HISTORICAL REVIEW

The Cincinnati Association for the Blind has a long and distinguished history. At an organizational meeting of interested persons on December 7, 1910, ways to address problems caused by absence of employment opportunities for blind adults and the high rate of blindness, particularly among children resulting from improper care of the eyes at birth, were discussed. On May 4, 1911, the Cincinnati Association for the Welfare of the Blind was incorporated as a nonprofit organization under the laws of the state of Ohio. Bernard Kroger was the first president, serving from 1911 to 1914.

The first year, a workshop was started, providing employment to 20 blind men in a basket, mop, and broom shop where the average wage was $6 a week. A prevention of blindness program was also developed under the direction of a local doctor. Both programs were successful, and it was necessary to move to larger quarters at 1506 Breman Avenue (now Republic Street).

Special education programs for midwives began in 1912. At that time midwives were prosecuted on occasion for failure to take proper care of the eyes of newborn babies. The early history of the agency reflects many types of recreational activities, such as Christmas parties, boat rides, symphonies, and sponsoring a bowling league. Although the workshop continued without interruption from its beginning in 1911, it was not until 1918 that the first executive director, Calvin Glover, was employed. Mr. Glover served as executive director until his retirement in 1958. Also in 1918, the Association affiliated with the War Chest (today known as the United Way and Community Chest).

Shortly after receiving War Chest support, in 1919, an additional staff person was employed as a social worker. Early social services focused upon financial help, procuring eye examinations, and referral for community services. The same year a lunchroom was established which provided a complete hot meal for the men employed in the workshop at a cost to the men of two cents.

In 1924, the Association dedicated a building at Wade and Plum Streets (now Central Parkway) where it continued to provide workshop and prevention services, as well as blind relief. By 1930, workshop sales had reached $38,000. This was, however, at a loss of $3,366.81 to the agency, and by 1951 the subsidizing costs had reached such a point that the Board seriously considered discontinuing the basket operations.

In 1937, the good relationship between the Association and the state agency for the blind resulted in the Association being authorized as a distributor of Talking Book Machines in the Cincinnati area and also in initiating a vending stand program for blind men. During 1944, several blind men were placed in war industries. In 1946, the agency changed its name to the Cincinnati Association for the Blind.
In 1947, the Central Parkway building was renovated. In 1948, home teaching services were offered and a nursery program was developed for preschool blind children and their parents in the wake of the retrolental fibroplasia wave. Early rehabilitation case records indicate that braille, typing, and power sewing machine usage were taught at the agency.

The following year, 1949, Mrs. Martha Seasongood Stern donated the Max and Alfred M. Stern Farm School and Vacation home. From 1949 until 1958, CAB operated a dairy and poultry farm training school at the Stern facility near Mason, Ohio. The farm school was discontinued because of its excessively high operating costs. From 1958 until 1971, the Stern facility continued as a vacation camp for blind children and adults. It was sold November 1, 1971. Also in 1949, classes in dancing, dramatics, singing, and instrumental music began.

In 1950, after a successful demonstration period of three years, the nursery for preschool blind children was turned over to the Division of Special Education of the Cincinnati Public Schools, although CAB continued to provide counseling and casework to parents of blind children.

In 1958, upon the retirement of Calvin Glover, Milton A. Jahoda was employed as the agency's executive director. Mr. Jahoda served until his retirement in 1985.

In 1959, CAB turned over the supervision of the vending stand program to the state agency for the blind, contract assembly work for industry was begun, and women were admitted to the workshop for the first time. The contract program expanded rapidly until it was necessary to lease space in three separate buildings in different parts of the community to house its operations.

Professional casework services were established in 1960, and the same year brought a major renovation of building and equipment. In 1961, the agency initiated its orientation and mobility program and affiliated with the National Industries for the Blind.

Vocational and psychological counseling services were initiated in 1963, and a federal grant was approved in October of that year for "Orientation and Mobility Services for Legally Blind Persons Living in Five Counties in Ohio and Kentucky". Also in 1963, a braille music program for piano and instrumental music was initiated.

Major emphasis upon services for visually impaired persons began in 1964, and a second grant was approved that year for "Greater Cincinnati Low Vision Lens Service for Partially Sighted Persons Living in Five Counties in Ohio and Kentucky".

Home teaching and rehabilitation services were expanded with additional staff and broader services in 1965. In 1966, the broom shop was phased out.

