



Supporting People with Visual Disabilities to Live Full Lives



MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION
for the
Blind and Visually Impaired



ACCESSIBILITY

The roots of the Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (MABVI) stretch back to 1903. MABVI is one of the oldest social service organizations in the U.S. serving adults who are blind or low-vision. Helen Keller was one of MABVI's early leaders. MABVI's commitment to promote independence and self-determination for blind adults is rooted in her values.





Today, MABVI still provides training, therapy, and support to more than 1,500 people a year who are blind or have low vision, services that allow them to thrive and continue the activities that are important to them. Losing your eyesight doesn't have to mean being sidelined.

In Massachusetts, most people who lose their vision are older adults, and their visual disability is age related. Like everything else, the retina wears out. Blindness can also be caused by strokes and other conditions more common in old age. It's estimated that half the people 80 and older have an age-related eye disease that can't be corrected with lenses or surgery which will lead to progressive vision loss. While many



Adjustment Counseling

Before people can learn new skills, they must be ready. When faced with the news that they're going blind, many people become too anxious or depressed to learn to adjust to this new challenge. The experience can feel traumatic. People panic that they won't be able to remain in their home. They may fear going out. They may worry that their life is over.

MABVI has developed a range of adjustment counseling services that are effective in helping people adjust to their blindness and become ready to use new skills and supports that will allow them to move on with their lives. MABVI has 36 peer lead support groups located in community centers throughout the state. And for many people who are losing their vision, meeting someone who "gets it" is exactly what they need.

people with age-related eye disease retain some usable sight for years, reading becomes difficult, falls are a greater risk, and daily activities become more challenging.

Older adults who are facing blindness can learn new skills that can help them successfully adjust to vision loss and continue to live safely at home. Blindness doesn't have to mean stopping the activities you enjoy.



A woman with short grey hair, wearing red-tinted safety glasses and a green long-sleeved shirt, is smiling and gesturing with her hands. She is standing in front of a whiteboard that displays large letters (H, V, Z, N, C, V, C, Z, S, O, N, V, K, D, N, Z, K, S, Z, K, S). A person in a dark suit is partially visible on the right side of the frame, gesturing towards the woman. The image is framed by a yellow border on the left and a dark blue border on the right and bottom. The text "©Meg Landers" is visible in the bottom right corner of the image.



Once someone has resolved the emotional barriers preventing them from dealing with the challenge of living with lower vision, they are ready to learn new strategies for doing all the things they relied on their sight to accomplish. MABVI has a unique approach to providing vision rehabilitation. We have a network of licensed occupational therapists, trained in vision rehabilitation, who are located throughout the state. They work with individuals in their homes, teaching them new skills for doing things like cooking, taking medication, reading, whatever the individual needs to be safe and fulfilled. The advantage of using occupational therapists (OTs) is two-fold. First, the OT is trained to work with conditions such as loss of mobility, memory, neuropathy, that like uncorrectable vision loss are more common as people age. Second, vision rehabilitation provided by occupational therapists can be billed to health insurance.

Access Technology

Technology is increasingly providing new ways of leveling the playing field for people who are blind or visually impaired. Thousands of applications are available on the internet that help individuals live independently. Rather than needing assistance finding things on the shelves, individuals can use video magnifiers or can order items online and have them delivered to their home. An individual can use their smartphone to photograph text and have the phone's virtual assistant read it out to them. GPS apps can guide someone to the nearest restaurant or bus stop. So much is available that can enrich an individual's life and allow them to live more independently. The one thing that's needed is training customized to meet the needs of older blind adults.

MABVI has a unique model for technology training. All training is self-paced and customized for the individual. MABVI can provide as much or as little training as is needed. Most training is provided 1:1, though some group sessions are used to supplement individual training. Training is provided in convenient locations, primarily in senior centers throughout the state. We're expanding quickly to offer training in every region of the state, with satellite locations available to schedule individual sessions as conveniently as possible. Training is provided by MABVI's expert instructors and a team of interns and volunteers who are most often blind or low vision themselves; they are the true experts in this specialized software and hardware. Unlimited training is offered at no charge to consumers.







Age-Friendly Communities

Since vision loss is such a common part of aging, we believe that we can best achieve our mission by developing relationships with all the organizations that serve elders within the community. To better serve individuals living with blindness or low vision, hospitals must accommodate emergency room patients who cannot read the forms they're asked to sign. Managers for Elderly Housing can help their blind residents by learning about assistive technology. And by using these networks, MABVI's efforts to recruit volunteers, and reach more people who could benefit from our services are greatly enhanced. MABVI is embedded in Age-Friendly networks in Boston, Framingham, Worcester, New Bedford, and Springfield.

Volunteer Program

Though MABVI's focus is on helping individuals live as independently as possible, there are situations in which nothing beats having assistance from a sighted volunteer. MABVI's 1:1 volunteer program trains hundreds of volunteers and matches them with individuals who need assistance with a range of tasks, everything from reading mail, to helping decorate for the holidays, to guiding them on a visit to the gym. MABVI's volunteer program is more than 60 years old and supports more than 245 volunteer matches.

Meaningful relationships between volunteers and the blind consumers develop through these matches. These relationships change volunteers' perceptions about blindness and disability in general. These connections are an important antidote to social isolation in our increasingly isolated world.



Advocacy

While MABVI is primarily a service provider, we must also advocate for change that will further our mission. When Massport was relocating their dropoff and pickup locations for rideshare vehicles at Logan Airport, MABVI and Massport leaders collaborated to come up with more convenient places for people to meet their rides.

We are now focused on helping to ensure that the Internet is accessible to people without sight. We are hopeful that artificial intelligence (AI) will provide more affordable opportunities for digital accessibility. We believe that working with all organizations to achieve accessibility is preferable to litigation.



MABVI is the Right Choice for Seniors

MABVI's combination of services allows us to best meet the needs of individuals experiencing visual disability later in life. MABVI's integration of clinical support with skills training allows older adults facing blindness to thrive.

Find out more about the support that MABVI offers. Call 888-613-2777, email mabvi@mabcommunity.org, or visit www.mabvi.org





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200 Ivy Street
Brookline, MA 02446

799 West Boylston Street
Worcester, MA 01606

24 Denby Road
Allston, MA 02134

888-613-2777 | www.mabvi.org

 @mabvi
 @themabvi
 the_mabvi