



A Publication of the NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND OF IDAHO

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President’s Report Fall 2020

Dana Ard, President National Federation of the Blind of Idaho

During these past few months, we have had many opportunities to build our Idaho affiliate. We had 54 persons registered for our virtual national convention in July. Since registration was not required, other blind people from Idaho may have enjoyed the convention as well. As always, our national agenda was very impressive including Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, Laura Wolk, the first blind woman to clerk at the Supreme Court, and Kaylee Brendle who, as a high school junior, successfully advocated the College Board for the necessary accommodations she needed to take the college placement test.



Numerous classes and seminars have been offered by affiliates open to interested blind persons. I have taken part in a women’s empowerment seminar offered by the D.C. chapter, yappy hour done by the National Association of Guide Dog Users (NAGDU), and technology, exercise, and discussion classes offered by the Colorado affiliate. Our Idaho affiliate has opened opportunities to build our organization. Treasure Valley chapter has invited all who registered for the national convention to attend their chapter meeting. Palouse Empire chapter

has opened their book club discussion group to all as well. Treasure Valley chapter hosted a virtual happy hour, baby shower, and NFB literature discussion opportunity. Affiliate fall conventions have also been open anywhere and everywhere. Our monthly presidential release is now available live. It is usually the first day of the month. In addition to hearing from our national president, participants can ask questions and learn more about our great organization.

The Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning program was done virtually this summer. I was asked to mentor one of our Idaho students. I was amazed at how well the virtual sessions kept students engaged. Because of my involvement with this student, I learned that he did not have his own Braille writer. I was able to connect his family to a source for an affordable Braille writer. I also got to work with the VISTA SEARCH Program providing a four-session class on communication. I included short presentations by some of our NFB young people from around the country, which led to some great discussions about blindness. I was fortunate to have two other Toastmaster members, as well as the program mentors assist with this class.

For the National Federation of the Blind, October is “meet the Blind Month.” It is a time to celebrate our accomplishments as blind people, educate others about blindness, and celebrate White Cane Safety Day, which is October 15. This year, thanks to the creativity of Ramona Walhof, we have added a new video on our Idaho YouTube channel called “Braille is Here to Stay.” Watch it at <https://youtu.be/AhP6kRma2rk>

The NFB Idaho state board meeting was held October 24. We voted to give three college scholarships for 2021 in the amounts of \$1500, \$2000, and \$2500. We will open scholarship applications to any student who is either legally blind or has been determined functionally blind by Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ICBVI) staff. This should allow more students to apply and increase competition. Scholarship applications should be out by January 1, 2021.

Speaking of 2021, Washington Seminar, which is our opportunity to speak to our congressional representatives about important issues to the blind, will be

virtual this year. It will take place February 8-11. Actual appointments will be set later this year. Because this event is virtual, members will be able to be involved in our Great Gathering In, participate in legislative training, and be part of the presentations. I will share more details as they become available.

Our state convention will be March 25-27. I don't know at this point whether it will be in person or virtual or a hybrid. If it is in-person, it will be at the Red Lion Downtowner in Boise. The convention committee is working hard to have this be a great convention.

I hope you are enjoying our beautiful fall weather, and I invite you to join all of our NFB activities as we work to build the National Federation of the Blind of Idaho.



Photo: Newest NFB member Hayden River Wier with parents Dylan and Bailie

Serving Blind Youth Summer 2020

Alison Steven

If it takes 10,000 hours to become a master of something, then I am racking up my time for mastery of the Zoom video conferencing platform after our summer of programs for blind and visually impaired young people in Idaho. Having moved the regular programs online, the planning teams got creative about how to engage young people over the internet. The NFB BELL Academy, in-home edition was delivered nationwide with three separate two-week sessions. Five of our Idaho kids participated, and I taught the second session. I was tantalized and frustrated at not being able to be with the kids in person. They all received a box of supplies including everything they would need for two weeks of lessons and many families reported their child being positively impacted by the program, by the connection with blind kids and adults and by the focus on skills of blindness. Finally, things are beginning to make sense to some of these families who have only heard about resources before and now they are seeing them in action. All the foundational elements of an NFB BELL Academy were included: reading braille, writing braille, cane training, making treats, planting seeds, and all while having fun and sharing experiences. There was even a visit from President Riccobono on the last day.