As a result of the expanded workshop and rehabilitation programs, CAB outgrew its quarters on Central Parkway. With the aid of a state-federal grant, approved in April 1966, "To expand Workshop and Rehabilitation Facilities of the Cincinnati Association for the Blind", the building at 2045 Gilbert Avenue was remodeled, and dedicated in 1968.

In 1969, CAB became one of the first voluntary agencies in the country to be accredited by the National Accreditation Council Serving Agencies for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (NAC).
In 1970, a work evaluation unit was established which placed emphasis upon the analysis of individual work skills and abilities that are useful in employment counseling; job training and placement, often in sheltered settings. In 1974, placement of blind and visually impaired persons in competitive employment was emphasized when a placement specialist was employed on a demonstration basis. This program became an integral part of the agency's rehabilitation services in 1977.

In 1974, the agency completed the planning and financing phases of a major expansion to the sheltered workshop, which would increase its capacity by one-third. This addition was completed in 1976. New paper conversion equipment in this addition enabled CAB to produce half of all the business machine tapes and teletypewriter rolls used in government facilities throughout the country.

In 1977, a federal grant administered by Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission enabled CAB's workshop to obtain equipment necessary to produce military combat equipment belts for the federal government.

In 1982, the Federal Circuit Court determined that the workshop was in the jurisdiction of the NLRB, and therefore subject to collective bargaining. Union negotiations began in 1983, and a contract was signed with the Association and Truck Drivers, Chauffeurs and Helpers Local Union No. 100 in 1984.

In 1983, a community-based glaucoma-screening program operated by staff and volunteers was initiated. In 1985-86 CAB joined with Clovernook Home and School for the Blind and the Ohio Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the needs of blind and visually impaired people in the Greater Cincinnati area. Also in that year, in cooperation with the Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired, CAB launched a summer vocational development program providing jobs in the community and in CAB's workshop for visually impaired high school students.


In 1986, CAB inaugurated a computer literacy and training program. Rehabilitation teaching staff was trained to provide the services and a grant was received from the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission to purchase computer hardware and software.

In 1986, the workshop expanded its product line by manufacturing kitchen gadgets, including can openers, pizza cutters, vegetable peelers, and cheese slicers, for U.S. military commissaries throughout the world. An assembly packaging line (dietetic packets) was replaced by a similar dining packet for soldiers (36-soldier meal module). In the spring of 1986, the community relations department was formed with the hiring of a community relations director, and a year later a community relations assistant was added. This new department consolidated public relations, fund raising, and volunteer functions, which were previously handled by other, staff members or an outside consultant.

In 1987, low vision staff joined with the Department of Ophthalmology at the University of Cincinnati to provide information to ophthalmology residents about low vision, including providing periodic educational sessions and observations by residents.
In 1988, in response to a recommendation in the 1986 comprehensive needs assessment, CAB initiated an early childhood intervention service for visually impaired youngsters from birth to 5 years of age and their families. An early childhood intervention specialist was employed in July of that year to staff the program.

The gadget line, which began production in 1987, became a permanent line in 1988; the paper department produced its 50 millionth roll of paper; and the workshop hired 25 new blind production workers as a result of the creation of additional jobs.

With the help of a grant from the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, an agency computer system was installed in 1988 to improve the efficiency of word processing, record keeping, and the procurement and use of information. In addition, new office space for staff was built on the fourth floor. The agency served a total of 3,184 people and employed 84 legally blind persons in its workshop.

In 1989, CAB was reaccredited by NAC for a five-year period. A 25th anniversary low vision fund was established. Barbecue tools were added to workshop products. The Lions Club of Price Hill pledged $10,000 a year from 1989 to 1993 to help support the new early childhood intervention service.

The agency served a total of 3,114 people in 1990. Workshop sales totaled $5,777,000, including a $1.4 million contract for 13.6 million dining packets (the single largest order ever) for American troops stationed in Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Shield. Also in 1990, the Senior Elfun Society, an organization of retired General Electric Company engineers, established a repair program for talking book machines and repaired over 900 machines.

3,191 people were served in 1991, and the workshop recorded record-breaking sales of $6,800,000. The agency opened its programs to Butler and Warren counties and received funding from their United Ways.

The agency presented a daylong conference for staff of nursing homes, and the first High Vision Games were held to encourage visually impaired children to use low vision aids.


In 1992, the agency served 3,340 people. The workshop began production of waterproof adhesive packaging tape for the federal government in two colors and five sizes, creating 5-10 new jobs for blind and visually impaired individuals, and three new kitchen gadgets were added to the gadget line.

