

Kronkosky Charitable Foundation

Roundtable Discussions

Topic: Visual Impairment

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Participants

Invited Representatives

Pat Good	Development Director	Lighthouse for the Blind
Cindy Johansen	Counselor	Tex. Comm. for the Blind
Judy M. Wright	Regional Coordinator	Tex. Comm. for the Blind

Foundation Staff and Trustees

Megan Kromer	Director of Program and Evaluation
Michael Bacon	Grants Manager
Mark Carmona	Grants Manager

Overview

Texas Commission for the Blind

- The Texas Commission for the Blind works in two distinct areas: children and adults.
- TCB is 64-years-old.

Children s Programming

- Texas is one of only a few states that have a separate program benefiting children.
- Many children are born with cortical blindness, which means that although there is no eye defect, the brain does not receive the correct message from the eyes. With stimulation, children can benefit. Typically, 2-3 years pass without noticeable change, and then improvement occurs in a short period. Clients can work with school district personnel in assessment, occupational and physical therapy areas, and in an introduction to visual stimulation.
- The program serves those 0-22-years-old that are PSVI.

The term PSVI (Permanently or Severely Visually Impaired) refers to a person who is legally or totally blind. This is defined as 20/70 best correction in both eyes, 2200 in both eyes with best correction or field restriction of 20 degrees.

- TCB's Children's program began 35-years ago and is state funded. Through TCB, clients can only access benefits similar to the aid they receive from Medicaid, SSI, or CIDC.
- TCB serves as a guide for case management (identification of resources) in assisting the family.
- There are not many benefits in the rural areas — occasionally a Lions Club will help by providing glasses, etc. However, rural school districts seem more willing to work with families in developing a service package for the child.
- Caseloads for TCB staff are at 100 each with 300 children total. 80-85% of the children are within the PSVI definition. This is only a portion of what the educators are serving (they are doubling this number). The number of children in need of services is rising, but TCB staff numbers are not.
- Case management and therapy are available to the children age 0 to 3 years. School districts provide case management and services once children reach school age. Public Law 94-142 mandates that children who are blind at birth be immediately eligible for services.
- TCB provide many items such as developmental toys, highchairs, and baby beds because a large portion of the population cannot afford these items in addition to other services or basic goods. In addition, TCB provides eye counseling and medical treatment, glasses, and surgical services for those who meet the income guidelines (250% of poverty).
- There are limits to the amount of work and education with parents in this area. There are ARD meetings (Admission, Review and Dismissal) where school personnel determine IEP's (Individual Education). This could lead to further assessments, or technology and vocational assessments. The local school district is responsible for getting these services. Parents must invite TCB to attend these meetings; caseworkers cannot just show up.

- Resources may include Braille instruction and tools, independent living skills, and mobility training. TCB also helps prepare the family for the reality of living with a visually impaired person. As the child gets older, it requires more technology and TCB is limited in this area. Technology in the home is a critical need (an example is \$8-\$15,000 for adaptive technology that includes computer software, scanner, etc.)
- An essential period of TCB intervention is when the child is 13 years old. Workshops are conducted to educate the children and families on
 1. career opportunities,
 2. social behavior, and
 3. money management.
- Through TCB, clients are exposed to outside cultural/educational activities such as the Children's Museum, NASA, Horseback Riding, etc. There is a ski trip to Colorado that focuses on breaking out of traditional stereotypes and orientation and mobility (O&M) training.
- In the words of the TCB, the biggest struggle for independence is Mom and Dad. Parents tend to be either very passive or very aggressive. Children need support but also need to have the chance to live independently and to make their own decisions.

Adult Programming

- Most clients in this program are not congenitally blind. Some of the clients are adventitiously blind — a condition commonly caused by diabetes and glaucoma. Eye disease is responsible for only a small percent of adult blindness. Eye diseases include retinitis pigmentosa, and macular degeneration. Other adult blindness occurs as a result of accidents, which include gunshots, giving birth, or adverse reactions to antibiotics or anesthesia.
- As people age, vision problems become increasingly prevalent. 1/6 of people under age 45 are affected, 1/5 under age 65, and 1/4 under 75.
- In some cases, blindness occurs while adults are fully employed. For some, long-term disability can kick in while others have lost their homes, jobs, and marriages.

- A staff of eight counselors works in vocational rehabilitation. There is a caseload of 65-100 clients that work in the Kronkosky geographic areas. There is a 30-day waiting period for vocational rehabilitation and the ultimate goal is for a client to attain a status of full independent living.
- Case Managers put together a rehabilitation plan with the client. Some of the components may include a low vision plan like telescopic lenses and bioptic glasses, which cost \$1600, or mobility training.
- There is great diversity among the people who are visually impaired. Staff explores self-esteem issues with visually impaired people. Someone with blindness goes through a grieving process.
- An area of impact is providing a full system of supportive services for the adult moving into the workforce. The majority of jobs can be accommodated and ADA allows for reasonable accommodations by employers. TCB works with employers to accommodate for persons with disabilities.
- If a person is legally blind, they can attend a state college at no charge.

San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind

- Their rehabilitation department served 545 clients in vocational training last program year. 135 employees who work for the Lighthouse are legally blind.
- The Lighthouse provides manufacturing opportunities and has formed a legislative action committee that is organized to provide feedback to the President, serve as a conduit for information, as well as serving as advocates. They were recently awarded a contract with base supply stores in military installations, which is now a career track for the visually impaired. They have strong relationships with the military community. Their technology unit is state of the art. However, there is a growing need for technology training for younger clients that can lead to better paying jobs.
- A major concern of the Lighthouse is the aged population.
- Some bigger issues include revitalization of the Rehabilitation Act, maintaining specialized services and the Jarvis Wagner ODEA Act.