

**TAP TRACKS**

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

**Autumn / Winter 2023**

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Please submit materials for the Spring / Summer 2024 issue of TAP TRACKS by February 15th 2024 to:

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

-- Tom Page

Greetings Kansas federationists and friends,

This writing comes at a time of sadness, celebration, excitement, and resolve  We mourn the loss of our leader and colleague Tom Anderson as we celebrate our great time in Houston at the National convention, get ready for our state convention in November, and continue to do what we all do to improve the lives of blind Kansans.

In brief, over 30 Kansans attended our national convention.  I look forward to hearing from members about their experiences.  We will collaborate in November on how to best bring home what we learned in Texas.

I cannot be more excited to announce that our National President, Mark Riccobono will attend this year’s convention and serve in the role of national representative. It has been many years since we have had the opportunity to host  our national leader. Susie Stanzel informed me that Dr. Marc Maurer did come to our Kansas convention back in 2002. In addition to our other convention planning and our senior’s workshop; this will be a not to be missed event.

We will review the actions of the last year and strategize on how to achieve progress in gaining newsline funding, bringing an end to sub-minimum wages for disabled workers in Kansas, improving access to and strengthening the services available to blind Kansans.  I look forward to meeting you in Wichita!

Read on for more on these topics and much much more….

Consult our recently refreshed website ([www.nfbks.org](http://www.nfbks.org)) for information and updates on the upcoming Kansas convention.

Please sign up for our email list by visiting [www.nfbnet.org](http://www.nfbnet.org)  and  signing up for the [home-on-the-range](mailto:home-on-the-range@nfbnet.org) list.

WHAT? ALREADY!

 --Donna Wood

Yes friends, spring has sprung, summer is cooling and autumn is approaching.  What this means is The National Federation of The Blind of Kansas state convention will soon be here.  The NFBKS will hold its annual state convention this November 3rd, 4th, and 5th, 2023.  We will convene at the Holiday Inn Wichita East I35 at 549 S. Rock Road Wichita, KS 67207.  Reservations can be made by calling (316) 686-7131.  Room rates are $125.00 per night and breakfast is included in the price.  Deadline for room reservations is October 16, 2023.  The hotel sits on the corner of Rock Road and Kellogg, just about a mile from the I-35 exit.  The affiliate is honored to welcome President Mark Riccobono as the National Representative.  You will find his bio following this article.

The convention will begin at 9:00 AM Friday morning with a Senior Workshop.  Which will run until 4:00 PM.  Lunch will be included in the workshop.  There will be a flier included in this newsletter with further information on the workshop.

Following the Senior Workshop, you can head to the registration table then on to hospitality.  If you are not hungry yet you can check out the Vendors hall.  Then at 7:00 PM join us for resolutions and immediately following will be the nominating committee meeting.  All are welcome at both meetings.

The theme of this year’s state convention is “Informed Choice”.  Saturday will focus on this theme with presenters from different agencies, community programs and resources.

After a day of presentations, the evening will bring delicious food and a keynote address brought by the National Representative.  Once the banquet is over the fun continues.  Charlie Wilks will perform for an hour.  Then the South-Central will hold a fundraiser.  Keep reading in this newsletter for details on the fundraiser.  It’s going to be a BLAST!  Stick around Sunday for our business meeting in the morning.

The State Convention is a good way to get information, make contacts, network and build relationships that can change your life.  So, come and join us for the weekend.  Preregistration is $5.00 it will be $10.00 at the door.  Lunch is $20.00 and banquet is $25.00.  A registration form is included in this newsletter.  See you in November!

LIVE THE LIFE YOU Want!

Mark A. Riccobono

Born in 1976, Mark Riccobono is the only child of two hard-working parents of modest means. Both were high school graduates, and, although they encouraged their son and gave him an example of what persistence and hard work could do, they had no experience of higher education and no familiarity with blindness.

Riccobono was diagnosed as legally blind at the age of five, glaucoma being the disease that took his sight. Although he knew he had a vision problem, as a child he never felt limited in what he could do. Being an only child just meant he relied more on friends, and his elementary years have left him with good memories. He benefited from going to his neighborhood school because his contact with children was not just at school but in play, birthday celebrations, and school holidays. His low vision meant he sometimes had to work harder, but the print was large, he got a seat in the front of the room, his teachers did what they could to help, and his friends were comfortable with their buddy who didn't see quite as well as they did. "I was comfortable in my own skin, and that made others around me comfortable as well." The obstacles he faced and the fact that he had some limitations simply emphasized that he should do what his parents did when things got tough: they just worked hard and powered through, and powering through became an indispensable part of his personality.

Riccobono got a very good elementary education, but found himself in a rough middle school. It was probably what would be called a failing school today. Many of his elementary school friends went to other middle schools, so his social network began to evaporate. Now there were new friends to make and already established groups who had reservations about adding new members to their circles, and this further added to what was already a difficult transition. The year before he entered the school there had been a stabbing, and little emphasis was placed on academic success. This was the place where he learned to stay under the radar, to isolate himself from others, and to decide his place was in the back of the classroom, where he was less likely to be noticed or called on. There were no services to deal with vision loss, and the only accommodation he can recall receiving was a special lock for his locker that he could operate. Without a good way to read and to see the blackboard, he learned to rely on memory, but even a good memory could not consistently deliver good test scores, and he believes that sometimes he was simply passed.

Riccobono remembers that he was sometimes challenged to do better and that often it was the math teachers who would ask more of him. But he was all too frequently allowed just to exist there in the back of the room with the students least likely to raise their hands, shout out answers, or be called upon by the classroom teacher. Riccobono describes this as learning to “be a passenger in my own life.”

To add to the difficulty of middle school, surgeries for glaucoma in eighth grade not only caused him to miss school, but eventually cost him a significant amount of the little vision he had. An uncle who observed these futile attempts asked his nephew, "What are you going to do if it doesn't work? What will you do if you don't get vision back?" "I began to ask myself with each surgery whether we might not be chasing the unreachable dream," Riccobono said. A surgery performed to burn off some of the scar tissue proved to be too effective, destroying the vision in his left eye and eventually causing it to shrink.

