

SIGHTLINES

Fostering Independence Through Assistive Technology

The Fayette County Association for the Blind covers all the bases in assistive technology — from low-tech to high-tech, for people who are “tech-savvy” as well as those who have no desire to use electronics. It is a client-centered approach designed to meet each person’s individual needs and goals.

Executive Director Sandra Morris said, “A lot of seniors ask us for help in using their smart phones and iPads.

They may have age-related macular degeneration, for example, which affects the central vision. It can make it impossible for them to see the icons on the screen. We help them turn on the built-in accessibility features and introduce them to apps that magnify, enlarge, or read the screen out loud,” Sandra said. “We gather people together in small classes and give them basic training, and then work with them one-on-one to ensure we are addressing their needs. Some

people don’t need or want much help, but others go slowly, with baby steps, taking a little chunk at a time.”

Some may need to learn keyboard shortcuts so they can navigate on a computer without using a mouse. Others learn how to reverse a screen to yellow text against a black background or to enlarge font size for greater readability.

Tom Mullen is the organization’s “equipment guru,” demonstrating the capabilities and features of various models of desktop video magnifiers. He also repairs equipment – from electronic devices to Perkins Braille’s.

“A lot of seniors are timid with technology,” Sandra said. “We try to incorporate it in various ways. For example, we know it can be devastating for someone to hear their eye doctor say: ‘There’s really nothing more I can do for you.’ And it may take time before the State services can get to them.”

“Our Specialized Services Coordinator is Kylie Sims. She’s the

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Message from the President



Dear Friends:

This will be my last greeting to you. On March 30th, I will ride off into the proverbial sunset to devote my energy to — well, who knows what? Retirement is my next daring adventure, and a huge change for me. I'm very excited, and a little apprehensive as well. But I'm inspired by the people I've had the privilege to know over the last 36 years in the "blind biz".

Every day, people with low vision deal with change. Every trip to a new doctor, every trip to a new grocery store, restaurant, or shopping mall

brings change. It is a challenge physically and emotionally. And yet, every day our clients deal with this change, they overcome their fear of it, and they succeed.

It's hard to fathom the technological changes I've seen during my career. The first personal reader on the market 30+ years ago cost \$60,000, was not at all portable, and I had to write a grant to purchase it for our clients. Now you can do the same thing on your smartphone. "Apps" that read, identify color, faces, and provide GPS guidance are now freely available. And, despite the recent turn of events with self-driving cars, I still

believe that blind people will "drive" cars in my lifetime.

The good people at Pennsylvania Association for the Blind and its member agencies are out there every day working to make sure that people with vision loss have the tools they need to live, as one PAB agency's mission describes it, "rich, vibrant lives". But they don't do it alone. They need your support. I hope you'll continue to provide it, as you have for decades.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart. It's now time to move on from this extraordinary part of my life because change is inevitable...except from vending machines.

Onward and Upward!

Sincerely

Elaine Welch
President/CEO

May is Ultraviolet Awareness Month

Ultraviolet Awareness Month is sponsored by Prevent Blindness America to increase awareness of how UV rays can damage your eyes, increase your risk of cataracts and cancers of the eye especially in high-risk patients. UV protection with sunglasses is recommended in everyone, not only those that work outside, and can be preventive.

Sunglasses should be 100% UV-absorbent for UVA and UVB or be labeled UV400. Another useful tip is wearing a brimmed hat, especially when outdoors in the sun for a prolonged period of time. Be extra cautious for children especially in mid-day and when sun is reflected off the water, snow or ice. Some people who have had cataract surgery with the newer intraocular lens implants have UV protection on their implants as well but should still wear sunglasses when outdoors.



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‘face’ of our agency for new clients,” Sandra said. “She assesses their needs. Her calm, caring, no nonsense approach helps quell their fears and gives them the motivation to learn new ways of accomplishing tasks. She gives them some low tech assistive aids: check-writing and signature guides, talking calculators, and lighted hand-held magnifiers.”

