

FLORIDA OUTREACH CENTER FOR THE BLIND, INC.



INFORMATION BOOKLET

2315 S. Congress Avenue
Palm Springs, FL 33406
(561) 642-0005
info_focb@bellsouth.net
www.blindfocb.org

Revised: September, 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Mission, Description & History
2. Organization & Management
3. Board of Directors
4. Staff
5. Services Provided

1. MISSION, DESCRIPTION and HISTORY

1.1.1. The mission of the Florida Outreach Center for the Blind (FOCB) is to develop and administer programs for persons who are blind and visually impaired that will integrate them into the social, economic and spiritual lives of their communities.

The Florida Outreach Center for the Blind is a not-for-profit training facility, formed for the express purpose of providing services to people who are blind or visually impaired. It was founded in 2003 by Carolyn Lapp who lost her sight at age fourteen in an automobile accident. She realized that thousands of visually-impaired persons had virtually no services. Ms. Lapp established the FOCB with a mission to address the needs of the estimated 48,000 visually impaired residents of Palm Beach County. According to Carolyn, "I believe that I'm blind for a reason and that is so I can help others who are experiencing the challenges of vision loss." Mrs. Lapp's idea was a simple one: give blind and visually impaired people the tools and training they need and they will develop a good attitude about their blindness and reach their personal, academic and vocational core values. *It was Ms. Lapp's belief that students could benefit from the perspective and insight of a positive blind role model and would respond well and more rapidly to someone who knows first-hand what they are experiencing and has successfully met the challenge. Therefore, FOCB is unique among local organizations serving blind and low-vision persons in that the CEO, most of the staff and at least half of the board members are blind.*

1.1.2. In the mid-2000's, a void developed in the availability of services for the blind and visually impaired in Palm Beach County. FOCB filled the void, providing the only non-governmental support for the blind community. Some fourteen years after its organization, FOCB continues to vigorously pursue its mission of total integration of the blind and visually impaired into society and providing the opportunities in rehabilitation of the blind to expand their personal expectations and reach their full potential.

1.1.3. In 2010, FOCB moved into its current facility, a free-standing, community based training Center conveniently located on a major bus route. In 2018, FOCB purchased the property and now owns it free and clear.

2. ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

2.1. FOCB is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt not-for-profit organization. It is set up as a C Corporation with the standard corporate structure. The Center is governed by a five to nine member Board of Directors of which fifty percent are required by our By-Laws to be blind or have an immediate family member who is blind. This arrangement is purposeful, in that it is a reminder of why FOCB exists, what is its mission and who it serves. The Board cannot take FOCB in a direction that does not include serving the blind and visually impaired as its only purpose. The Board elects a President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. Board members are all volunteers and receive no compensation. The operations are overseen by an Executive Director that serves at the pleasure of the Board.

The Florida Outreach Center for the Blind has met the high standards of performance set by the National Accreditation Council for Blind and Low Vision Services (NAC). It is registered with the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, Registration No. CH17058, to collect charitable donations.

3. BOARD OF DIRECTORS

3.1. The Board is diversified in its membership, but each member has some link to people who are visually impaired or blind. The following are the current Board members and officers.

Frank Seidman, President, Sighted

Dennis Stevenson, Vice President, Visually Impaired

Judy Doherty, Secretary, Visually Impaired

Jean Markevich, Treasurer, Sighted

Lou Ferri, Sighted

Edna Strnad, Member, Visually Impaired

Patricia Erickson, Member, Visually Impaired

Walter Bauke, Member, Visually Impaired

Brooke Evans, Member, Deaf-Blind (deceased Sept., 2019, position open)

The Board is assisted by an Advisory Board consisting of up to fifteen area consumers and professionals that report to the Board of Directors. The purpose of the committee is to provide a resource of volunteers that fully support FOCB's goals and can provide expertise to supplement that of the Board and Staff in such areas as fund raising, accounting, law, business & financial management and blind services.

4. STAFF

4.1. FOCB is quite proud of its small but talented and dedicated staff, whether paid or volunteer. They bring skills and an enthusiasm for teaching that has brought favorable results to and recognition by clients and members of the community. All staff members report to the Executive Director.