So Riccobono went into high school totally blind in one eye and with little vision in the other. In Milwaukee one could choose a high school based on its specialty, and Riccobono chose the one that emphasized business and becoming an entrepreneur. Unbeknownst to him when he made his choice, this school had a resource room for blind students. This was the first time he had considered that there might be others facing the challenges that made school difficult.

Riccobono is glad he chose to attend the high school emphasizing business. The teachers saw potential in him, and, for the first time in a long time, he found himself surrounded by people who believed he had capacity. "High school was better than middle school had been; it had some very good teachers who believed in my capacity, and it had people who worked to mentor me. They didn't understand where blindness fit into my career possibilities, but they knew how to teach, saw potential in me, and were determined to cultivate it."

He joined DECA, an association founded in 1946 to prepare emerging leaders and entrepreneurs. In this organization he engaged in competitions in public speaking, marketing, and creating a business plan. As a high school senior, he was involved in statewide competition, where he won first place in public speaking and earned himself the opportunity to compete in national competitions representing the state of Wisconsin. During that same year he started a school based business selling sports cards based on a business plan he developed the previous year.

After high school Riccobono arrived at the University of Wisconsin with a folding cane, a laptop computer with no screen-reading or screen-enlargement software, and a closed circuit television to enlarge paper documents. "I had to study a lot because I read slowly and memorization was the key to any success I might enjoy.” But even with the extreme focus he placed on academics, Riccobono hit the wall in his sophomore year and almost failed a computer class because he had no access to the machines. Eventually his rehabilitation counselor sent him for a technology evaluation, and the use of speech and other technology was recommended. At this point Riccobono started reaching out to other blind people, knowing that, if some of them were successful, they had to be doing something he was not. He knew that the barriers he was facing were real and that he was making a significant effort to overcome them, but he was learning that effort alone was not enough: he needed techniques, strategies, and building on the experiences of others. So it was that he came to find the National Federation of the Blind, won a state scholarship, and attended the national convention in 1996. "A lot of what I heard at the convention resonated with me—gave me real hope—but I wasn't sure it was real because I hadn't had the chance to test it myself. But whatever skepticism I had, the truth is that my predominant emotions were excitement and hope that what these people were saying was true. For the first time in my life it was clear to me that in this group it didn't matter how much or how little I could see. In this group no one ever asked or tried to limit where I could go. For the first time I didn't feel as though I had to decide what I would or would not do based on my vision."

In the summer after he found the Federation, Riccobono learned Braille, started using the white cane, and came to understand that blind people used other techniques that might help him. He immediately began testing what the Federation said about blindness and encouraged other students to do the same. In the fall of 1996 he founded and became the first president of the Wisconsin Association of Blind Students (a division of the NFB of Wisconsin). He also began rebuilding his dreams. He secured employment with the disability resource center on campus and coordinated the delivery of accessible materials to other students. Riccobono also began expanding his participation in the campus community, knowing that blindness was not the thing that held him back but rather his own low expectations learned over many years. Among his new activities Riccobono became the first blind person at the university to be certified to independently sail one-person sail boats in the Hoofers Sailing Program on Lake Mendota.

Riccobono finished college in May of 1999 with a degree in business administration, majoring in marketing and minoring in economics. He interviewed with Sears in his senior year of college and already had a job offer in hand when he graduated. While attending the Washington Seminar, people asked what he intended to do between his graduation in May and the start of his new job in August. They suggested he use this time for training. Finding the advice sound, he attended the Colorado Center for the Blind. There he worked on attitudes and skills and had a chance to test some of the Federation ideas he had thought about with such hope. He found they had verity in his life.

After training with Sears, Riccobono moved to Oak Creek, Wisconsin, where he rented an apartment about three blocks from where he had grown up. At this point he was feeling good about himself: a college graduate with a job, living on his own, and the recently elected president of the National Federation of the Blind of Wisconsin, having won that post in 1998. Before his election a proposal had been advanced to close the state's school for the blind. Riccobono was appointed to serve on an advisory committee charged with transforming the institution from a school to a center where ten programs serving the blind would be housed, one of them being the school for the blind. Riccobono learned from the Federation that his true passion was not necessarily business (although he exhibits the thinking of an entrepreneur in everything he does) but rather education and building innovative educational programs. When the Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired was established, Riccobono was hired as its director shortly before his twenty-fourth birthday. He headed an agency with a budget of six million dollars and began to implement programs that required more of staff and students, consistent with the expectations of blind people he found in the Federation. He worked at the Wisconsin Center for three and a half years, and an audit ordered by the implementing legislation gave the new center good marks and was the best the school had received in over a decade. But Riccobono found making changes at the center painfully slow and thought that his focus on improving education would be better served by working on a national level. Having concluded that Riccobono possessed some skills that would be valuable at the Jernigan Institute, President Maurer hired him, and he and his wife Melissa (a strong leader, advocate, and educator in her own right) moved to Baltimore. After working for some time in education, he became the executive director of the Jernigan Institute, a position he held until his election as the President of the National Federation of the Blind in July of 2014. In his Federation work he has led a number of critical initiatives including: establishment of the National Center for Blind Youth in Science, building a national mentoring program, expanding Braille literacy programs including the NFB Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning program, development of cutting-edge technologies including a car that a blind person can drive (the NFB Blind Driver Challenge®), many advocacy priorities, affiliate-building projects, and serving as a point person for key relationships with NFB partners.

