



July 2024

Welcome to the Greater Detroit Agency for the Blind & Visually Impaired (GDABVI)! On behalf of the Agency, I am excited to share the following information with you.

Greater Detroit Agency for the Blind and Visually Impaired began in 1961 as a non-profit called the Metropolitan Society for the Blind to provide direct services to people in metro Detroit who were blind or visually impaired, and to provide consultation and staff training to health agencies and educational institutions.

In 1970, the Metropolitan Society for the Blind merged with the Detroit Society for the Prevention of Blindness and became the Greater Detroit Society for the Blind. In 1993, the agency was renamed to honor its founding director, McAllister Upshaw, and became Upshaw Institute for the Blind.

In 2005, the organization sought out a more clearly recognizable identity, and changed its name to the Greater Detroit Agency for the Blind and Visually Impaired. As it has since its beginnings, the Agency continues to help residents with visual impairments to achieve and maintain independence. The Agency works with a variety of community partners to increase awareness about blindness and its impact on individuals, their families, and the community - including attitudes that place limitations on people who are blind or visually impaired.

Humans use their vision to learn a great deal about the world in which they live. Loss of vision is often accompanied by a sense of being isolated or dependent upon others. Agency staff help blind or visually impaired individuals develop skills and confidence, helping them find their way to a life beyond sight.

While GDABVI has a great history, we are focused on today, tomorrow, and beyond. Along with the variety of services we offer, our philosophy is to demonstrate what blind & visually impaired people can do rather than to dwell on limitations; we imagine what is “the possible” for our clients! The best news for our clients is that all we do is provided at no cost to them!

The GDABVI offers many services to our clients, but there are three services of which we are most proud:

1. Orientation & Mobility (O & M)
2. Technology
3. Special Services

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Orientation & Mobility (O & M):

Our Orientation and Mobility specialists conduct evaluations and training sessions to assist individuals facing mobility challenges due to visual impairments. Through our assessments and personalized training, we aim to help clients improve their mobility, navigate safely, and regain their independence.

Services include:

- Effective use of remaining vision.
- Pre-white cane training.
- White cane training.
- Sighted guide.
- Self-protection techniques.
- Navigating in new and unfamiliar environments.
- Street crossings.
- Public transportation.
- Public transportation applications.

O & M also helps our clients to navigate in their homes or places of business, as mentioned, safely.

Technology:

We know that technology is present in every aspect of our society. Rarely can one go through a day without using technology at some level; the Agency's goal is to make these interactions as seamless as possible.

Computer and Device Training:

Our specialists conduct thorough technology evaluations tailored to everyone's unique needs and goals. These evaluations help us identify the most suitable technological solutions. Subsequently, we recommend technology training programs designed to address specific personal technology goals, ensuring that individuals can effectively utilize the recommended technology to enhance their daily lives. Our commitment is to empower individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to make the most of modern technology.

Training includes:

- Keyboarding.
- JAWS- screen reader.
- ZoomText- screen magnification software.
- Tablet.
- Smartphone training.
- Computer training.

Special Services:

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Recently, several news reports discussed that social isolation is now a major health concern across many demographics. The more technology connects us, the irony is that we are less connected. Our Special Services seeks to mitigate that gap.

Support Groups:

Our agency hosts monthly support groups led and coordinated by our outreach and client specialists. These meetings are held on the second Tuesday of every month. The meetings provide a welcoming space for participants of all ages to come together, fostering a powerful sense of community. During these meetings, individuals can share valuable resources and offer helpful information to each other, creating a supportive environment in which everyone may benefit.

Recreational Activities:

Every month, our agency organizes an array of enjoyable activities. On the first Friday of each month, individuals can participate in Blind Bingo and other engaging events, complete with a complimentary lunch and opportunities to win prizes. Additionally, our Book Club convenes on the fourth Tuesday of every month.

Outings:

-In 2024, the Agency has organized trips to the Henry Ford Museum; The Detroit Institute of Arts; and Comerica Park, to name a few. These outings allow individuals to immerse themselves in art, history, and nature, fostering a deeper connection to their local surroundings. Participants can expect enriching experiences and opportunities for social interaction during these outings.

- Additionally, we plan on hosting movie nights in all seven counties that we serve. The movie nights will feature audio-described movies for a fully inclusive cinematic experience. These gatherings will provide a relaxed and enjoyable way to spend time with friends, enjoying popcorn and refreshments while watching a variety of films.

These outings and movie nights are integral to our mission of enhancing the quality of life for individuals with visual impairments by promoting community engagement; leisure activities; and cultural enrichment.

Finally, we recognize the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in a society that is becoming more diverse. Recently, the Agency was pleased to participate in and exhibit at the Detroit Disability Pride Festival.

At GDABVI, our quest for equity expresses itself in three primary ways:

First, we believe that everyone has a right to the healthiest vision possible. Eye care should not be limited by barriers such as access to proper healthcare, reliable transportation, nutritious food, safe and affordable housing, or a good education. We provide social services navigation to help clients

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overcome these challenges. Additionally, GDABVI's vision preservation efforts include generating awareness around healthy living behaviors and chronic disease management.

Secondly, we offer a safe and inclusive environment for those who have lost their vision. From our core values to our physical space, our teaching staff, and educational methods, to events and activities, our agency embraces and demonstrates diversity, equity, inclusivity, belonging, and justice. Finally, we advocate for the people we serve and support those who advocate for the rights of individuals who are blind, visually impaired,

Finally, we advocate for the people we serve and support those who advocate for the rights of individuals who are blind, visually impaired, or disabled.

Thank you for allowing me to share some of what GDABVI does, supporting our clients. I am privileged to work with so many amazing and selfless individuals.

Warm Regards,

Jim Smock
Executive Director

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