



SPRING NEWSLETTER

“You have truly changed my life.”

“It’s more than just training,” explains Kim Frieson, a VCB client in Kern County who is currently receiving virtual training in Independent Living Skills, Assistive Technology, and Braille.

“It’s like you’re helping transition from this mindset of ‘I am not capable of doing anything because I’m blind’ and equipping us with the tools that change your perspective to ‘I don’t have to let this stop me.’”

Kim went blind at age 23. After years of struggling to regain sight through surgeries, Kim was left with very limited light perception in addition to her existing hearing loss. As she lost more sight, Kim shared that she experienced a change in the way she was being treated by those closest to her- a devastating blow in an already tough situation. Her loss of sight was impacting her autonomy, her confidence, and, maybe worst of all, her self-respect. “I loved cooking and baking- being in the kitchen brought be so much joy before,” shares Kim. “After I lost my sight, I didn’t go into the kitchen for over a year because of the fear.”

While it is often not intentional, we often hear stories like Kim’s at VCB. She shared that her family would say things to her like “You can’t do that, you’re blind” or “here, let me help with that, that isn’t safe for you to do.”

With great sincerity, Kim clarifies ***“In trying to help, they were taking away my independence and sense of worth.*** I developed the mindset of ‘I can’t see now so I can’t do anything’ and I became totally dependent on people with sight to do things for me. And, honestly, I let them do it because it was easier- I was partially responsible too.”

At the recommendation of her Bible study group, Kim turned to VCB during a very dark and challenging moment in her life. Kim first arrived at VCB terrified of what the future would bring but things have changed dramatically for her. “Now I know there is no reason I can’t do something just because I cannot see. I just have to do things another way.”

Learning at VCB has impacted more than just Kim’s independence- “You guys just ‘get it.’ ***Every new tool I learned that would seem so small to someone sighted has helped me to grow and build confidence.***”

Now Kim is regularly back in the kitchen and has been savoring her remote training. “I was so isolated before for so long that beginning to learn remotely actually made it more comfortable. I did not have all the pressure of having to go outside and get somewhere. Improving my skills in my own home has helped me grow and become more confident in public.”

“I’m still learning,” says Kim, “but I don’t have to ask for help as much as I used to.” With the help of her specially trained instructors at VCB, learning isn’t frightening any longer for Kim- “It’s the greatest feeling in the world. I’m finally proud of myself and when you are confident, that changes every aspect of your life.”

For others struggling with vision loss, Kim says “Don’t let fear hold you back. The only thing stopping a person with a visual impairment is themselves. ***We have to do things differently but that doesn’t mean you can’t do it.*** It’s a wonderful journey and I am so excited for whatever comes next.”



Message from the Executive Director



As we surpass the one-year mark of living in a COVID-19 world, our team has been deliberate in examining how our agency supports those we are committed to serve. "Help" means "making it easier for someone to do something by offering one's services or resources." Helping is inherently personal to the person being helped and not the person doing the helping.

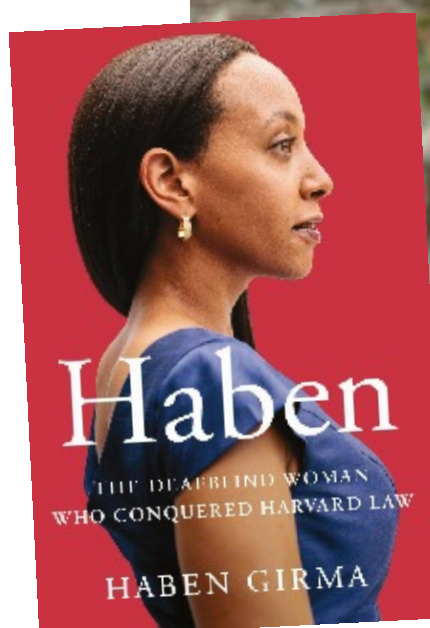
At VCB, we are exploring all the ways in which our community could benefit from our help. Our training programs are critical and valuable. So critical that we have been reviewing and refreshing two of our core services, Independent Living Skills and Braille. The re-launch of these programs will provide a long-overdue update to help with essential blindness skills. Crucial as they may be, our traditional classes alone do not fill the entire need. Through individual stories, widespread surveys, and lots of check in calls, we have identified new ways to better help people experiencing blindness and low vision.

From our new community conference calls to the exciting launch of the VCB Podcast, we are working harder now than ever before to keep our community connected, informed, and engaged. Our leadership team is working on releasing a network of support groups, a peer-to-peer connection program, and other wellness opportunities.

The COVID-19 Vaccination clinic on February 27th was a great example of an opportunity to rise to the occasion. Along with our Disability Equity Partners, VCB was a part of the successful advocacy efforts to get Californians with disabilities who are at high risk for severe case of coronavirus prioritized on the vaccination eligibility list. In collaboration with Fresno County, at our first event we were able to help over 100 people who are blind or low vision and appropriate caregivers have access to the COVID-19 Moderna Vaccine. For our clients, many of whom are highly vulnerable to this virus, this has been an exceptionally isolating time and this vaccine was the light at the end of a very long, dark tunnel.



Shellena Heber



Highly Recommended Read

Our team has found creative and unique ways to ensure that we can continue to meet the need of the community. Thanks to community support, ongoing trainings, and our new strategic job-creation partnerships, VCB is the healthiest it has ever been.