1993 was a year of growth at CAB. The agency served 3,675 people and expanded services into outlying areas including Butler and Warren counties and Northern Kentucky.

The agency saw increases in the numbers of aging adults, especially the over-80 population, who sought services. It also served more very young children who were born prematurely and were visually impaired.
Also in 1993, CAB shared expertise with other professionals in the community through special programs including seminars for activity directors and staff from senior centers, professionals in the field of early childhood education and intervention and ophthalmology residents from the University of Cincinnati.

In 1994, the workshop extended its product lines with the additions of eighteen new sizes and colors of waterproof tape and four new, upgraded kitchen gadgets. The workshop continued its customer diversification efforts toward State Use and commercial markets for examination table paper.

In 1995, a new talking book machine room was constructed to house the talking book equipment and the coordinator, as well as to provide an area for volunteers to work. The workshop established a high speed dining packet assembly line with 10 positions filled by employees who are blind. The agency initiated the implementation of a $134,000 grant from the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission that expanded the computer-training program. $140,000 in savings was realized from the 1994 reorganization of the workshop. A five-year accreditation was awarded when the agency underwent reaccreditation by the National Accreditation Council for Agencies Serving People Who are Blind and Visually Impaired (NAC). CAB formed an active partnership with Children's Hospital Medical Center of the University of Cincinnati to provide clinical evaluations to infants with visual impairment.

In 1996, CAB implemented an independent living training program for individuals over the age of 55 with funding from the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission. The agency installed a new computer network to be used for all word processing, accounting, inventory and statistical functions. CAB also upgraded its accounting system using state-of-the-art software, which integrated accounting and manufacturing systems. CAB conducted its first annual membership campaign and exceeded its goal.

In 1997, CAB completed its first contract with the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission for the Independent Living Program for people over the age of 55, serving 332 clients - the highest number of clients served and the best success rate in the State of Ohio. The agency created “Early Expressions”, a program using music with families in the early childhood intervention services program; 30 families participated this first year. The early childhood intervention services also implemented an early access program to provide families with information about assistive technology from simple switches to computers, serving 18 families. The rehabilitation department offered a series of adaptive cooking classes for adults at CAB. The social services department initiated a support group at CAB for workshop employees.

The workshop added four new products; masking tape, filament tape, kraft paper and continuous rolled computer paper in 1997. It also reconfigured the tape and paper department to make room for five new converting machines and four new product categories.

The agency held its first special event, a Cabaret, which was attended by 180 people and raised more than $10,000. It also created a Visionary Society to recognize persons who have arranged a planned gift to benefit CAB in the future, identifying 38 founding members.

On January 1, 1998, Radio Reading Services of Greater Cincinnati merged with CAB to better meet the needs of the ever-growing older population with visual impairment.
Also in 1998, the agency completed its second year contract with the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission for an Independent Living Program by serving 472 persons, and exceeding all expectations for the program. CAB offered support groups in Middletown, Northern Kentucky and several retirement communities. The computer access department provided consultation and training on computer access to several school districts in Northern Kentucky, the Special Education Regional Resource Center in Cincinnati and the Hamilton County Board of Education.

The workshop developed seven new ergonomic kitchen gadgets for sale in 1999 and introduced a new product, pocket duct tape into the NIB base store system. With foundation funding, the agency provided two summer programs for school aged children, parents and teachers in daily living skills and familiarization with computer access technology. Radio Reading Services significantly increased the number of people using the Personalized Talking Print Program, and an expanded volunteer orientation program was developed for new RRS volunteers.

In early 1999, CAB began Building Dreams, a $3.5 million building renovation project. This massive undertaking replaced outdated systems, including windows, heating and air conditioning, electric and masonry, and the agency computer system. The renovation made more efficient use of interior space on all six floors to make it possible to serve more people in the community.

It created new service areas, including broadcast studios for radio reading services, a new low vision clinic, a large computer access area, an activity room for children, an equipped kitchen for rehabilitation teaching, a large community room, and workshop space rearranged for greater efficiency. Building Dreams was completed in early 2000, on schedule and under budget.

The agency began operation of “Office Runway”, the Base Supply Center (BSC) at Wright-Patterson Air force Base, in February 2001 in an effort to bring additional revenue into the agency. The first year of operation saw $900,000 in sales at a significant loss. By 2008, BSC sales grew to nearly $5.25.