Mark and Melissa have three children: Cynthia born in December 2006, Oriana born in May 2010, and Elizabeth born in June 2012, all of whom are growing up in the Federation. Two of their daughters both carry the same eye condition that Mark has, but they will have greater opportunities than their dad because of their connection to the National Federation of the Blind. With the emphasis on social media, YouTube, and communication that goes beyond the written word, his family and their activities have been more visible than those of earlier leaders. "While as a family we draw some lines, we are generally pretty comfortable with letting people know what we are doing, the message being that we lead normal lives and do the same things others with children do. We try to show people what we have learned—that blindness does not prevent us from being the kind of parents we want to be and from living the lives we want." Riccobono is always building—his social media presence frequently shows him engineering new creations out of Legos with his children.

When asked about his responsibilities as the newly elected President of the National Federation of the Blind and whether it is scary trying to fill the shoes of former President Maurer, Riccobono says, "It isn't so much trying to fill someone's shoes as building on a foundation. It is a tremendous responsibility to figure out how to go farther, to strengthen the movement, to lead in such a way that we go forward and build on what we have been given. My challenge is to meet the expectations of folks who have given a lot and have been around a long time, to meet their expectations and let them know they are still wanted, valued, and needed, while at the same time recognizing that the world is changing, that the organization must continue to evolve, and assuring people that these requirements are not in conflict but a part of continuing to exist and thrive. I worry less about the shoes I must fill or the comparisons that will be made than I do about figuring out how to lead us in the miles we must go, preserving the resources we have, while spending enough of them to make the world what we want it to be. I feel grateful that Dr. Maurer recognizes my challenge—he has had to face it in his own transition and Presidency, and I feel confident that most of our members understand this too. The nature of this office demonstrates daily just how far we have to go, and, although we have a tremendous organization and significant resources, we have just a fraction of what we need to do the work that remains. "In accepting the Presidency of this organization, I pledged to give all of my energy, my creativity, and my love to our movement. This is how I intend to pay it back, pay it forward, and make a future full of opportunity for blind people. I have no illusions that this will be easy, but I have every expectation that it will happen when all of us pull together to create the kind of future in which we truly live the lives we want."

INFORMED CHOICE and the HOLY GRAIL

– Rob Tabor

In just a few short weeks we will gather in Wichita for the NFB of Kansas 2023 state convention featuring a theme of "Informed Choice.”

But this begs the question as to what does "informed choice” mean? To answer this pressing question, it is imperative to place this crucial concept into its proper context. Obviously, the concept of informed choice can be broadly applied to a wide variety of situations, this article will examine the concept of informed choice within the context of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services for the blind or otherwise disabled.

We begin our exploration of informed choice by noting that this is a legally required process as set forth in section 102(d) of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended in 1998. This statute places VR agencies under the following requirements:

• assist applicants and eligible individuals in exercising informed choice in making decisions related to the provision of assessment services;

• assist applicants and eligible individuals in exercising informed choice in making decisions related to the provision of assessment services;

• provide or assist eligible individuals in acquiring information that enables them to exercise informed choice in the development of their individualized plans for employment (IPE) with respect to the selection of the employment outcome, VR services and service providers, the employment setting and the settings in which the services will be provided, and methods for procuring services;

• develop and implement flexible procurement policies and methods that facilitate the provision of services and afford eligible individuals, meaningful choices among procurement methods; and

• ensure that the availability and scope of informed choice is consistent with the obligations of the VR agency.

See <https://rsa.ed.gov/sites/default/files/subregulatory/pd-01-03.pdf>

In addition to these legal requirements, The US Department of Education's implementing regulations at 34 CFR 361.52(c) specify the minimum information about services and service providers that must be provided by the State VR agency to applicants and eligible individuals during the process of developing the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE.) The information must include: the cost, accessibility, and duration of services; the types of services; the degree to which service settings are integrated; the qualifications of service providers; and, to the extent available, information about consumer satisfaction with those services. The regulations also suggest various methods and sources for acquiring information about services and providers.

Even from this cursory review of the applicable laws and regulations, there is much more to informed choice than meets the ear. These formidable requirements might even set off a migraine to a VR counselor who is trying to be conscientious about full compliance.

As for consumers of VR services, even a thorough study of these laws and regulations can still leave some questions unanswered; e.g., how informed is informed? For example, the VR counselor may offer Envision and Alpha Pointe as optional centers for training in pre-vocational blindness skills such as braille, orientation and mobility, access technologies, home management, and job-seeking. Such a limited list of blindness skills training options may well comply with the letter of the informed choice legal requirements, but not with the spirit of the laws and regulations pertaining to informed choice. A very recently blinded person may not be aware of other blindness skills training centers such as the Nebraska Orientation and Adjustment Center, BLIND Inc., the Colorado Center for the Blind, and the Louisiana Center for the Blind.

By now we can all appreciate the difficulty in grasping the concept of informed choice in its fullness. Put another way, any attempt to grasp the full nature and spirit of informed choice can seem if we are on the quest for the elusive holy grail. Hopefully, these following takeaways will help us to sift out the most important things amidst the arcanities of the legal and bureaucratic morass.

• In enacting the informed choice provisions of the Rehabilitation Act, Congress intended for the VR client and applicant to interact with state VR agency personnel as a full partner in all phases of the VR process.

• Informed choice places responsibility on the counselor, the agency, and the client for bringing the desired outcomes to fruition.

• Accordingly, VR clients and applicants are wise to ask if all available options have been presented.

• Last and not least, the National Federation of the Blind and its Kansas affiliate are available and ready to assist you to assure that you receive quality VR services. If you are experiencing any problems with the Kansas Division of Rehabilitation Services (KRS), you may contact the Kansas affiliate president Tom Page by email at topage@swbell.net, or by phone at (316) 734 -4839.