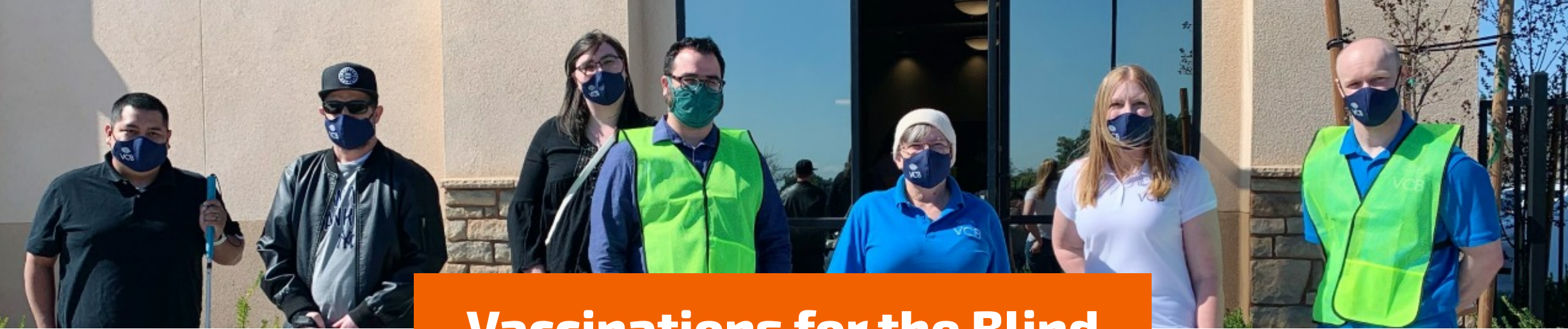
We have so much more to do. If you can give, your investment in our work will help with so many important and unfunded initiatives- better services for blind children, more active engagement with our seniors with vision loss, and meeting the immense immediate need for better access to mental health support for clients in crisis.

Yours in service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Shellena J. Heber".

Shellena Heber

"Many persons have a wrong idea of what constitutes true happiness. It is not attained through self-gratification but through fidelity to a worthy purpose."- Hellen Keller



Vaccinations for the Blind

Saturday February 27th, VCB hosted a COVID-19 vaccination clinic in partnership with the Central Valley Regional Center (CVRC) and the Fresno County Disability Equity Project. The clinic successfully ensured that 300 individuals with disabilities and their care providers were vaccinated, over 100 of whom were blind or low vision.

VCB had been advocating for nearly a month to hold a vaccine clinic for people with disabilities, especially those with visual impairments. After several weeks of coordinating with the County of Fresno and CVRC, the clinic was greenlit one week prior to the event. Our call center agents worked energetically over several days to get clients signed up for the event, making nearly 1,000 calls. As not everyone is comfortable signing up for the vaccine through online portals, we worked to ensure that people had a live agent available to help them register for the clinic.



Assembly member doctor Joaquin Arambula administering Covid-19 vaccine.



VCB client Olivia receives her first dose of the vaccine.

On the day of the event, the team had a constant flow of individuals. CVRC made sure that we could see 75 people per hour and VCB had a team of individuals available to provide support to the individuals with visual impairments, starting with greeting those as they came in the door, to helping individuals check in, and ensuring those who came by themselves had help finding where they needed to go. We connected with many people we had not seen in a while and we are eager to grow those connections so we can continue to support them.

VCB will continue to provide services throughout the pandemic through our funding sources. We are coordinating with Kern county to help with a vaccine clinic there and are working on making connections to help in Tulare, Kings, and Madera counties as well. VCB is dedicated to providing the most current and needed service to our clients.

Thank You Isnardi Foundation!

VCB Receives Monetary Grant



Valley Center for the Blind would like to thank the Isnardi Foundation for their ongoing support of our mission. As our largest supporter since 2017, the Isnardi Foundation has been instrumental in making our dreams of creating accessible jobs for people who are blind a reality. The Isnardi Foundations' partnership allowed VCB to hire and support over 20 employees who are blind and low vision in the last 9 months along.



In 2006, the Isnardi Foundation was created by Vincent Tocchini Isnardi, born in 1918 and raised in Fresno, CA by his Italian immigrant parents. As a pharmacist, Vincent was well respected and served the community under his philosophy of "treat everyone with dignity and respect." Vincent was charitable throughout his life and his foundation lives on supporting organizations located in and near Fresno that support and promote many wonderful causes including education, human development, and the reduction of poverty and injustice.

This year, the Isnardi Foundation assisted VCB with a substantial grant to ensure that we could fulfill our goal to be an enduring and encouraging force in the lives of those we serve. Thanks to this funding, we have provided frequent, effective, and efficient pandemic related services, updated our rehabilitation programming, and developed jobs for work-ready clients. For more information, please visit their website at isnardifoundation.org.

Have you listened to the VCB Podcasts yet?

If not, check us out on Facebook, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and many other podcasting platforms to catch up on all things VCB!

Episode 3 is out now!



As of March 15th, individuals with certain significant high-risk medical conditions or disabilities are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine!



Register to get your vaccine!

Follow VCB on Facebook and Instagram today.



/valleycenterfortheblind

VISIT US ONLINE AT MYVCB.ORG