions were adopted in the 1960s "when medical care was viewed primarily as curative and palliative, with little or no consideration given to increasing an individual's functional status." Many states' Medicaid programs and individual health insurance plans have adopted similar definitions and likewise will not cover the cost of access technology.

Access technology enables blind Americans to participate in today's workforce. Blindness is well-defined and measurable, but affects each person differently and at different ages. Since individuals' needs differ, manufacturers have designed various

tools that enable each blind American to perform tasks that they were once unable to accomplish themselves due to their blindness. Braille note takers are frequently used in schools, screen reading software allows workers to check their email at home, and screen magnification software can help seniors losing vision learn about community activities. Access technology equips blind Americans to seek employment and stay employed. For the 71 percent of blind Americans who are either unemployed or underemployed, it is a vehicle that facilitates the job seeking process. Despite this critical need however, public and private entities struggle to meet consumer demand. This leads to untimely delays in the delivery of necessary technology and ultimately harms the blind consumer.

Access Technology Affordability Act:

Makes access technology more affordable so that blind Americans can procure these items for themselves. It establishes a refundable tax credit for blind Americans in the amount of \$2,000 to be used over a three-year period to offset the cost of access technology. The credit created by ATAA will sunset after five years, and will be indexed for inflation.

Provides flexibility for individuals to obtain access technology based upon their specific needs. Accessibility requires an individualized assessment of one's own skills and needs. Therefore, blind Americans should be given the opportunity to procure access technology on their own to ensure that they are receiving the tools that are most useful for them.

Historically, Congress has implemented tax incentives (e.g., Disabled Access Credit) for business owners required to make accommodations, including access technology, for employees and patrons with disabilities. Even though Congress created these tax incentives to increase accessibility in the community, these incentives are underutilized. Meanwhile, blind Americans

primarily depend on public and private entities to procure access technology for them.

IMPROVE AFFORDABILITY OF CRITICALLY NEEDED ACCESS TECHNOLOGY NECESSARY FOR EMPLOYMENT AND INDEPENDENT LIVING.

For more information, contact:

Kimie Eacobacci, Government Affairs Specialist, National Federation of the Blind

Phone: 410-659-9314, extension 2441

Email: keacobacci@nfb.org

For more information visit www.nfb.org

Disability Employment Act

AN OUTDATED APPROACH TO EMPLOYMENT FAILS TO ADEQUATELY EQUIP WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES FOR THE CHALLENGES OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY.

The Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act (JWOD) is a well-intentioned but obsolete law intended to provide employment for people with disabilities through specialized government contracts. Enacted in 1938, the Wagner-O'Day Act required that government agencies prioritize the procurement of products produced by blind people. In 1971 the program was expanded to become the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act, and to include nonprofit agencies employing persons who are blind or have other severe disabilities. , While the originally intended goals of the program are noble, the current structure falls short of those ideals by failing to equip workers with the necessary skillsets to compete in the twenty-first century workforce.

The work experience provided by the AbilityOne Program does not utilize or teach the skills required for today's fast-paced digital work environment. Many workers with disabilities employed under the AbilityOne Program are assigned menial, repetitive tasks, which do nothing to equip them with the skills needed to succeed and advance in a modern workplace. As a result, many of these individuals find themselves trapped in these jobs for years, if not decades, with no real hope to advance or find new employment opportunities elsewhere.

The AbilityOne Program thrives on specialized contracts while at the same time paying employees with disabilities subminimum wages. Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, passed in 1938, authorizes the Secretary of Labor to issue Special Wage Certificates to certain entities, permitting them to pay workers with disabilities subminimum wages. The vast majority of 14(c)-certificate-holding entities are nonprofit "sheltered workshops" (segregated work environments) that pay over 300,000 workers with disabilities, some as little as pennies per hour. Additionally, the failure of the AbilityOne Commission to adequately manage its own financial resources and display an appropriate level of transparency has eroded public confidence in the program.