Interspersed between the sessions of NFB BELL Academy, the Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired ran a virtual VISTA College Days in June and a four-week virtual session of VISTA SEARCH in July. College Days lasted a week and included all the usual elements of College Days except for the residential piece. Students had classes with Earl Hoover (Academic and Executive Functioning), Tyler Merren (Recreation and Fitness) and Lance Kaldor (Meta Cognition). And if you are not sure what some of those classes are, be glad that you don't have to be in college anymore! Tyler Merren brought a key factor of movement and physical activity to College Days which kept us all sane and engaged in an otherwise static program. Tyler, for those who do not know, recently won the San Francisco Lighthouse Holman Prize for his accessible fitness app and website. Each student attending the program was assigned a professional mentor (within the career field of interest to them) and a peer mentor to support them and hold them accountable.

The key element of peer mentoring was carried on in the VISTA SEARCH program. SEARCH stands for Summer Employment Advocacy and Readiness at Home

Curriculum. Students “zoomed” for two hours a day and then connected with their peer mentors to follow up on what they had learned and the assignments they needed to complete. By the end of the four-week program, each student completed an informational interview with someone employed in a business or career field that the student wanted to learn more about. We were also able to bring in blind professionals from around the country who were, not surprisingly, more available than usual. These speakers covered topics of self-determination, job exploration, and work readiness. Joe Strechay, who works for APH as well as a producer on top TV and film shows, explored the students’ strengths, weaknesses and interests with them and then helped them develop “elevator speeches”. Kathy Nimmer, who was awarded NFB Blind Teacher of the Year Award in 2015, presented on developing great resumes and thoughtful word choice in job applications. Molly Burke, who has over two million followers of her YouTube channel, talked with our young people about the challenges and obstacles she overcame to be successful as a blind YouTuber. Tyler Merren returned to present sessions on successful interview techniques. Throughout the month Dana Ard and her Toastmasters team worked with the students on their presentation and debate skills. Students walked away from the program with some great skills, great ideas and most importantly great connections with blind role models.

A student brought a smile to my face as she summed the program up with the following comment: “I thought it was going to be boring, but it was actually really fun!”

It’s your Toolbox

A continuing series highlighting Federationists helping Federationists

Bailie Weir Fall 2020



The other day my husband decided it was officially time to change the breaks on his 2003 Toyota 4Runner. After a quick trip to the local auto parts store to get the new brake pads, he made short work of the task at hand. As he sat on an upside-down bucket near the car where the wheel was removed, I asked him about all the tools he needed to change his brakes on his own. He gave me a little laugh and started to list off things such as, a car jack, a C-clamp, and a few types of wrenches among other items. I was a little surprised to hear about all the tools he needed and then thought to ask. “Wouldn’t it just be easier to take it in and have someone else do the work for you rather than spend the money on all the tools and the time it takes to figure out what to even do?” My husband gave the question some thought while he worked and then answered, “I think there is something to be said about the sense of pride you get when accomplishing a task on your own.”

This comment struck home to me. Every day I used a collection of tools at work and home so I too could accomplish tasks on my own. It may not be like fixing the brakes on a car, but the sense of pride I felt being able to fill out paperwork or read a book by myself was just as strong.

Throughout my whole visually impaired life I was told that I would need to build a toolbox so that I could accomplish different tasks independently. I now use tools such as my Smartlux digital magnifier that helps me read small print in a pinch or my LVI CC TV that I use at work to read documents which aren’t available in a digital format. Everyday my white cane helps get me to work and when I sit at my desk, I am using ZoomText to see what’s on my computer screen and hear different items when my eyes get too tired to see. Sometimes, I even like to give my eyes a break completely and grab my Focus40 refreshable braille display to read and reply to emails.

