

I. INTRODUCTION

Losing vision can be extremely traumatic. No one gets this news without having a complex set of reactions such as denial, anger, fear and depression.

If you have recently learned that your vision is diminished or likely to worsen in the future, you may be experiencing any or all of these feelings. You may be wondering how you will go on doing what you have always done, how you will maintain your independence and how you will take care of yourself and your family.

Some people think that because they have diminished eyesight they are not a full person. You may be having similar thoughts; you may be feeling very alone. One of your concerns may be that you don't know where to turn for guidance, advice, assistance, support, comfort, information and instruction.

We at the Office of Services to the Blind want you to know that you are not alone. Although only you can make the adjustment to vision loss for yourself, there are many services and support systems that can help you. This ***Handbook*** has been prepared to give you an overview of services available to you and to get you started on the path to a healthy and positive future.

First, let us spend a few minutes expressing our thoughts about persons with visual impairments. Blindness does not equal helplessness or despair. Millions of people in

the United States who are visually impaired live happy, healthy and productive lives. They pursue relationships, jobs, hobbies, civic duties, volunteer work, parenting and all the other components of human endeavor with the same effectiveness and satisfaction as fully sighted people. With training in the special skills of independence, individuals can accomplish just about anything they set out to do.

Our philosophy is that the essence of a person does not reside in the ability to see or to perform any particular physical function, but rather in the spirit. The capacity to set the course of one's own life and the conviction to stay on course despite the inevitable obstacles of destiny come from the will. If one such obstacle is the loss of eyesight, it is the inner person who makes the choice between defeat and adjustment. Thus, the onset of a visual disability need not be a barrier to an individual's ability to attain a rich and fulfilling life.

Blind and visually impaired individuals are an integral part of our society. They are employees, breadwinners, spouses, parents and grandparents. They care about the same life functions as everyone else: earning a living, raising a family, being personally fulfilled and making a contribution to others.

The most dangerous thing that you can do at this point is make assumptions about what you will or will not be able to do in the future. You are probably not familiar enough with the implications of visual impairment to fully know

what to expect. Please seek the support and guidance of persons who are knowledgeable. People who have experienced vision loss, as well as professionals trained to assist persons with visual impairments, can be of tremendous help to you in this transition phase.

Before you make any major life decisions such as quitting a job, selling a house, moving in with adult children or others, abandoning hobbies or friends, please contact an agency providing services specifically for visually impaired individuals. Ask them about adjustment counseling, support groups and peer counseling. You will find a list of “California Agencies” in the “Directory of Resources” section of this ***Handbook***.

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

Think of this Handbook as a guidebook, describing major points of interest and telling you how to access them. It is not intended to replace in-depth information about any particular program or service, but rather to let you know what is available. Once you find the programs and services that suit your needs, you can do further research about eligibility requirements, fees and other important information.

Since most people who lose vision are more than 50 years of age, this ***Handbook*** is directed to the older population. These individuals are not usually connected to the social service system, and thus are not familiar with available resources. Families of visually impaired children should

contact the Special Education coordinator in their local school districts for information and assistance.

The final section of this ***Handbook*** is a “Directory of Resources” which will be referenced throughout. In this section, you will find contact information for numerous agencies/organizations and a brief synopsis of their services.

Use this ***Handbook*** as a reference library. You don’t need to read and try to absorb all of it at one time. Look through it and study those sections that seem to respond to your immediate concerns.

Remember to contact us at the Office of Services to the Blind if you have any questions or need further information.

Our contact information is:

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You may also e-mail us at: BlindAccess@dss.ca.gov.