

Dear Assemblywoman Gorelow and Committee Members,

When any Nevada citizen loses a limb or physical functioning, they most often go to rehabilitation. These services take place in acute or long-term care facilities where specialists like occupational therapists or physical therapists are provided on a daily basis until discharge, often costing the State thousands of dollars per day.

You may be unaware that a critical area of rehabilitation is generally overlooked. Those of us who have lost our eyesight are often sent home without rehabilitation. Who are we? We come from a variety of ages, ethnic backgrounds, and economic situations. We are often employed with families and a car. But when our eyesight fails everything comes to a screeching halt. Doctors do their best to provide treatment but, in many cases for both for the young and old, there is no resolution except to go home. This was the case for Angela Hoffman. She lost her eyesight in her prime and with it the desire to keep living.

Blindconnect, a nonprofit, has been a solution for Nevadans facing vision loss for the last 24 years. Most recently, we have increased our programming to provide Nevada's first and only residential training and blindness skills day programs. In partnership with RTC and with friends like Betty's Village, we are creating possibilities for Nevadans with vision loss to find hope for a brighter future.

Blindconnect has working agreements with DETR to provide training, resources, and assessments to both their vocational participants and older blind. Nevertheless, there still remains a large group of citizens who are not being served. These citizens are the ones who go home from the final doctor's appointment with no hope for recovering eye sight or maintaining their lifestyle.. These individuals are the ones who do not know that it is possible for persons who are blind to learn how to independently function and so they face placement in nursing facilities at alarmingly young ages. These are the ones who often times unfortunately give up because they cannot see a way to survive.

Therefore, we are requesting that the committee thoughtfully consider funding blindness rehabilitation for Nevada citizens through Blindconnect. Blindconnect offers the vital training necessary for individuals to not only live again independently but become once again employed. We have the highly specialized staff who are qualified to work with blind and low vision rehabilitation. We also have the passion because we ourselves have once faced vision loss and have overcome its challenges.

Thank you for your time. Please refer to the attached document about current services for the blind/low vision population of Nevada and note that there are an estimated 87000 blind and low vision persons in our State.

Raquel O'Neill, LCSW

Blindconnect President
Nevada State Rehabilitation Council Chair



Angela's House

NEVADA'S TRAINING CENTER FOR THE BLIND

www.blindconnect.org

702-631-9009

More than 87,000 people in Nevada report blindness or severe difficulty seeing even with glasses. <https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/data/state-profiles/nevada.htm>

Across the country, rehabilitation from the loss of eye sight is treated by referrals to state and community agencies. Most states have multiple training centers and residential options for individuals while Nevada has very few resources.

- * Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living (peer support programs)
- * Bureau Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired (employment and older blind programs)
- * Blind Center of Nevada (social/recreational and employment programs)
- * Nevada Blind Children's Foundation (children and family programs)
- * Blindconnect (life skills training, employment training, and peer support programs)



Blindconnect, a Southern Nevada nonprofit established in 1998, has a mission to enhance opportunities for Nevadans effected by vision loss.



In partnership with Betty's Village and Opportunity Village, Blindconnect has opened Nevada's only residential blindness skills training program. Individuals facing vision loss can learn to regain independence and confidence by living at Betty's Village in Blindconnect's rented apartments.



Training classes take place at Angela's House in the RTC Mobility Training Center with Blindconnect's blindness professionals and peers.



The journey of rehabilitation for the blind starts with learning daily living skills, coping and adjustment counseling, and orientation and mobility skills to foster independence.



In partnership with DETR's Bureau Services to the Blind, Blindconnect strives to provide adjustment to blindness and employment services to adults with vision loss.



It costs \$4000 per month to provide housing, transportation and training per individual through Blindconnect.