Today, my toolbox may seem quite diverse, but it wasn’t always that way. In fact, I completed my Bachelor of Science degree and worked for nearly four years with only my Smartlux magnifier. It took a lot of tears and frustration to learn that not every task can be accomplished with only one tool in hand.

I think at times we all feel like it would just be easier or simpler to ask a friend, spouse, or family member to read or fill something out for us. We have all been in a doctor’s office frustrated about trying to fill out those forms with the

unbelievably small print, haven't we? Or maybe you can relate more to being at the grocery store attempting to find a specific item on the shelf, but just can't seem to locate it. The challenges blind and visually impaired people face everyday is a very long list and we all struggle with different things. That is where your toolbox can really help. Finding a variety of tools that work for you can allow you to live a better, less stressful, life. Find a good handheld magnifier you can use at your doctor's office, or maybe have them email the forms to you beforehand so you can use a CC TV at home to complete the paperwork before an appointment. Rather than struggle while shopping, consider a monocular or downloading an app to help you locate items more easily in the grocery store.

The best part about your toolbox is that it is truly yours. Nowadays, it is very possible for us to find a wide assortment of tools that may help us accomplish a variety of tasks independently, it just takes some time to find the ones that work best for *you*. Remember that there isn't a single tool that can do it all, weather you are changing brakes on a car or shopping at the grocery store. Most importantly, don't forget to allow yourself to feel that bit of pride when you are finally able to accomplish a task on your own, no matter if the task is great or small. Every step is worth celebrating.

Heard Birds Fall 2020

Steve Bouffard, Curator of Birds

Orma J. Smith Museum of Natural History, The College of Idaho

Bird sounds are down from spring and summer levels now that nesting season is over and most of the birds that migrate south have already left. Still there are plenty of birds to hear, both not so common. There is Jay, that's been reported in Plantation Country Club. It's normally found further east rare bird here in Idaho and general, so avid birders get hearing or seeing it. It was *sound* only, and it took a



common and some one bird, a Blue the Boise area near an eastern bird in the US. It's a the west in excited about first identified by while before it was

actually seen. It really is a "heard bird". Blue Jays have also been reported along the upper Snake River from Blackfoot to Island Park, so if you are in eastern Idaho you too have chance to hear one.

The birds that will be here over the winter make a variety of different calls, such as contact calls and alarm calls. Contact calls are given to keep members of the flock in contact with each other. If they are in a flock, there are more eyes watching out for predators. They can afford to spend more time eating rather than being vigilant. When one gives an alarm call, everyone is immediately on alert. They are so attuned to alarm calls that they learn and respond to alarm calls from other species. In the winter it is common to see several species mixed together in flocks for mutual protection. Some birds have learned to take advantage of this behavior. Blue Jays, a rather brash, if not outright aggressive bird, often mimic the call of hawks. Song birds hear the supposed hawk, give alarm calls and scatter, leaving the jays sole access to the food source.

Birds you can hear this fall and winter (especially if you have bird feeders) are American and Lesser Goldfinches; House, Song and White-crowned Sparrows; Red-breasted Nuthatches; Black-capped Chickadees; Eurasian Collared and Mourning Doves; Black-billed Magpies and Common Crows; Common Starling. Most of their calls are some sort of chip or chirp, but with a little practice these can all be identified. Some are easy, like nuthatches and chickadees. Red-Breasted Nuthatches sound like a miniature back-up alarm – so if hear a beep, beep, beep coming from up in a tree, it's a nuthatch. Chickadees say their name – "chicka dee dee dee". They give it when they are alarmed – the more "dees" they say the greater the alarm. Also present are Northern Flickers and Downy Woodpeckers. They have different rates of drumming and distinct calls.

So, get out and listen for birds. Whenever you're out, keep an ear out for birds. You can learn to identify the calls and songs if you want, or if not just appreciate the sounds of nature – whatever suits you. I'm almost always birding by ear when I am outside. You can too!

Our public transportation partners have gone above and beyond to keep their services safe, sanitized, and moving. Families rely on the bus and other services to get to life-critical appointments, essential jobs, etc., and feel grateful for the efforts being made to ensure the wellbeing of our community.

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