SOUTH-CENTRAL CHAPTER; A YEAR IN REVIEW

– Roshunda J. Holt

  It has been an exciting year for the South-Central Chapter. This is my first year as president, which I humbly accepted once our very own Emily Schlenker stepped down to vigorously pursue her pharmaceutical degree. Along with me becoming president, my role as Vice President became filled by Brandon Keith Murphy. He and his lovely wife Ridda just celebrated their first year in marital bliss back in June and have successfully upgraded their living situation as of this August! We are lucky to have a lady VP within our chapter. Ridda truly makes sure Brandon, and I are well informed about things needed for our constituents and she’s essential in the growth of our members as well. She was successful in organizing an amazing popcorn fundraiser that had a profitable turnaround. Ridda has also accepted a new position at Envision Inc. in the WIC call center, offering quality customer service to those in need. What a wonderful year of accomplishments for some of our other members as well. Alison Roets is thriving in her call center position at Meritrust and Lauren Bush completed her culinary degree at Butler college and is now employed at WSU in their food service facility. Curtis Jackson has become the newest member in our chapter and is very active in the participation of our fundraisers and meetings. He even accompanied us when we hosted Jeanetta Price when she came down and presented her A Write to Heal seminar at both Envision Arts Gallery and the Mulberry Arts Gallery. Jeanetta even spent time with some of our chapter members in a cozy meet and greet the Envision Arts Gallery hosted for us. Also, as aforementioned, Emily Schlenker is breaking through all the pharmaceutical barriers to pave the way for future BVI that carry the same passion to work in the field of medicine. I would also like it to be known that our Treasurer of the South-Central chapter, newly elected national board member and our Kansas state affiliate President, Mr. Tom Page has a band named the Haymakers! This cool musical ensemble is coming out with not only their third but also fourth CD before the year’s end. Make sure to get one for yourself and just a few more to give as gifts to your friends this Holiday. That way you can all be singing your favorite Haymaker hits while bringing in the new year! The NFB South-Central chapter in Wichita KS still meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 6pm until 8pm at the Lower Level of the Envision Inc. building on Main St. We hybrid these meetings so you can always join in via zoom if you want to participate but cannot obtain the transportation to get to us in person. I am excited to see what the future holds for everyone in the South-Central chapter. We are a fun group of lively individuals striving to make a better life for ourselves and those around us. We welcome anyone who desires to join our small group of wonderful people and are excited to meet you!

ANNOUNCEMENT

This year’s state convention will have a change to our post banquet celebration. We will be having Charlie Wilks, a solo vocalist and guitar player, perform for one hour. Then we will be hosting a South-Central Chapter fundraiser in the form of a karaoke night! You can pay one dollar to request a song to be played by the DJ, our very own Laridda Williams-Murphy, or five dollars to perform a song. At the end of the night a panel will vote on the best performance and the individual chosen will win a prize! If you are planning to perform a song, please send your request to Alison at aroets1750@gmail.com a week in advance, so that the karaoke versions of the songs can be found ahead of time. There will be somebody at the post banquet get together collecting cash in person for song, requests or you can send donations, to the PayPal account (treasurer@nfbks.org.) with a memo saying it is for the South-Central Chapter fundraiser

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DO I REALLY NEED TO USE MY CANE?

(When I do use my cane, do I act more blind than I really am?)

– Bruce Roberds

I was seventeen years old and on a family camping/fishing trip.  I was baiting my fishing hook when my step mother noticed me and told my dad to go help me with that because she was afraid I was going to put the hook through my nose.  At that point she promised herself that she was going to make me a doctor appointment as soon as we got back home.  Long story short, I was diagnosed with Juvenile Macular Degeneration now called Stargartz. I was not introduced to the white cane until I was well into my fifties, and when I do use it, I often wonder if people watching me might think I am a fraud and that I really don’t need to be using it.

Thinking back, I was probably losing my vision slowly about a year before my diagnosis.  I was starting to have to get closer to things to be able to see them clearly but not significant enough to really pay it much attention.  I was blessed with the fact that at such a young age and the slow progression of my vision loss I was able to adapt very well, but I did have some struggles with things I couldn’t do and some things I should not have done.

I continued to drive a car for about fifteen years, I had a couple of minor fender benders which I can now say were both directly attributable to vision loss but at the time I was in denial.  I had many more close calls but I was still in denial about my vision loss being a problem.  I tried to go to college to study accounting, but when I could not see to read the books, I gave that up; at least for the time.  I bought a motor boat for water skiing; this was a lot of fun but I did have some close calls with this also, fortunately no major mishaps before I gave it up.  I went to work at Beech Aircraft.  I primarily worked in the warehouse counting parts and reading part numbers.  I kept this job for thirty-two years, ten of which I was a full time union official.  During periods of layoff I worked for two years as an accountant at KU Medical School handling payroll, accounts payable, and all of the petty cash accounts.  I worked for a year as an Emergency Medical Technician on a non emergency ambulance service.  I also worked for a little more than a year as a manager at a McDonald’s restaurant.  While working at Beech I also served as the Chief Financial Officer for the local lodge of the machinist union.

Ok, enough of my background story; let’s get on with how I was introduced to the white cane and my experiences with it and without it. Many people who read this article probably know Roshunda.  I had known her for a few years before she introduced me to my first white cane.  She called me one day and said she wanted to come over and tell me about this new place she had found that was helping her deal with her vision loss.  Of course, I had her over and listened to her story but I was not interested in it for me, by this time I was in my early fifties and was getting along just fine.  Turns out the place she wanted to tell me about was Envision.  I knew about Envision; I told her, they have a store where they sell magnifiers and talking phones and some other things and I had been there a couple of times.  We talked for a while and before she left she wanted to gift me a white cane.  I assured her I did not need it but she was insistent.  That cane found its way to the top shelf of my closet where it stayed.  Sometime later I had a need for a new talking phone so I went to the store at Envision.  This time there was a different person working the counter than who I had seen there before.  She actually worked up on the second floor.  At that time the store was located just inside the doors on the first floor.  She wanted to introduce me to some of the other services they had to offer and enticed me by saying that I could probably get what I came after for free through a grant.  I made an appointment and got to meet Dr. Fletcher along with Karen, Andra, Terees, and others.  I cannot say enough nice things about all of these people and what they do, but this is about the white cane so I will skip to Michael who was the Orientation and Mobility person at the time.  Michael introduced me to my second white cane and provided me with some formal training on how to properly use it.  I still would not use the cane very much, but thought maybe I should try to use it whenever I was using paratransit or the handicap parking decal, both of which Michael helped me obtain.