AbilityOne sheltered workshops create a segregated work environment that is antithetical to competitive integrated employment. The current structure requires that the majority of the work performed on AbilityOne contracts is carried out by employees with disabilities at specialized nonprofits. These specialized nonprofits create an artificially inclusive work environment. Additionally, the current structure incentivizes excluding workers with disabilities from advancement to administrative, managerial, or supervisory positions. This results in people with disabilities stagnating in the same job for years or decades without creating opportunities for advancement to employers outside the program. This model also fails by not

sharing best practices to employers outside the program in order to broaden its impact.

Disability Employment Act:

Will expand bidding opportunities within the program. The Disability Employment Act will allow for-profit as well as nonprofit entities to bid on contracts through a newly created commission.

Will ensure that workers earn at least the prevailing wage. The bill will prohibit the use of 14(c) certificates and will require employers to pay workers with disabilities at least the minimum wage, or if greater, the prevailing wage.

Will equip employers with the necessary tools and supports to integrate workers with disabilities. The bill establishes an Employment Integration Trust Fund to assist employers to meet reasonable accommodation requirements under Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Employers will have access to financial assistance to ensure that the technology they use is accessible; to train design, development, and manufacturing teams on best practices; and to provide the necessary supports required by individuals with other severe disabilities. This will improve disability employment practices across all sectors of employment.

Will better integrate with the Randolph-Sheppard Program. The bill will honor the Randolph-Sheppard Priority for all military dining contracts, including cafeterias.

Will eliminate the conflicts of interest and lack of accountability in the current program. The bill will change the composition of the commission, restructure the way the contracts are awarded, and create a trust fund to support the organic integration of workers with disabilities into the mainstream workforce.

INCREASE AND ENHANCE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

Sponsor the Disability Employment Act.

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Greater Accessibility and Independence through Nonvisual Access Technology (GAIN) Act

ADVANCED DIGITAL INTERFACES CREATE BARRIERS THAT PREVENT BLIND INDIVIDUALS FROM INDEPENDENTLY OPERATING ESSENTIAL DEVICES THAT ENHANCE QUALITY OF LIFE.

Home use medical devices, home appliances, and fitness equipment are becoming less and less accessible for blind Americans. The rapid proliferation of advanced technology is undeniable. Most new stoves, glucose monitors, and treadmills now require that consumers interact with a digital display, flat panels, and other user interfaces. This new technology is inaccessible to blind individuals and creates a modern-day barrier. Inaccessibility is not a mere inconvenience; it can threaten the safety, health, and independence of blind Americans.

Advancements in technology have the potential to transform how people live in a society but are designed for those with no

functional limitations. This flaw in product design limits options for blind Americans who need nonvisual access to important devices that are available to people without disabilities.

Nonvisual access is achievable, as demonstrated by a number of mainstream products. Apple has incorporated VoiceOver (a text-to-speech function) into its touch-screen products, making the iPhone, iPod, and iPad fully accessible to blind people right out of the box. Virtually all ATMs manufactured in the United States are accessible, and every polling place provides a nonvisual accessible voting machine. Frequently, a simple audio output or vibrotactile feature can make a product fully accessible at minimal cost.

Current disability laws are not able to keep up with advancements in technology. Although the Americans with Disabilities Act and other laws require physical accessibility for people with disabilities (e.g., wheelchair ramps, Braille in public buildings), no laws protect blind consumers' right to access technology such as home use medical devices, home appliances, or fitness equipment. The National Council on Disability concluded that accessibility standards lag behind the rapid pace of technology, which can interfere with technology access. This trend of inaccessibility will continue if accessibility solutions are ignored. Only a fraction of manufacturers have incorporated nonvisual access standards into their product design while others continue to resist these solutions.

Greater Accessibility and Independence through Nonvisual Access Technology Act:

Calls on the Access Board to conduct a nonvisual access standard review. The Access Board (an independent federal agency and leading source of information on accessible design) will review the

current marketplace, consult with stakeholders and manufacturers, and will issue a report with findings and recommendations for a minimum nonvisual access standard for home use medical devices, home appliances, and fitness equipment.

