

## **MONTANA ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND EXPANDS SUMMER ORIENTATION; OPEN HOUSE SLATED**

BILLINGS, MONTANA—Jocelyn DeHaas was just a teenager when her father sought help from the nonprofit, Montana Association for the Blind (MAB). He lost his eyesight due to a hereditary eye disease, which affected his mental health and happiness as well. “He went through this program and it changed his life. He became president of his chapter, and then state president. He had a new purpose in his life.”

DeHaas is now executive director of the Montana Association for the Blind. The organization, in its 75th year, helps visually impaired and blind individuals maintain independent living. Its Summer Orientation Program (SOP), June 13–July 9 at Rocky Mountain College in Billings, will instruct participants on safe mobility, adaptive equipment, recreation, and assistive technology. “We teach skills for daily living, such as doing the laundry, shaving, organizing medicines, and personal hygiene,” DeHaas says.

A grant from the Gianforte Family Foundation has enabled the organization to expand programming this year to include computer and software training for those who want to find or maintain employment, despite their visual impairment. Students will use adaptive computers and specialized software—JAWS (Job Access With Speech) screen-reading technology and a Fusion magnification program—to increase accessibility for those who cannot see a computer screen or maneuver a mouse. “Specialized software is the bridge to using a computer when visually impaired,” DeHaas says.

The orientation will also include training in job search strategies and preparing for interviews. “Our goal,” according to DeHaas, “is to offer employment training to all blind and visually impaired individuals seeking these resources. We will teach students the skills they need to thrive and contribute to their communities—self-sufficient and employed.”

Most MAB staff and volunteers are visually impaired, including Ed Worrell, one of three computer instructors. Diagnosed with diabetes at age 4, Worrell endured many eye surgeries in his 20s before going blind at age 24. He and his wife run OverHere Consulting in Great Falls, serving others with vision loss across Montana. “We use a very hands-on, one-on-one approach to help them be as independent on the computer as they can be,” he says. Worrell credits his own student experience in the SOP for some of his success: “It helped me so much. It’s a pay-it-forward scenario. I want to help other people.”

The free, annual summer program typically accommodates 25 students of all ages and from all areas of Montana. Room, board, and the training program are included.

An Open House on Sunday, June 26 at Rocky Mountain College will showcase the organization’s services. All are welcome.

The Montana Association for the Blind operates nine chapters throughout the state that provide support, information, and a sense of community to members. The MAB runs a Low Vision Center in Bozeman and awards scholarships to blind and visually impaired students pursuing higher education in Montana. To learn more about the association or its programming, contact DeHaas: [mabdirector@mabsop.org](mailto:mabdirector@mabsop.org) or 505-818-8721; or visit <https://www.mabsop.org/sop.html>.

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