I increased my activities with Envision including attending the Adult Support Group where I met Bonnie and Hannah, some more wonderful people doing wonderful things.  Then Roshunda tells me there is another group we should also be a part of, The National Federation of the Blind.  My response was but are we really blind enough to be a part of that group?  Her response was oh yes!  She had already been to a convention in Florida and we will be just fine.  So, we both went to our first meeting of the South Central Chapter and we met some wonderful people there who were living life and doing everything independently, some using canes and some using dogs.  There were blind people there who were retired, some full time gainfully employed, some attending college, and one who was the chapter president studying to be a pharmacist.  That one still blows my mind! I am so proud to know her and I applaud all of her accomplishments.  I had gone to the meeting with cane in hand thinking that if I am going to an NFB meeting I should at least look the part.  I soon put it away again though.  This group did not require me to use a cane to be a part of their group but assured me that I was plenty blind enough to join the NFB.  I have to say though, watching this group of blind people navigate using their canes was quite inspirational.  This still did not mean I needed to use my cane more because by all accounts I could see everyone was still blinder than me.

I gradually started using my cane a little more than just when I thought people were watching me use paratransit or a handicap parking stall or to make sure I get the extra help I might need in an airport to find my gate or where to find public transportation at the airport.  Eventually I tried to use the cane even more in public if for no other reason than to identify myself as visually impaired in case I need a little help with something visually or just in case I walk too close to a stranger in the grocery store and invade their space they won’t be near as offended as if they think I am just being rude or obnoxious. One time at a casino I was trying to use a ticket cashing machine and was getting too close to it trying to read the instructions. Security surrounded me like I was trying to do something to the machine.  My cane might have come in handy that day (only to show that I am visually impaired).

Now that I have established more reasons to use my cane more often there is another stigma that worries me.  Do I act more blind than I really am when using the cane?  Should I act more blind than I really am when using my cane?  I will tap my cane down the aisle of the paratransit but acting like the cane will help me find the steps as I disembark the bus, but I know exactly where the steps are and can see the layout of the bus just fine.  But is someone watching me?  Am I using proper cane technique as I walk the isles of the grocery store?  On long store outings I might get lazy and forget to sweep my cane in front of me, I might start to just push it in front of me or start picking it up and setting it down beside me as I walk.  Is somebody watching me?  I might go off and leave it at a restaurant or someplace else I was sitting.  Is somebody watching me?  I required an escort to get to my gate at the airport and after they leave, I need to go to the restroom by myself.  Is somebody watching me?  If I am in a public place and I drop something and I am able to reach down and pick it up without a problem finding it.  Is somebody watching me?  Someone offers a greeting a: hello or good morning” or is offering some help with something, as I answer I look up and make eye contact with that person.  Is that person watching me?

I do not have any formal education in blindness training or extra initials behind my name that says I am an expert but I am living the life of a visually impaired person and so I do have an opinion about the two questions in the title of this article, and that answer to both is YES.  As I said earlier I lived a lot before I was ever introduced to the cane and even then did not fully embrace it for a long time, so I am still trying to form the habit of taking it with me wherever I go but I do still forget it sometimes.  I want to try to take it everywhere though because I never know what I might run into that would make navigation easier with it.  My cane is particularly helpful in public places where I am around people who will think I am just rude or antisocial when they cannot tell that I am blind.  As far as acting more blind when using my cane to navigate steps or other obstacles that I can see, that is OK too.  I am practicing my cane skills and good sage traveling technique.  After all, I never know when my cane will help me by detecting something I did not see.  I have stumbled sometimes when there is a step but no color contrast or other markings such as handrails to indicate a step exists.  When it comes to wondering if someone is watching and maybe thinking, is he really blind enough to be using that cane?  I have decided that I must do what comes natural to me.  If someone questions my blindness I am not to fault them after all as this article is all about, I questioned it for myself as well, instead I will seek the opportunity to have a conversation with them and educate them as I have been educated throughout this process of accepting and using my cane.  Blindness is not a one size fits all where either you are blind or you’re not.  What I like to tell people who raise the question is that blindness covers a large spectrum form legally blind to totally blind and all points in between, as well as people with center vision loss, those with peripheral vision loss, those with night blindness or color blindness, those whose vision randomly comes and goes, and other characteristics I am not aware of.  Many people who are considered blind have more than one of the characteristics.

I know this is a long article but I think each piece is important to tell about where I came from and where I am today with my white cane.  I was inspired to write this article by a couple of different workshops that were presented on Hadley.edu. (Thank you Sharon for sharing the Hadley experience on Home-on-the-range).  I was also inspired by a couple of people who have questions along these same lines.  Linda, being one of those who wanted to talk to me one day about how I cope with needing the cane sometimes but not all of the time and how do I handle people who are watching me and thinking I am not really blind.  (Like I had all of the answers).  I shared with her some of my experiences as I have shared in this article, and then encouraged her to continue using her cane as much as she can get comfortable with and represent the blind community and help educate the whole general community about blindness.

JAYHAWK CHAPTER UPDATE

– Rob Tabor

Since our last update the Jayhawk chapter has resumed in person meetings supplemented by teleconference participation. Our in person meetings, which had been held at Mi Ranchito Mexican restaurant, has now migrated to La Tropicana Mexican restaurant, at least for the time being. This came about because Mi Ranchito was forced to vacate its premises to make way for a What-a-Burger franchise in which Kansas City Chiefs superstar quarterback Patrick Mahomes is a partial investor. We do not know when or where Mi Ranchito will reopen.