Carolyn Lapp, Executive Director
Sara Clark, Certified Vision and Rehabilitation Therapist
JoAnne Chalom, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist
Manes Pacius, Bookkeeper & Instructor
Jason Goldfield, Assistive Technology Specialist
Maria (Luz) Norris, Braille and Independent Living Instructor
Dixie Thiery, Administrative Assistant
William Lapp, Manager, Visual Aids/Volunteer
Rita Martine, Client/Volunteer
Aileen Jasper, Receptionist/Client/Volunteer
Marilyn Tribolati, Client/Volunteer

5. SCOPE OF SERVICES

5.1.1. People with visual impairments have significant needs, whether they were born blind or lost their sight later in life. They need to be able to cope with their blindness while leading lives of contribution and contentment. They need to find work, to support themselves and their families. They need and want to be able to travel, and to communicate easily with others near and far. FOCB recognizes that for every technique used by a sighted person to accomplish a task, alternative methods can be used by a blind person to achieve the same results. It is our goal to teach these alternative techniques in our programs. Through the skills learned at FOCB, visually impaired persons are equipped with the tools necessary for them to live independently, pursue an education or be viable candidates in an increasingly competitive job market.

5.1.2. FOCB addresses these needs by providing instruction and support in the areas of independent living skills and vocational rehabilitation services. Some of the programs and services include the following:

- Reading and Writing Braille
- Daily Living Skills Training
- Personal, Financial and Home Management Training

- Assistive Technology Training
- Low Vision, Optical, and Non-Optical Devices Training
- Orientation and Mobility training
- Job Coaching and Readiness Training
- Transition Program for High School students who are visually impaired
- Outreach Programs for seniors who are visually impaired
- Kids' Club for blind children and their families
- Peer/Facilitated Support
- Self-Advocacy Training
- Information and Referral Services
- Recreational and Leisure Time Activities Training
- Book Club led by Talking Books Librarian
- Deaf-Blind Support Group

All services are provided, free of charge to the client, in English, Spanish, French and Creole. The Center has never turned away any blind person who requested help.

5.1.3. FOCB does not just teach skills. It uses a holistic approach that addresses the general needs of its clients and families. Incorporated in its training, FOCB:

- Counsels visually impaired individuals to understand and accept their blindness.
- Provides training in the essential skills for independent living.
- Provides positive role models to assist the blind in reaching their full potential.
- Locates, informs and helps acquire for the blind individual, services available to them.
- Educates clients on civil rights concerning their blindness.
- Informs and trains the blind in the use of adaptive technology, aids and appliances.

FOCB reaches out to and supports the families by:

- Counseling sighted family members and friends of the blind individual to aid them in understanding blindness.
- Serving as liaison between the client and other agencies. (Florida Division of Blind Services, Veterans Administration, Social Security Administration, Office of Equal Opportunity, etc.)

- Employing visually impaired instructors.
- Working with eye care professionals.
- Training and utilizing volunteers.
- Increasing awareness about blindness through presentations, web site, social media, mail-outs, literature, and newsletters.

5.1.4. The Florida Outreach Center for the Blind offers itinerant and facility-based services. The Center serves an average of one hundred and thirty clients annually.

5.1.5. In 2011, the Florida Outreach Center for the Blind initiated a Kids' Club that provides opportunities for blind children and their families to share support and resources. The Club hosts activities such as a Beeping Egg Hunt, annual Holiday Party and a touch-tour of the Barnum and Bailey Circus. In addition, the Center hosts the only Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning (BELL) Program for low-vision children who are not taught Braille in school because of their residual vision. This life-changing program provides children with low vision with intense exposure to Braille and other forms of non-visual learning through fun activities. By providing the BELL Program, FOCB hopes to reduce the eighty-five per cent illiteracy rate among low-vision children.

5.1.6. In 2015, the Florida Outreach Center for the Blind established the Deaf-Blind Advisory Council and Support Group. This was in response to our growing awareness of people with dual sensory losses and the special challenges they face in learning and communicating.

5.1.7. FOCB is always reaching out for funding to be able to serve more clients. But this is to no avail if we cannot reach people to let them know we are here. That is our greatest challenge. We are working to better inform members of the community about our area's "best kept secret – FOCB."