Sometimes, it’s the little things that make all the difference. “These are the first steps forward,” Sandra

said, “and people are so grateful! It’s a real confidence-builder for them to know they can still write their own checks and pay their bills without having to ask someone else for help. It helps restore their sense of dignity, privacy, and independence. One client told Kylie that the check writing guide and talking calculator were the best things that anyone ever gave him. She can’t count the number of hugs she’s received!”



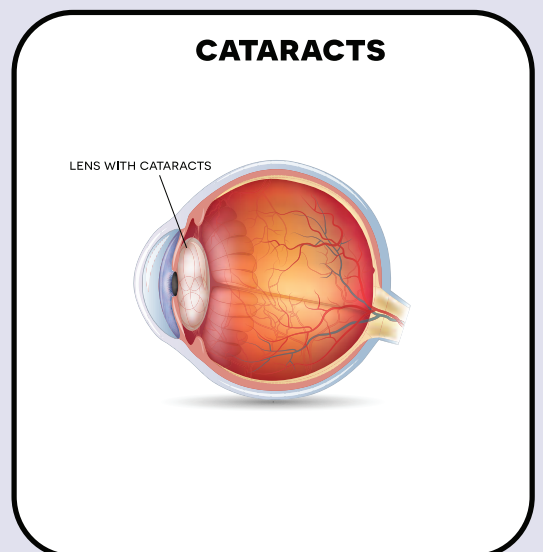
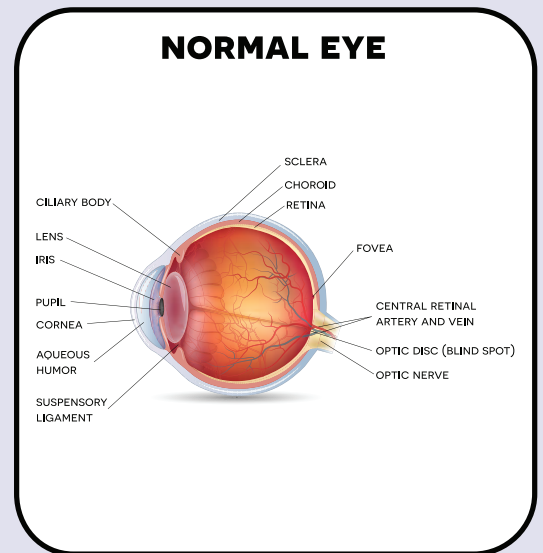
June Is Cataract Awareness Month

A cataract is a clouding of the lens of the eye that affects vision. While cataracts are generally age-related, they can occasionally be present at birth, a condition known as a congenital cataract.

People with cataracts often describe having blurry or double vision, a strong glare, or difficulty seeing at night. Surgery is the only available treatment for removal, although it is typically not necessary. However, a cataract can lead to additional eye problems, so consult your ophthalmologist if you are experiencing any of these symptoms.

While cataract affects more than 24 million Americans age 40 and older, cataract can occur among young adults or children. Risk factors that may lead to getting cataract at a younger age include:

- Intense heat or long-term exposure to UV rays from the sun
- Certain diseases, such as diabetes
- Inflammation in the eye
- Hereditary influences
- Events before birth, such as German measles in the mother
- Long-term steroid use
- Severe long-term nearsightedness (myopia)
- Eye injuries
- Eye diseases
- Smoking



When it comes to helping seniors adjust to losing their vision, **one size does not fit all!**



and its 25 independent Member Agencies understand that when it comes to addressing the needs of seniors who are struggling with vision problems, **ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL!**

The truth is, older folks often have very different priorities than those of working-age adults or youth.

They didn't grow up using the technology we have today, and with the added challenge of vision loss, it may be too daunting to start. But even something as simple as a talking clock or calculator, audio books, and better lighting can make a real difference.

Others may find they can no longer read the icons on the screen of their smart phone or iPad. They may just need help in turning on accessibility features or learning keyboard shortcuts on their computers.

With the right training, seniors can learn to use accessible technology, including video magnifiers and specialized apps. They can once again enjoy reading, sending email, searching the internet, and engaging in social media.

But losing one's vision can present frustrating challenges, and it can be easy to get overwhelmed. When they have access to caring and patient instructors who understand their challenges and can work with them one-on-one at their pace, it can make all the difference.

Give now, and transform someone's life! Give to the **PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND**