We had a very enjoyable summer social on Saturday, June 17 at La Tropicana. It was a wonderfully warm day for dining on the large patio. It was a real delight to get acquainted with Joy Polson, a prospective new member whom president Renee Morgan met on the city paratransit bus. Joy is keenly interested in the work of the Federation, and we hope she becomes a member by the time you read this edition of "TapTracks."

We gave ourselves a summer vacation during July on account of national convention. Then at our August meeting we began the process of planning activities for Meet The Blind Month (MTBM). We plan to make an appearance before the Lawrence City Commission to offer a mayoral MTBM and White Cane Awareness Day proclamation in early to mid-October. We are also looking toward a possible trivia night fundraiser, provided we can find a suitable venue.

The Jayhawk chapter meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 4-00 PM at La Tropicana at 434 Locust Street in North Lawrence, at least for the foreseeable future. For more information about the chapter, we invite you to log onto the Kansas affiliate website at

https:/www.nfb.org

You may also contact chapter president Renee Morgan by email at rmorgan@willowdvcenter.org or by phone at (785) 424-4734.

SENIOR’S  DIVISION UPDATE

– Dianne Hemphill

The National Federation of the Blind of Kansas (NFBKS) Senior’s Division has been particularly busy these past few months. Several of our active seniors went to Washington D.C. earlier in the year to discuss critical legislation for the blind.  This was the 2023 Washington Seminar where, once again, face- to -face meetings with  our elected officials took place.

Our monthly call in meetings included such diverse topics and speakers as:  Kim Moore of WSU continuing education available for seniors statewide; Debby Gibs of Hawaii, who provides monthly call-in discussions supporting the learning and use of Braille. Debby was an audiologist that taught Braille and other subjects at the Hawaiian adult rehabilitation center following her vision loss: and, a representative of AA support provided during the national conventions for those working on their 12 step programs.

The big project this year is the planning for a senior hands-on, one day introduction of useful skills, workshop on November 3rd, 2023. This is the Friday prior to the NFBKS state convention in Wichita. The officers of the Senior’s Division are looking forward to this chance to have a hands-on opportunity for seniors and a family member. The work stations will include demonstrations and hands on in the areas of interest, will include:  managing medications and non-visual ways to take care of some of your health monitoring; using the iPhone and other useable telephone options, with accessibility techniques, home management ideas, considerations for learning Braille, signing up for Newsline, which has accessible  newspapers and magazines and, the opportunity to experience the use of the white cane for safety and mobility. Lunch will be provided. Space is limited so place your registration with Dianne Hemphill at diannehemphill@cox.net or call 316.201.1323. Workshop registration goes from Monday, October 2 through Friday, October 20, 2023. Hope to see you there!  Look for the informational flier called, Informed Choice, also in this newsletter.

“INFORMED CHOICE"

The National Federation of the Blind of Kansas invites you to join us in a 1-day workshop for seniors 55 and older who are blind or experiencing difficulties in daily living due to vision loss.

Date:  Friday November 3, 2023

Time:  9-00 AM – 4:00 PM

Place:  Holiday Inn Wichita EAST I-35, 549 S Rock Road, Wichita, Kansas 67207

Are you blind or losing your eyesight with a corrected visual acuity of 20/70 or less and is this vision loss causing problems with everyday living? If so, this skill-building workshop may assist you in finding available resources in your community and introduce technologies that promote independence. Presented by blind/low vision individuals already living a more independent life.

We will feature presentations, demonstrations, and provide hands-on experience in

•  managing and organizing your home for safe navigation

•  using the long white cane for safe mobility, including additional transportation options

•  identifying and organizing medicines; talking scales, and other talking products

•  identifying and handling money to include bill paying

•  accessible smartphone options

•  obtaining free audible access via telephone to newspapers and magazines if you are legally blind

•  each participant can look forward to receiving a free resource sheet

Registration is open Monday, October 2 to Friday, October 20, 2023.

You MUST pre-register by contacting:

Dianne Hemphill at (316)201-1323 or by e-mail to: diannehemphill@cox.net

Please include “NFB workshop registration” in the subject line as well as:

• your full name, mailing address, phone number, and email address

• Your visual acuity (cannot be better than 20/70 with correction to qualify for this workshop)

• There is no charge, donations are gratefully accepted to help us defray expenses.

• Lunch will be provided.

• Space will be limited, so advance registration is required. Feel free to bring one relative or friend with you and please provide their contact information.

Neither blindness nor age, or the combination of the two, should stop you from living the life you want.

Come join us and let us have fun and learn together. We are the senior blind of the National Federation of the Blind, living the life we choose! We want to help you realize the possibilities!

Read more about our organization: nfb.org

Also, ask about the National Federation of the Blind of Kansas (NFBKS) convention following the workshop on

Saturday-Sunday, November 4-5, 2023, at the same hotel:

PLEASE Do not call the hotel about this workshop.

For questions and/or assistance with registration, please contact

Dianne Hemphill at the above telephone number or e-mail address.

NFBKS IN COMMUNITIES OF FAITH OVERVIEW

– Donna Wood

We began our year with a lesson on When We Face troubled Times.  What does the Bible say we are to do when we have trials and tribulations in our life.  There are many scriptures in the bible that cover this subject.  We spent time in Psalm, Proverbs and Isaiah in this study.

In our next meeting we heard and were blessed by the testimony of two new members.  Brandon Murphy and Laridda Williams-Murphy shared their faith and spiritual journey with us.  The road traveled to becoming a Christian is not always an easy one.  But when you get where God wants you to be, he is faithful to bless you.

It is exciting to report that in April we heard from another new member.  Michael Nava shared his journey of faith and his work as an advocate throughout his life.  Michael shared how he found out as an adult about being Native American.  And how he searched and found his roots in that culture.  And why he has a strong need to be an advocate for Native Americans.

