



The Focal Point

Washington State Department of Services for the Blind

Fall 2017

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Time for Re-Connection

As autumn 2017 begins and the holidays quickly approach, we have to ask: “Where does the time go?” It has been about a year since we published our Focal Point Newsletter and this reflects the busy and changing world of blind and low-vision services.

We want to touch base with our physician partners in the Eye Physician Connection to give you an idea of what we have been up to. The big news is that DSB is now an active partner in the WorkForce system and WorkForce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA is landmark legislation designed to strengthen and improve our nation’s public workforce system and help get Americans, including youth and those with significant barriers to employment, into high-quality jobs and careers and help employers hire and retain skilled workers.

Continued on page 3

New Technologies Give Blind Users Independence

New technologies are giving people with permanent vision impairments or blindness greater independence and flexibility, allowing them to better navigate their homes, communities, and workplaces. These products range from apps that run on smartphones to devices implanted in the retina.

Many of these products make use of either artificial intelligence (AI) or live human assistants. Some smartphone apps – like Seeing AI, developed by Microsoft – use computer intelligence to recognize and describe items in front of the phone’s camera. This type of tech can read text, locate and scan product bar codes, recognize and describe people and scenery, and even identify

Continued on page 2

DSB Featured on *Mission: Non-Profit*



A panel of DSB staff and supporters prepare to tape an episode of *Mission: Non-Profit*. The program will air on TC Media cable and online channels throughout October. Visit <http://tcmedia.org/videos> for more information.

money. Meanwhile, other apps use live video streaming to share the user's environment with a sighted volunteer. The volunteer will then describe the environment during a live chat.

Wearable technologies also use streaming video while freeing up the users' hands. Aira (created by Aira Tech Corporation), use devices like Google Glass paired with a mobile phone to stream real-time video to their paid agents. The agents assist callers by describing the images streaming to their computers. On the other hand, My Eye (created by OrCam) clips to any pair of eyeglasses and uses AI to provide information to the wearer.

More advanced devices use light and magnifications to enhance images for people who are legally blind, without surgery. These devices (which resemble a small set of virtual reality goggles) use a high-speed, high-definition camera to capture the user's environment and then displays

digitally enhanced images on two screens inside the headset. Users can adjust the color, contrast, focus, brightness, and magnification to match their needs.

Technologies are also starting to do more than speak to users. A system called BrainPort, by Wicab, uses electro-tactile stimulation by turning optical data into pulses that users feel on a device on their tongues. Users learn to interpret these pulses as the shape, size, location, and motion of objects in their environment.

A surgical option is presented by the Argus II Retinal Prosthesis System, created by SecondSight. This device translates image data into a signal that is received by a surgically implanted retinal device. The device creates electrical pulses that users can learn to recognize as people, objects, and text. SecondSight has recently received FDA approval to test the concept of using similar technology to stimulate the human visual cortex.

While the smartphone apps are free or very low cost, the wearable services and surgical devices have higher purchase prices and/or subscription fees. However, people with visual impairments and blindness have a growing number of

options to help them live their lives independently.



The OrCam MyEye clips to any eyeglass frame.

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). This observance focuses attention on the contributions of individuals with disabilities who are in or entering the workforce.

Governor Inslee and city councils across the state are issuing proclamations expressing their dedication to supporting the goals of NDEAM and DSB.

You can learn more about NDEAM and the proclamations across the state by visiting us on Facebook or on our website.



The Argus® II Retinal Prosthesis System is intended to provide electrical stimulation of the retina to induce visual perception in blind individuals.

Re-connect

Continued from Page 1

What does this mean to you and your patients? It means we now have a much larger resource reach to serve working-age adults and youth. DSB now spends approximately 15% of our annual budget on youth, through career-focused services. If you have young patients with permanent eye conditions that could be impacting them at school or work, we have increased resources to serve them.

With the DSB engagement in the WIOA system, we are able to leverage enhanced services for adults throughout the state of Washington. We are working to provide meaningful access to all services for career pathway exploration, education, training, and workplace supports. The value for your patients that have a permanent eye condition is that we can mitigate any functional impairment at work, school, or home. We are ready to assist in strategies and supports to save their jobs and provide security for their futures.

We want to provide services to your patients sooner rather than later. Early intervention

provides the best health model for your patients, regardless of age. By referring your patients with permanent eye conditions, you are participating in a pro-health service model.

DSB has six local office locations throughout the state. We hope you can get to know your local DSB staff. We will be reaching out to you to introduce the local DSB staff and we hope you can spend a few minutes to make a Connection.

We wish you continued success and we're looking forward to a productive and healthy 2018 and our continued partnership in the health of your patients.

"If we do not like our work, and do not try to get happiness out of it, we are a menace to our profession as well as to ourselves."

—Helen Keller "Know Thyself," The Home Magazine, September 1930"

Recommendation by Doctor Leads to Patient Independence

Dan lost his retail employment due to sudden, severe vision loss caused by anterior ischemic optic neuropathy in both eyes. In addition to losing his job, Dan became very dependent on others to perform daily living tasks and to get places. He felt restless and depressed.

Thanks to his eye doctor, Dan was able to connect with DSB. DSB provided him with vocational planning, extensive training in adaptive skills of blindness, counseling, devices, and technology specific to his needs.

With his increased skills, confidence, and independence, Dan found employment with a large fruit company. Using his adaptive technology and newly acquired skills, he now works in a gate house at the entrance to his company's warehouses. He checks the paperwork of incoming trucks and directs them to their loading docks. Dan shared that he loves his new job. He receives a competitive salary with benefits and enjoys his interactions with truckers and co-workers.

Thanks to his physician's referral, Dan is a productive member of his community.



Washington State
Department of Services for the Blind
3411 S. Alaska Street
Seattle, WA 98118-1631

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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3411 S. Alaska Street
Seattle, WA 98118
Phone: 206-906-5500

P.O. Box 40933
Olympia, WA 98504
Phone: 360-725-3830

Email: info@dsb.wa.gov
Website: www.dsb.wa.gov

800-552-7103

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How can I refer my patients to DSB for services now or in the future?

A: We know you value early intervention for functional services provided by DSB. Referral is simple and our physician partners indicate that they like one of the following two options:

- We can supply you with a patient-focused brochures that you can give to your patient while in the exam room. This brochure talks directly to your patient on how DSB services may benefit them. If you would like a supply of these brochures, contact us and we will send them to your office.
- Your front desk can bookmark our online referral form on www.dsb.wa.gov. As your patient leaves, your staff can provide simple contact information with a direct referral. DSB will contact your patient for more details.

If you have any questions on how to refer your patients for no cost services, contact Mark.Adreon@dsb.wa.gov or call 206-906-5502.