

II. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Question: What is the relationship between age and vision loss?

Answer: Many of the conditions which cause vision loss are associated with aging such as Macular Degeneration, Cataracts, Diabetic Retinopathy and Glaucoma.

Question: Does the term “blind” only refer to persons who are totally blind or have no useful vision?

Answer: The term “blind” technically includes persons whose visual acuity ranges from legal blindness to total blindness. However, the term “visually impaired” is increasingly used to indicate persons with visual impairment ranging from slight to severe. Only about ten percent of the visually impaired population is totally blind. The rest have some useful vision.

Question: What does “legally blind” mean?

Answer: “Legal blindness” is the degree of vision loss established in state and federal law as the basis of eligibility for governmental services such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medi-Cal, and rehabilitation services. Legal blindness is about ten percent of normal visual acuity or 20/200 or a visual field limited to 20 degrees.

Question: What are the most common causes of vision loss?

Answer: They are Cataracts, Macular Degeneration, Diabetic Retinopathy, Glaucoma and Retinitis Pigmentosa. Information about these conditions can be obtained from their respective associations.

Question: Do most blind people use Braille?

Answer: No. Only about eight percent of blind individuals learn to read Braille. About half of visually impaired persons are over 65 years of age and they tend not to learn Braille.

Question: Are most blind persons of working age employed? What kinds of jobs do they do?

Answer: Approximately 30 percent of blind and visually impaired persons of working age are employed. Blind persons still face a great deal of employer resistance. Employers fear they will not be able to produce competitively with sighted employees. Those who are employed work in a wide range of fields. There are visually impaired teachers, professors, lawyers, machinists, auto mechanics, aviation mechanics, customer service representatives, public administrators, social workers, psychologists, engineers, medical transcriptionists, court reporters, county, state, and federal workers, stock brokers, insurance agents, travel agents,

real estate agents, salespersons, entrepreneurs, factory workers, etc.

Question: Have technological advances had an impact on blind people?

Answer: The development of synthesized speech and the widespread availability of inexpensive speech chips have opened a world of opportunities for visually impaired persons. The major handicap of blindness, the lack of immediate personal access to printed information, has been effectively neutralized by the advent of personal computers which can output information in speech, Large Print or Braille. The use of scanners which convert printed documents into computer files give blind persons access to printed materials in minutes rather than the weeks formerly required to have them recorded on tape or transcribed into Braille. Speech chips have rendered virtually all appliances useable by blind persons. There are talking clocks, calculators, gauges, scales, microwave ovens and remote control devices as well as many kinds of tools with audible output.

Question: What kind of recreational activities do blind people participate in?

Answer: Blind persons engage in a wide variety of sports and recreational pursuits. Blind cross-country skiers ski with a sighted guide who skis beside or behind them and gives verbal clues about the environment. Blind golfers golf with a sighted partner who helps them keep track of

their ball. Blind bowlers sometimes use a guide rail to keep their approach straight. Blind cyclists ride on tandem bicycles with a sighted “captain” riding on the front. Blind runners sometimes run touching hands with a partner or just with verbal directions from a fellow runner. There are blind swimmers, water skiers, wind surfers, horse trainers and horse racers. For the less ambitious, there are Large Print and Braille playing cards, tactile board games, puzzles, chess, checkers and many other games.