At our next meeting we received blessings from a young couple and their story.  Tybia and Daniel Belding, who are married and have a three-year old son.  Tybia shared that she grew up in a home that went to church and whose parents shared their faith with their children.  As Tybia grew she realized her father was not safe to be around and as a young child her parents were divorced.  Her mother experienced mental health issues, but Tybia and her siblings were taken care of by the church.  Tybia had some struggles with her faith and how to have a relationship with Jesus.  As she grew and studied, she worked out her issues.  Daniel also grew up in a Christian home.  His mother was told by doctors that she should abort Daniel, that he would have multiple disabilities.  His mother did not listen and a perfectly healthy baby boy came into the world.  When he was six they found out he had RP.  This did not slow him down.  But as he lost more vision and lost loved ones that meant so much to him, he grew angry with God.  He always believed in him, but was angry with him.  When he went to college he began drinking heavily.  It became a problem.  He prayed to God that if he went on a fishing trip and did not get drunk he would quit alcohol.  He drank all weekend but could not get drunk.  So, he gave up alcohol.  He and Tybia both attended the Colorado Center for the Blind and that is where they met.  They now work in the ministry Disciples for Christ and share their faith with others.

In June our Speaker was Natamra Doke from Special Touch Ministries.  They help those with disabilities.   They have summer camps and work in other ways to help the disabled to be included in worship, church and other parts of Christian life.

Tom and Linda Anderson and other members of Communities of Faith attended the national convention in Houston, in July. Tom is still the President of the newly named Blind Christian’s Group.  We look forward to continued Christian fellowship in the year to come.

A PASSION FOR FINANCIAL LITERACY

– Alison Roets

I started working at Meritrust Credit Union in March of 2022. In the year that I’ve been with Meritrust I have found a passion for financial literacy and well-being.  I feel this is an important thing to consider, especially when you’re on disability, SSI or retirement. The most impactful thing I have learned from our financial counselors is to budget all your spending and income, then save. It’s better to know exactly how much you have so you can save only what you can afford. It’s never good to have to dip back into savings for spending. I also learned to have an emergency savings account, because cars and cooling/heating systems do break down and you will have to pay for them. These accounts are here for you to spend and that’s okay. I encourage anyone to contact their bank or credit union to see if they have a financial counseling or well-being department that can sit down with you to help you budget. The counselors at Meritrust also help with debt and credit. I think this is a topic that isn’t addressed a lot with the blind and visually impaired community and I feel it's extra important to have control over your money if you are limited by disability or SSI payments. Please join me in my passion for financial literacy and well-being. Meritrust also does classes and presentations on financial literacy if your chapter would be interested please reach out.

JOHNSON-WYANDOTTE-COUNTY CHAPTER REPORT

– Tom Anderson and Jody Mulik

The Johnson-Wyandotte County Chapter of the NFB of Kansas held its election of officers in November 2022.  The following people were elected: Tom Anderson, president; Susie Stanzel, vice-president; Jody Mulik, secretary; and Don Mulik, treasurer. We were delighted to have Michael Nava join our chapter at that meeting.

In December 2022, our chapter had a combination birthday party for Martha Kelly and Christmas party for the chapter. The celebration was held at Jack Stack Barbecue in Overland Park, Kansas.

At our January 2023 meeting, we were delighted to welcome Patricia Stillwell as a member of our chapter.  Patricia, Michael, and Tom represented the chapter at the Washington Seminar. We were able to meet with Congresswoman Sharice Davids in person on January 31.  Our members did an excellent job of presenting the issues.

At our March 2023 meeting, we voted to participate in a Walk for Independence on May 6 at Loose Park in Kansas City, Missouri as a fundraiser for our chapter. At that meeting, Christian Pruett and Tom talked about the Braille Challenge at the Kansas State School for the Blind. Also, at that meeting, Michael and Patricia talked about their terrible experience with Alphapointe's training program. Tom said that he will be focusing on getting better transportation for blind people. He also commented on the Medical Device Nonvisual Accessibility Act and the Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act. He encouraged us to get in contact with our representative and our senators to cosponsors them.

At our April 2023 meeting, Tom talked about our chapter participating in the upcoming fundraising walk on May 6th. He also talked about the National Convention from July 1-6 and mentioned that the state affiliate will be giving $1,500 per person to help with expenses. Tom and others talked about how we could improve transportation for blind people in both Johnson and Wyandotte counties. We congratulated Anya Fuller on becoming an American citizen.

At our May 2023 meeting, we were delighted to welcome Richard Schoenberger as a member of our chapter. Tom encouraged us to keep getting sponsors for the Walk for Independence since this is our only fundraiser. Both Patricia Stillwell and Michael Nava have received the Kenneth Jernigan Convention Scholarship. Tom said that he would like to go to a public meeting for transportation in Johnson County just to get our foot in the door. After that, he will work on getting better transportation in Wyandotte County.  Don Mulik read an article written by Bob Payne called “My Brother” about the life of his brother Don Payne, a former member of our chapter. Tom said that we will have the 2024 state convention in Overland Park. He is looking for a hotel. Our chapter decided to investigate getting matching polo shirts.

At our June 2023 meeting, guest speaker Ben Dallin, President of the NFB of Wisconsin, talked about his life. Tom said that there are seven members of our chapter going to the national convention. They are Linda Anderson, Tom Anderson, Susie Stanzel, Anya Fuller, Robert Fuller, Patricia Stilwell, and Michael Nava.

At our August 2023 meeting, Michael Nava, Susie Stanzel, Anya Fuller, and Tom Anderson talked about their experiences at the national convention.

A FAREWELL TO A MAN OF SERVICE

By Rob Tabor

We of the Kansas affiliate regret to announce the loss of a good man and a long time Federation leader. Tom Anderson passed on Tuesday, August 29, 2023 in the late afternoon hours, at Advent Health in Overland Park Kansas  where he was hospitalized to treat very severe Covid symptoms.

Many Federationists will fondly remember Tom's eloquently delivered invocations at NFB national conventions over many years. Those involved with the Communities of Faith division will miss his leadership in the devotional services which take place every morning at convention.