In 2003, CAB began providing low vision services at satellite locations in Butler and Warren Counties in Ohio; in 2004 a satellite location was opened in Warren County; in 2005 the agency opened a satellite in Northern Kentucky; and in 2007 a satellite location was opened in Clermont County.

In 2005, CAB became CABVI when it changed its name to the Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired to better reflect the people it serves.

In December 2006, John H. Mitchell became the agency’s fifth Executive Director after the retirement of Hank Baud.

In August 2007, in an effort to reach underserved populations, the agency established an outreach program with the addition of an outreach social worker, a position funded by a grant through the Greater Cincinnati Foundation. The outreach social worker’s primary responsibility is to spread the word about vision care and CABVI services throughout core neighborhoods in Cincinnati.
In October 2007, CABVI's Board approved a three year strategic plan that had been developed over a four month period. The plan called for specific initiatives to steer the agency in the direction of the newly developed agency vision, "CABVI will excel at fulfilling and responding to community needs by being the principal source and resource for people who are blind and visually impaired." Two major initiatives called for from the plan were a broad based community needs assessment and to development and execution of marketing plan for the agency.

In the summer of 2008 after a two-year exploration and realization that offering employment options in the service sector was a need of the community, CABVI began the process of establishing a Call Center Training Program. The Center was officially opened in April 2009.

On March 20, 2009, CABVI presented the findings of the Community Needs Assessment that was completed in late 2008. The study, which involved 422 participants, was completed in collaboration with the Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired and six other community organizations whose services involve people who are blind or visually impaired. In June of 2009, CABVI in collaboration with Clovernook completed two focus groups. Ultimately, a list of 26 new program or service enhancement initiatives were developed from the Needs Assessment and Focus Groups which will be used to make future changes and additions to the services that CABVI provides to the Community.

In November of 2009 in collaboration with the Clovernook Center, the Cincinnati Eye Institute and the Deaconess Foundation, a volunteer transportation service, ITN of Greater Cincinnati was established to provide additional transportation options to individuals who have vision loss and seniors who are in need of transportation. This new service began operation on May 26, 2010 and had provided over 2,400 rides to members as of May 17, 2011.

In December 2009 CABVI purchased two new vehicles for the Agency with funding received from a foundation grant. During 2010, a formal client transportation service was developed that continues to evolve to meet the needs of clients receiving services and attending focus groups at CABVI. This program was established in response to the identified needs of the Community Needs Assessment in 2009.

At the January 28, 2010 Board Meeting, CABVI's Board unanimously passed a resolution to establish a Joint Planning Task Force between CABVI and the Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Since the passage of the resolution, both agency Board heads and agency CEOs have been meeting regularly to assess where opportunities lie for collaboration between the two agencies.

**2011 – YEAR-LONG CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION**

On October 6-9, 2010, CABVI hosted the Annual Training Conference of the National Industries for the Blind in Cincinnati. This was the first time this conference was held in Cincinnati and presented a great opportunity to showcase CABVI as a model agency to the more than 65 agencies participating and over 500 attendees nationally. The event was also the launch of CABVI's Centennial year.
On April 26, 2011 CABVI hosted the 100th Annual Meeting of the Association with over 90 members of the association in attendance. The historic meeting included a presentation by Dan Hurley, former Vice President for History and Research at the Cincinnati Museum Center, who spoke on Philanthropy in Cincinnati at the turn of the 20th Century.

On 5/4/11, CABVI celebrated its Centennial with the Cincinnati Community by hosting a celebration event on Fountain Square to acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the agency’s Incorporation in the State of Ohio on May 4, 1911. The 90-minute event included formal proclamations from City, County, State and Federal elected officials as well as music from the Clark Montessori Steel Band and the Ohio State School for the Blind Marching Band.

On 8/31/11, CABVI hosted “CABVI Night at the Reds”. Activities included pregame and scoreboard recognition of CABVI’s Centennial. CABVI friends, staff and volunteers purchased 626 tickets for the event; John Mitchell threw the ceremonial first pitch and CABVI Board President, Michael Lichstein, delivered the game ball to the starting pitcher.

On Sunday, September 11, 2011, CABVI hosted an Open House with guest speaker, Kevin O’Connor, whose presentation about life with his visually impaired son was entitled “Do You See What I See”. More than 65 people attended.

