



The Voice

Vision · Opportunities · Innovation · Choices · Expertise

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Message from Dacia Johnson, Executive Director



Governor Kate Brown has emphasized the importance of having an economy and workforce that ensures every Oregonian has a place to work and earn a living to support themselves and their families. This newsletter features individuals who are blind working in different occupations that utilize their unique skills and abilities. With specialized training, tools and technology, individuals who are blind can perform nearly any job-related task or occupation. Like all of us, Oregonians who are blind want a chance to be able to support themselves and their families by doing a job that they love.

I also want to recognize the State of Oregon Department of Administrative Services Motor Pool staff for their excellent customer service and responsiveness to our staff during a recent trip to Central Oregon. You can learn more in this edition of The Voice.

We are also embarking on a major initiative in the agency Business Enterprise Program. This newsletter introduces you to Lewanda Miranda, a licensed manager who is blind and has volunteered to be the first individual to shift her business model to directly managing the day-to-day operations of her business. I hope you track our progress in strengthening and modernizing this important employment program for Oregonians who are blind.

For many years our agency has been proud to participate in the Governor's Toy Drive. Agency employees Dee Bucellato and Terri Lewis worked together to make sure that kids in need are able to receive something special this holiday season. Here is a picture of the toys before they made the trip to the State Capitol!

Happy Holidays!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dacia".



Ax Prince is putting his “Employment First”

The Department of Human Services tracks success stories in the Employment First Initiative. Recently, Ax Prince, a client of the Oregon Commission for the Blind was featured. More success stories can be found on the Employment First Website:

<http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/EMPLOYMENT/EMPLOYMENT-FIRST/SUCCESS-STORIES/Pages/ax-works-at-blackstone-audio.aspx>

Ax finds his dream job working 20 hours a week at Blackstone Audio

Before Ax Prince was hired at Blackstone Audio, manager Saresa Whitley spent hours on Braille labels matching the dots from the template to what was printed. It was part of the quality control check. For her, however, it was a time-consuming and inefficient system.

“It took me a lot longer to try and do what Ax does in just a few seconds by actually reading the Braille,” Saresa said. “He has saved us time and has the skills to make sure we are putting out a quality product.”

Ax, 32, is blind and experiences autism. He had several jobs before the Oregon Commission for the Blind helped him get employment at Blackstone Audio in November 2015. Ax is a joyful man who plays piano, sings and beatboxes in his free time.

Ax is the Quality Control Braille Technician for Ashland-based Blackstone Audio, the largest independent audiobook publisher in the United States. He works as part of a team responsible for managing the contract that Blackstone holds with the Library of Congress’s Talking Books program.

Through a national network of cooperating libraries, National

Library Services administers a free library program of Braille and audio materials circulated to eligible borrowers in the United States. Ax’s job is to sort the audio book materials and check for any errors on the Braille labels.

“I really like that I can sit all day rather than standing,” Ax said. “It’s something I like to do. And I really like my coworkers.” The Library of Congress team (or LOC team) is a tight-knit group. They have embraced Ax as their friend and coworker.

“Ax has brought unity to the team,” said Saresa, Library Production Supervisor for Blackstone. “People that used to not get along so well now put aside their differences because they see the challenges that Ax has had to overcome in his life. Yet he still comes to work smiling, joyful and excited to work. He is the glue that holds the team together.”



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Daryl Ackley with Ackley Counseling & Employment Services provides Ax's current long-term supports. Ax works mostly independently now, with Daryl checking in from time to time. Daryl was a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor for the Oregon Commission for the Blind when he first met Ax at age 15, when he was in high school. At that time, Daryl helped Ax to secure several work experiences and helped him with some life skills.

"I believe everyone should work and that individual community employment is really what everyone should have a right to, and has the ability to achieve," Daryl said. "Seeing Ax now in a career and doing something he really likes doing and making money, it's really rewarding." Ax had several jobs over the years. He wanted a job closer to his home in Ashland, where he feels more comfortable. The Commission for the Blind hired Diane Paulson to develop a job for Ax.

"I was looking not just for any job for Ax, but one that fits his skills and attributes," Diane said. "I was originally thinking of him for Blackstone's recording studio since he is so musical, but this opportunity came up for the Talking Books program that matches Ax's talents and also met the employer's needs."

Jane Hagle, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor with the Commission for the Blind, said Blackstone has been an ideal job fit for Ax. He currently works 20 hours per week. "Ax really wanted connection; he craved it," she said. "He is a wonderful human being who just wanted to be part of a team."

When Saresa told Jane in summer of 2016 that the Library of Congress was switching to a different form of Braille, called Unified English Braille (UEB), for its future audio books, the Commission for the Blind secured a tutor for Ax to help him master a series of classes through the Hadley School for the Blind. He is now officially certified in Unified English Braille so he can continue his work for Blackstone's Library of Congress team.

"He is a really hard worker," Saresa said. "He has caught several errors that we brought to the Library of Congress's attention, and many more mistakes from the embossing machine. The work he does is extremely important." Ax's coworkers can't say enough about their team member. Sarah Gill, the crew leader on the Library of Congress team, said she and Ax call each other "home skillet" as nicknames. "He is the most vibrant, happy, easygoing person I've ever met," she said. "I don't think our team would be complete without him."

Coworker Martha Valle appreciates Ax's musicality and energy. "He listens to any music, doesn't matter, he loves it," she said. "He loves it here and we love him." Chelsea Whitley, another team member, said Ax helps to keep the team from being too stressed during busy times. "No matter what the music, he is always dancing and if there is no music on, he dances to his own beat," she said. As for Ax, he has found his perfect job match.