As a braille and communications instructor at Colorado Center for the Blind, Tom touched untold hundreds of lives over many years before retiring and returning to Kansas.

Back in Kansas, Tom went immediately to work, serving on several state advisory committees pertaining to blind Kansans, while serving as a member of the Kansas affiliate board of directors.

For the past 2 1/2 years, Tom served as president of the Johnson Wyandotte chapter of the Kansas affiliate. He came into office with previous experience as chapter president of the erstwhile chapter in Great Bend, Kansas, and, in the early 1980s, as president of the Douglas County chapter as the Jayhawk chapter was then called.

Above all, Tom was a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, a wonderful husband to his wife Linda, also a long time Federationist. Tom will definitely be missed by all and forgotten by none.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

By Bruce Roberds

I had the privilege to attend the NFB National Convention last year in New Orleans.  While I was very interested in every event at the convention there was one workshop that most interested me.  The workshop was concerning the recruitment and retention of new members.  I was interested in this workshop because this is not one of my strong suits, but I know the need is there as well as the potential.

Recruitment is every member’s responsibility.  Our strength is in our numbers to be able to advocate for blind individuals everywhere whether it be legislatively, or in the workforce, or school. Or in everyday living.  This is why President Riccobono ends every speech (at least that I have heard) with “Let’s go build the National Federation of the Blind”.  In the workshop there were several really good ideas for recruiting new members.  One of them does double duty, which is fund raising.  We are not only raising much needed funds to do what we do, but we are also putting our organization out in the community and making them aware of our existence.  Another idea was for us as individuals or as a group to participate in community service.  This gives our organization exposure to the community as well as shows that we are productive and contributing members of our community.  Finally, it was suggested that we make an effort to have a booth at community events such as at the State and County Fairs, Home shows, Women’s shows and anywhere we can think of that might be available.  Overall, we must meet people where they are; not only physically but also mentally.  Our members and potential members have different levels of blindness and different levels of acceptance of their blindness.

Just as important as recruitment is retention.  A person who feels unaccepted or even rejected will likely never return.  The suggestion is for each chapter to create a membership committee.  The function of the committee is to organize recruitment activities.  They should also be responsible for maintaining a current member contact list.  Additionally, they should create an onboarding process for new members.  The onboarding process should be designed to make new members feel welcome first and foremost.  Included should be educational information about the organization.  There is so much information to share we do not want to overwhelm the new member all at once.  By feeding the information a little at a time allows for better retention of the information as well as provides a reason to maintain contact with the new member over a period of time thus enhancing the feeling of being welcome in the organization.

Another tool to aid in the recruitment and retention of new members is social media.  The workshop stressed the importance of having a strong social media presence.  The social media accounts need to be easy to locate with common simple words that anyone who is not familiar with our organization can easily access.  As much as possible we should maintain that social media access at the chapter level, division level, and the state affiliate level.  A key person within each of these entities needs to be responsible for keeping the social media information current and accurate.

Recruitment of new members is essential to the survival of our organization.  Recruitment is worthless without the retention of those new members.  We can accomplish these two objectives with great success through fundraising, outreach, onboarding, and social media.  So, with that, let’s go build the National Federation of the Blind!!!

THE GOAL TO GROW

By Sharon Luka

Keep in mind that our grand goal is to build and grow the Federation.

The North-Central chapter of the NFB of Kansas has been meeting the third Wednesday of the month, at the McKenzie Center, in Salina, at three pm. We have been meeting in a hybrid fashion.

In our May 17, 2023 meeting, we were blessed with a program from Nayenci Lamar, Independent Living specialist with Independent Connection, Inc. We met at their facility in Salina. Independent Connection, Inc. will have a booth at our ensuing convention in Wichita.

Our president, Margaret Finger, noted that she has completed two terms on the city's accessibility board. Tom Basgall and Sharon Luka have previously served on this board.

In July, we had a bountiful banquet party at Martinelli's Little Italy restaurant in Salina.

Two members attended the national convention in Houston, in virtual format.

On September 19, 2023, some members will host a literature and learning table at the North-Central Flint Hills Area Agency on Aging senior fair. The all-day event will be held at Tony's Events' Center. We will distribute NFB literature, demonstrate braille and show the ScripTalk medication reader from Envision America.

Austin Meyer will train for a dog guide from September 24 to October 7, 2023. He will be schooled at the Kansas Specialty Dog School in Washington, Kansas. His training was to occur four years ago, but Covid put it on hold. The school will have a table in the vendors' hall at our November, 2023 state convention.

In considering our goal to grow, we hope to gain new members.

CONGRATULATIONS TOM PAGE!

– Nicole Taylor

I would like to extend my congratulations to our state affiliate president, Tom Page for his recent election onto the National Federation of the Blind’s national board.  He was nominated and elected onto the national board in July at the National Convention in Houston, Texas.  This opportunity is a great honor for Tom and I am confident that he will do a wonderful job.

Registration for the NFB of Kansas 55th Annual State Convention

November 3-5, 2023

Holiday Inn Wichita East I35,

Please send registration form and payment to Robert Fuller at 1120 Randall Rd. Lawrence, KS 66049 or paypal to treasurer@nfbks.org and go to the Friends and Family button.   Please make checks payable to the National Federation of the Blind of Kansas.

If you are registering multiple attendees, please include all names of those you are registering.

Name(s):\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Pre-registration:  $5.00 \_\_\_=\_\_\_\_\_ Registration at the door:  $10.00

Luncheon: $20.00 \_\_\_=\_\_\_\_\_ Banquet: $30.00 \_\_=\_\_\_\_ Vegetarian Meal? #\_\_\_\_\_

The convention will be held at Holiday Inn Wichita East I35

At 549 S. Rock Road, Wichita, KS 67207 telephone (316) 686-7131. Room rates are $125 per night (includes breakfast). Please come and join our 55th annual state convention!

Live The Life You Want!