Establishes a minimum nonvisual access standard for home use medical devices, home appliances, and fitness equipment. Six months after the Access Board publishes the above-mentioned report, the Board will begin a rulemaking period, not to exceed 36 months, to establish a minimum nonvisual access standard for home use medical devices, home appliances, and fitness equipment. The final standard will go into effect three years after the final rule.

Authorizes the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to enforce the nonvisual access standards for home use medical devices. Under its authority to ensure the safety, efficacy, and security of medical devices, the FDA will investigate and prosecute violations of manufacturers who fail to comply with the standard.

Authorizes the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to enforce the nonvisual accessibility standards for home appliances and fitness equipment. Under its authority to investigate and enforce consumer protection matters, the FTC will investigate and prosecute violations of manufacturers who fail to comply with the standard.

END THE DIGITAL DIVIDE FOR BLIND AMERICANS.

Sponsor the Greater Accessibility and Independence through Nonvisual Access Technology Act.

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Senior Division Update By Dianne Hemphill

The NFBK Senior's division enters its third year with the following officers; Dianne Hemphill, division president; Susie Stanzel, division vice-president; Tom Anderson, division secretary, and Rob Tabor, division treasurer. Monthly tele-conference calls take place the fourth Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m.

This year's focus will include several topics around security. Our first guest presented lots of information about identity theft. Notes that can be useful to all have been sent out via home-on-the-range. Financial planning and new topics on training will also be on this year's calendar.

Please join us in our efforts to find and assist senior's around Kansas in working towards "living the life we want".

Here We Come Las Vegas! By Donna Wood

The convention of The National Federation of the Blind is the largest gathering of blind people in the world. It is the premier event for training, support and information for the blind community. It also serves as a governing body, democratically electing our leadership and establishing each year's organizational priorities.

This year's National Convention will be held from Sunday, July 7 to Friday, July 13, 2019. The location will be The Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino 3950 S. Las Vegas Blvd Las Vegas, Nevada 89119. To make reservations call 877-632-9001. For NFB convention attendees, the nightly rate for singles, doubles, triples, and quads is \$99. Hotel taxes are 13.38 percent and sales tax is 8.25 percent. The resort fee, normally \$37 a night, is waived for NFB convention attendees. However, fees for internet access, local and toll-free calls, and fitness center access might apply. You may make your reservations starting January 1, 2019.

Online preregistration will be available from March 1st to May 31, 2019. Registration will also be available on site in Las Vegas.

For further details on the Hotel and its amenities and a brief outline of each day's activities of the convention please go to nfb.org. A full agenda will be posted in June. The NFB of Kansas hopes you are able to join us in Las Vegas in July.

Mark Your Calendars By Donna Wood

The National Federation of the Blind of Kansas would like to announce this year's state convention will be in Salina, Kansas. We will assemble in convention November 1, 2, and 3, 2019. The location will be The Hilton Garden Inn and Convention Center Salina. The address is 3320 S. 9th St. Salina KS 67401. The telephone number is (785) 309-0440. Room rates are \$109.00 per night.

Here is just a little about the hotel. The Hilton Garden Inn Salina offers and ideal location just off the I-135, the south side of Salina. The state-of-art hotel is the first of its kind in the city. From electronic locks you can control with your phone, to sensor-

controlled thermostats which detect body temperature. The hotel has it covered. Relax and refresh in one of the stylish guest rooms. Every room boasts modern amenities including WIFI access, microwave, mini-fridge and an innovative Garden Sleep system registered bed. Enjoy delicious American favorites at the Great American Grill or stock up on snacks from the 24-hour pavilion pantry. The hotel also has a heated indoor pool and a fitness center. So mark your calendars and plan on attending the annual state convention of the NFB of Kansas. See you there!