On Thursday, October 20, 2011, CABVI held its Centennial Capstone Dinner at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in downtown Cincinnati. Special awards were presented to Sue Friedlander for over 13 years of outstanding service to CABVI, including her leadership role in the merger of CABVI and Radio Reading Services. The Kroger Company and, in particular CABVI’s first Board President, Barney Kroger, who served from 1911 to 1914. The award was accepted by Reuben Shaffer, current CABVI Board member and Kroger Company Chief Diversity Officer, and several other Kroger employees. The third special recognition award was presented to the United Way of Greater Cincinnati for their outstanding support of CABVI since 1916; the award was accepted by UWGC President, Rob Reifsnyder. Honorees also included 100 members of the Centennial Honor Roll. Approximately 280 people attended.

On November 2011, CABVI established our Contract Management Services (CMS) unit at the Defense Logistics Agency in Columbus, Ohio. This new unit provided service based employment opportunities for college graduates who are legally blind performing contract closeout work for the U.S. Department of Defense.

On February 9, 2012, CABVI and the Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired signed a historic Strategic Partnership Agreement designed to optimize the use of community resources in supporting the health, welfare and independence of people who are blind and visually impaired in Greater Cincinnati. Further, the intention of the agreement was to coordinate collaboration on all initiatives pertaining to service provision and planning of services to meet the on-going needs of the community.

In June of 2012, CABVI’s Industries Program received compliance certification to the International Standards Organization (ISO) 9001:2008 Standard. This standard ensures that products are of consistent good quality, will meet or exceed customer requirements, and will continually improve. This standard is reviewed each year in order to renew and maintain this certification.
In January 2013, CABVI established a new low vision service in Florence Kentucky. We also launched a new social enterprise, CincySight Office products. This new social enterprise was established to create new employment opportunities in the service sector while providing a margin from operations to help financially support agency community services.

On October 23, 2013, a special meeting of the Association was called to consider revisions to the Agency Constitution. By a unanimous vote, those members present approved revised By-Laws for the Association. Revisions approved provided modernization to the governing document providing for electronic participation in meetings of the Board, changes to provisions on term limits and changing the titles of Board President to Board Chair and Executive Director to CEO.

In 2013, CABVI’s service levels reached a breakthrough goal of serving 5,001 clients in that calendar year. This achievement capped a four year breakthrough goal of serving 5,000 people annually and established a new benchmark for future service levels for years to come.

On May 1, 2014, CABVI became the sole provider of five vision rehabilitation services in Greater Cincinnati as result of the Joint Services Construct with Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired. These services include Access Technology, Low Vision, Orientation and Mobility, Social Services and Vision Rehabilitation Therapy. This agreement between CABVI and Clovernook Center significantly reduced the duplication of community based vision rehabilitation services.

In May 2014, CABVI’s Industries Program received re-certification for ISO 9001: 2008.

In August 2014, Contract Management Support Services at the Defense Supply Center Columbus (DSCC) expanded to 16 full-time employees with 11 of these positions filled by people who are legally blind.

Between 2012 and 2015, CABVI received the largest ever single planned gift in the form of a bequest from the Estate of Louise Nippert. The gift totaled $2,492,888.

In 2015, the agency served a record-breaking 5,006 people and the Board of Trustees updated the Mission and Vision Statements.

In February 2016, CABVI leased 17,000 square feet of production and distribution space to meet agency growth needs until a permanent building is located for 2017.

In March 2016, CABVI established a new CMS operation at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

In April, 2016, CincySight was rebranded as VIE Ability: Delivering Supplies and Social Impact and a new cargo delivery van was purchased with support from a local foundation.

CABVI is grateful for a very generous estate gift from Carolyn (Voss) Hornbeck that helped CABVI purchase an additional building in July 2016. With 59,000 square feet of space, this increased CABVI’s operations by more than 75%.

CABVI celebrated the grand opening of the Hornbeck Social Enterprise Center in August, 2017.

The agency served a record 5,830 people in 2017.
This historical review of the Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired reveals an agency, which moves with the times while at the same time fulfills its mission. The early periods reflect the spirit of that time—to do for blind and visually impaired persons as a group apart. Since the 1960's, the emphasis has been on enabling people who are blind and visually impaired to function independently alongside their sighted peers as a result of services provided by skilled professionals.

Among the challenges that the new millennium brings will be meeting the ever growing demand for services while maintaining CABVI's solid foundation of professionalism and quality service. Identifying new sources of revenue to address the issues of overall operating expenses increasing at a rate greater than revenue will be required to provide for long-term sustainability. Developing new markets and new products, as well as improved production efficiency, will be required to maintain the viability of the Industries Program and Base Supply Center, as well as new Social Enterprises that are still to be developed.