"I prefer to be right here," he said, smiling widely and grabbing his manager Saresa's hand. "Blackstone is the right job for me." Jane Hagle was Ax's VR counselor for the Oregon Commission for the Blind. Diane Paulson was the job developer and initial job coach for Ax. Corinne Vieville was Ax's tutor for the UEB training. His personal agent is Deirdre Rapp with Creative Supports. Daryl Ackley with Ackley Counseling & Employment Services provides long-term supports.

Woodcarving Artist Mick Yoder is featured in Oregonian Article

Mick Yoder spoke with Oregonian Reporter Samantha Swindler about his vision loss and how he has been focusing on building a profitable business that utilizes his craft of woodcarving.

At the Oregon Commission for the Blind's workshop, clients who cannot see are learning to use table saws and wood planers. And it's here that a newly blind contractor from Molalla discovered he could still earn a living with his hands.

In March 2015, Mick Yoder slipped off a metal roof and tumbled head-first into a tree. He cracked his skull, broke five ribs, and lost his sight after internal bleeding damaged his optic nerve.

Suddenly, the proprietor of Mighty Mick's Construction, who'd worked in the field for 50 years, lost the job he loved. "It's a big transition," said Yoder, 66. "I was at the top of my game. Even through the recession I was busy... and then all of a sudden, you're not the go-to guy anymore."

Yoder was totally blind after the accident, but he's since gained some limited close-range vision. "If you were standing in front of me, given enough time, I could see your face and I could be able to identify you, but I need time to do that," he said.

Yoder had always worked with wood. When he wasn't constructing buildings, he was a hobbyist carver, creating Christmas ornaments and small relief carvings of animals and angels. After his injury, Yoder knew he wouldn't be contractor, but he hoped to turn woodcarving into a full-time job. The Oregon Commission for the Blind helped make it happen.

See the full story by Samantha Swindler of the Oregonian at:

http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2016/11/blind_wood_carver_column.html



Pictured: Mick Yoder, Photograph featured in The Oregonian article authored by Samantha Swindler

Entrepreneur who is Blind is Focusing on Business Growth and Potential

In 2016 the Legislature provided the Commission for the Blind with funding that allowed us to secure federal funds to implement a major policy change in the agency's Business Enterprise Program.

We will be moving from a model of sub-contracting of vending machine operations to direct day-to-day operations being managed and directed by licensed managers who are blind. The Commission for the Blind will be purchasing the vending machine equipment and necessary software in order to support this change.

Lewanda Miranda will be the first licensed manager who is blind to begin fully operating her vending route. Lewanda's vending route is a complex business model that provides vending services not only to state/local buildings, but also includes road side rest areas and prisons.

As part of her small business, Lewanda will manage a team of employees to fill and service more than 80 vending machines in Eastern Oregon.

Pictured is Lewanda Miranda filling vending machines in Eastern Oregon's winter weather. She doesn't let vision loss stand in her way of running a successful business.



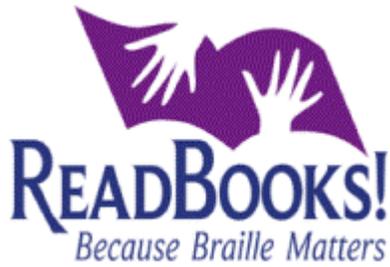
State Fleet/Motor Pool Team Supports Timely Service Delivery in Central Oregon

Every day our Rehabilitation Instructors for the Independent Living Program are out and about in all parts of Oregon in order to bring OCB's services to our clients in their homes. Sometimes getting to our clients is as much of an adventure as figuring out how to assist clients achieve their goals for independence.

Kevin Ehrenshaft, OCB Rehabilitation Teacher, has travelled to places he has never been this fall. He has been going to rural locations that aren't locatable through navigation devices and taking alternate routes when main roads are closed during the height of the fire season.

Recently, Rehabilitation Teacher Jackie Macy was making home visits to provide skills training in Bend and Redmond when her state vehicle had suddenly stopped working in Bend. She called DAS Fleet Services and they immediately arranged for the vehicle to be repaired and for an alternate vehicle to be provided.

Jackie was able to continue to serve clients and the staff at DAS Fleet Services maintained contact with her throughout the process. Because of the DAS Fleet staff's commitment to excellent customer service, Jackie was able to maintain her appointments with clients to provide training in their homes. Since she had to stay overnight while the vehicle was repaired, she was even able to fit in an additional client visit with a new referral! That is excellence in State Government in Action!



Free Braille For Kids!

FREE braille literacy program for your families is available at the following link!

<http://www.nbp.org/ic/nbp/programs/readbooks/readbooks.html>

ReadBooks! Because Braille Matters, sponsored by National Braille Press.

The purpose of this program is to encourage families to think about braille literacy at the earliest possible age. It costs nothing, and you may start a child on the path to literacy.

**OREGON
COMMISSION
FOR THE
BLIND**
Expanding Opportunities
for Oregonians with
Vision Loss



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For over 70 years, the Oregon Commission for the Blind has been a resource for visually impaired Oregonians, as well as their families, friends, and employers. We have nationally recognized programs and staff that make a difference in people’s lives every day.

Our vision is to achieve full inclusion of visually impaired people in society. Towards this aim, we help people make informed choices about their individual goals and plans. These aspirations ultimately lead to successful employment, independent living, and social self-sufficiency.

For Tessa (pictured), success meant earning a license with the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) and becoming a valuable member of a solid community of entrepreneurs who are blind.

For the past 12 years, she has run “Tessa’s Coffee Corner” in a county building in SE Portland. This opportunity to run her own business and the income it has provided has allowed her to further her education and become a homeowner.

