

BLIND SERVICES FOUNDATION OF FLORIDA, INC.
STATE OF FLORIDA DIRECT SUPPORT ORGANIZATION ANNUAL REPORT
FISCAL YEAR 2017-2018

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The Blind Services Foundation of Florida, Inc. is an independent 501c3 Not-for-Profit organization created by the Florida Legislature in 2004 to serve as the Division of Blind Services Direct Support Organization. Its mission is to support the Florida Division of Blind Services by raising funds and bringing public awareness for outreach programs and educational opportunities. The Board of Directors includes leaders in Florida's blind and visually impaired community who serve as unpaid volunteers. Most of the members of the Board are blind and bring their personal passions for the mission to their work.

The majority of the Blind Services Foundation's funds come from proceeds from the sale of the Bikers Care specialty motorcycle tag. This foundation is one of five non-profits who benefit from the sale of the Bikers care tag, each of which helps people with disabilities live independently, become self-sufficient, find employment and maintain their quality of life. The foundation also receives private donations from individuals, families and corporate donors. During Fiscal Year 2017-2018, the Foundation took in approximately \$68,832.80.

The primary value of the Foundation lies with the projects it supports each year that the Division of Blind Services cannot sponsor due to funding restrictions. The Foundation allocates approximately \$50,000.00 each year to support a specific project that the Board agrees is appropriate. The Board has the opportunity to examine the needs of people who are blind in Florida and explore areas where there are unmet needs. Over the last five years, the Foundation has supported initiatives that provided additional funding for children's programs, educational

projects, public education/awareness and the establishment of an endowment for blind students at Miami-Dade College.

Funds Distribution

We are very excited about our major project for this year. It represents the kind of innovative effort that we have sought over the past several years and has the potential to make a huge difference to the success of blind people looking to go to work in Florida.

Our Foundation works closely with the Florida Rehabilitation Council of the Blind who, over the past few years, has been concerned about how vocational evaluations are prepared and evaluated by the Division of Blind Services. As a result of questions raised by the Rehab Council, a presentation was made to the Council by Karen Wolffe, a leading exponent of job readiness evaluation who has previously worked for the Royal National Institute for the Blind in the United Kingdom and with Florida's Rehabilitation Center to develop and implement job readiness measurement and training. Her presentation made it clear that the last blindness-oriented vocational evaluation tool was developed in Texas in 1991.

This meant that there was no blindness specific evaluation that takes into consideration the need for technological competence and also means that the creation, evaluation and general implementation of a new tool could significantly improve the ability of counselors to help their clients make good vocational decisions based on more effective measures of clients' abilities by a modern instrument.

The Foundation approved a proposal that would begin by creating an "expert panel" consisting both of consumers and professional evaluators who would be trained on techniques that would be used to create and then build consensus acceptance of the elements that will be included in a potential new tool. The training has now been held and the first round of consensus-building is currently under way.

We are working with the Vocational Evaluation Committee of the Division of Blind Services and with others with the hope that we will create an instrument that

cannot only be used here in Florida but throughout the country. The Foundation has asked the legal department of the Department of Education to provide us with feedback on copyright options that are available to us. We are considering utilizing the Creative Commons approach to making this instrument available once completed. The Foundation is excited about this cutting edge project which has received virtually all of our available funds this year.

Additional Funds Distributions

We approved the potential provision of a reading device for a young student at the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind. We are hesitant because we want to be sure that training will be available for her.

We are continuing to work as well to empower people who are deaf-blind in Florida by having allocated funds which have not yet been used to help this population with grant writing which, because of their disability, is difficult for this group.

Sunset Legislation

During the 2017 legislative session, the Blind Services Foundation underwent a "sunset" review. We were pleased to have been visited by auditors during two of our meetings who indicated no issues with the way we conducted our business. The result of the review was to cause significant change for our group.

Changes were made to the expectations of other groups covered under the Bikers' Care legislation which meant that we were required to deal directly with our Bikers' funding rather than working through another agency.

Another result of these changes was to dissolve the coalition of Bikers' Care recipients which had hitherto operated.

The net result of these changes was to require our Foundation to operate on its own. This has meant that a number of initiatives were begun by our Board this year.

Marketing Initiatives

We worked to finalize the approval of a new brochure which is in the last stage of creation at this time.

We also are seriously considering making major changes in our web site. We have created a web site committee who will consider a proposal we have received from a commercial web developer which, if approved, will result in a much more visible, more dynamic and more interactive presence on the web.

We have determined that we should spend some time developing a poster which we can use to market the Foundation. It will be our hope to place this poster and our brochure in licensing offices throughout the state as well as at motorcycle dealerships. We think we can use these also at meets of motorcycle enthusiasts.

The Foundation has completed all required paper work to remain in compliance with state law.

Our Board continues to have a majority of its members chosen from among the leaders of blindness organizations in the state. The majority of its membership is blind and we continue to seek to work closely with the Division of Blind Services. This year we again worked to help sponsor DBS events. We supported a celebration of the 75th anniversary at the office in Tampa where the Division of Blind Services actually started in 1941. It also celebrated the re-opening of that office following the repair of hurricane damage to the building.

Conclusion

The Foundation is committed to making a difference to the lives of blind people in Florida and appreciates the opportunity to continue to forward the betterment of this under-served and under-employed population. We expect to continue our work for many years to come and appreciate the chance to serve people who are blind in the Sunshine State!