



# Montana Association for the Blind

## Share Our Vision

In 1946, a small group of blind Montanans, their families and friends had a bold dream that Montana would be a place in which those with blindness are perceived and understood to be an integral and valued part of the Montana community; they wanted a state where the tools and skills needed to adjust to blindness are readily available, and in which those with blindness are given every opportunity to participate fully in their community.

To work toward achieving these goals, they established the **Montana Association for the Blind (MAB)** — a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

As the population ages, more and more people are affected by diseases that rob them of their eyesight such as macular degeneration, diabetes, and glaucoma. Anyone may lose their sight to disease or to injury. This often leaves people at a loss of how to continue to do the daily activities that were important to them and, in turn, causes them to feel isolated and lacking in purpose. To lose one's sight is frightening. But to live as a blind person does not need to be.

The MAB has grown into a vibrant organization with nine local chapters around the state and an at-large chapter that meets monthly by telephone. The local chapters provide the understanding and emotional support for those living with visual impairment. They also invite guests in to educate members on tools that may help them, health, or entertainment. One chapter, the Bozeman Chapter, even has a book club and hiking club.

The MAB has several vital programs available to members around the state. These include the Emil Honka Scholarship that helps visually-impaired students attend college in the state, and a loan program that provides no-interest loans to visually-impaired people to buy adaptive equipment. The Bozeman Chapter also operates the Low Vision Equipment Demonstration Room where people can come to try out aids to see what right for them.

Our largest program is the **Summer Orientation Program**. It is a one-month school held every summer to teach adults who have lost or are losing their vision the skills and techniques they need to successfully continue to live their lives independently. For the last 12 years, we have rented a dorm at Trinity College in Helena to conduct the school.

Many who attend have lost confidence in their abilities to participate in everyday life. Others are in dire need of assistance with basic mobility training and lessons in mastering basic living skills. One letter that came to us many years ago demonstrated the desperation one family felt when making an inquiry about the school: "About a week ago my father became blind due to diabetes. Currently, my father is crawling around the house on his hands and knees while my mother has no idea what she can do to help." This man attended the **Summer Orientation Program** where he learned needed skills and regained the dignity he thought he had lost forever. He went on to lead a productive life at home and in his community.

Students attending the **Summer Orientation Program** take classes in mobility to learn how to navigate using a white cane. They also take classes to learn to do the simple tasks that many of us take for granted such as: brushing one's teeth, matching clothes, and organizing

medications. Students are able to choose elective classes in Braille, computer, technologies such as smartphones and tablets, cooking, woodworking, low vision equipment, sewing, or crafts. Students don't just learn skills at the program, they develop life-long friendships.

The **Summer Orientation Program** is offered without charge to students—our founders wanted to make sure that the lack of money was never a barrier to anyone. We offer this program with the help of generous donors, an endowment fund, and a crew of enthusiastic volunteers.

## **CONTACT INFO FOR M.A.B.**

– **Phone # (Main Office):** (406) 442-9411.

– **Email address:** mabadmin@mabsop.org

– **Website:** [www.mabsop.org](http://www.mabsop.org)

*\*For information about the **Summer Orientation Program**, call our office or contact MAB director, **Jocelyn DeHaas** via e-mail at: [mabdirector@mabsop.org](mailto:mabdirector@mabsop.org).*

