



## Summer Newsletter



# The Best is Yet to Come.

Nina is a hardworking businesswoman, enthusiastic learner, dedicated community volunteer, and an inspiring example of enduring motivation. Nina began losing sight at age 68 due to hereditary glaucoma but through faith and a little help from her “IT expert” brother, Nina found VCB and continued living her best life. Being a small business owner of Mary Kay for over 20 years, Nina’s main priority was continuing to provide the same excellent service that earned her six vehicles and a successful career.

“I was such a busy person- in my church, in my career, when my sight began to decrease, I had to take steps back and figure out ‘What do I do now?’ I knew people still needed me, so determination and perseverance were at the top of my mind.”

Nina made sure that those closest to her did not pity her for her sight loss. Her focus was on continuing to do as much independently as possible, but also to ask for help when she needed it most. Nina especially appreciates the many

times her husband of 28 years made sure she had transportation to doctor’s appointments and to the VCB office so she never missed a single training class - “he is so precious and so helpful.”



Nina with husband Calvin

With the support of her husband and her church, Nina began her services for VCB in the fall of 2019, sharing that the team at VCB was very accommodating in getting her through the program. “Aaron never forgot to check on me to see how things were going. I so appreciate him for that.” Most importantly, Nina shared that she knew she could “continue on, no matter what” because of the great example set by VCB instructors, who were also people who experienced vision loss.

When the pandemic hit, Nina says her services “never missed a beat.” Nina was able to continue to make progress remotely in her assistive technology training and independent living, even learning how to conduct her business meetings over Zoom using voice over. Nina’s attitude is guided by the inspiring idea that by taking each challenge day-by-day, “the best is yet to come.” With the help of VCB, Nina continues to be number one in sales in her unit of 69 women and teaches other women how to move forward in their own businesses. She also serves on the Elder Committee at her church and participates in a monthly food box distribution.

*“It’s been a journey and as I continue to move forward, I’m forever grateful to Valley Center staff. The minds, doors, and hearts at VCB are wide open. All you have to do is show up. They are there to assist you with whatever you need- the hope becomes infectious, and it spreads.”*



Another busy quarter has flown by! Students will soon be back to school, COVID-19 vaccines are widely available, and we are adjusting to our new normal. We have received a lot of questions about VCB's "re-opening" so I would like to use this letter to share with you a few important points:

### **1. We Never Closed!**

I hope you join me in being so proud of this incredible team for keeping services going, even when we were all faced with so many unknowns. Things have not always been perfect. There were many opportunities to improve and be a little better each day. Adjusting to working remotely required some big cultural shifts for our company. We had to be more flexible, kind, and dedicated than ever before- not just with our clients but with each other.

### **2. Partially Remote is Here to Stay!**

For some of our clients, especially those who live in rural communities, training remotely has removed obstacles and has led to a more successful learning environment. Some of our staff have also benefited from remote work. When you consider that roughly 80% of VCB's present staff are blind or low vision, transportation to and from work is often the hardest part of the day. Working from home has eliminated the need for transportation, allowed for more convenient working environments, and has lowered VCB's overall costs by allowing those still in the office to share office space. These changes have made our donors dollars stretch further and allowed us to focus more on direct services.

Remote training is not ideal for everyone or every service, though. Orientation and mobility, kitchen safety training, and problem-solving technology issues still make the most sense on-site. Additionally, some people just learn better in person (we see you, our beloved extroverts!). This is the heart of VCB. We customize every training program, not only because we care, but because every person is unique.



### **3. Staying Open Minded!**

We must stay open-minded and continue finding opportunities to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on our community. Regulations continue to change frequently. Our work with the Disability Equity Project helped many of our clients who were eager to be vaccinated do that very early on in the vaccine roll out. We also have coordinated in-home vaccinations, helped with financial support during the pandemic, provided thousands of hours of COVID-19 community education, and, in the process, gave 26 people who are blind and low vision jobs.

When you come to the office, we will be very clear about what requirements we have as a business. For now, we are allowing vaccinated individuals to choose if they would like to wear a mask or not. By the time you receive this newsletter, things may have changed. If you want to be vaccinated and have not yet, give us a call. We will help with every step of the process.

It is wonderful to know that we can come back together in-person. Thank you for supporting us through all the changes of this past year and keep sharing your feedback and ideas on what the next phase of VCB growth should look like. We commit to you to continue this exciting upward trajectory to build a better world for people who are blind and low vision.

*In service and gratitude,*



Shellena Heber

VCB would like to recognize and express gratitude for Together Toward Health (TTH), an initiative of the Public Health Institute, for their considerable support of our initiatives to support trust, equity, and accessibility in response to COVID. TTH coordinates community-based organizations to expand community outreach and workforce developments. Thanks to TTH, VCB is launching a significant community education campaign to accomplish two objectives.

1. Reach and educate a broader audience about blindness.
2. Find partners to develop sustainable employment opportunities for people who are blind.



Funding is provided by Together Toward Health, a program of the Public Health Institute, through funding from a group of philanthropic organizations.

Additionally, TTH has funded an exciting project that helps the Disability Equity Project replicate VCB's work in other counties. This will help to better unify service providers to collaborate on programs, share resources, and advocate for our community. TTH has been a tremendous partner in helping California interrupt COVID-19 by celebrating the important work of small community-based organizations like VCB. Thank you, Together Toward Health!

## Now Accepting Medicare for Low Vision Assessments!

*VCB's Low Vision Clinic is growing and is now more accessible than ever.*

It is a challenge to find a place in the Central Valley that does low vision exams. VCB is committed to ensuring that this vital service is available for all who need it. The Low Vision Clinic is often the first stop at VCB for people who have some vision. This exam is conducted by an optometrist with specialized training in low vision. It begins with a complete eye health exam and history. The doctor will assess to see if the patient would benefit from glasses, including tinted lenses, and make recommendations for assistive devices to help maximize the use of their remaining vision. Also, special care is given to educating the patient on how VCB can help them further through services and support.

VCB has regularly held our clinic starting in 2020 but now have grown to two providers and clinic days up to three times a month. Adding Medicare billing as an option to support this important service is just one way that VCB is ensuring that each person with vision loss has the tools they need to maintain their independence and employment opportunities.



*"I wanted to be a part of VCB to help improve low vision patient lives and be able to watch their journeys. People with vision loss need hope and support to make a change and I hope we can do that for all of our patients."*

*-Dr. Ta, VCB Low Vision Specialist*



# Congratulations!

Aaron promoted to Director of Rehabilitation.



Aaron has been with VCB for three and a half years, starting as the VCB scheduler and quickly moving up the ranks to Case Management. Creating this new leadership position at VCB demonstrates our commitment to providing the highest quality services in our industry and Aaron's compassion, dedication, and belief in our mission makes him just the person to carry us into this new chapter of VCB.



*"When I started at VCB as a part time scheduler, it was my mission to uphold the systems in place. As time went on, my focus then shifted to how I could improve the agency and my place within it. By seeking out more efficient ways to conduct operations and services, VCB can better resolve any issues that may arise within the rehabilitation team and maximize client outcomes. As Director of Rehabilitation, I will implement a more efficient process to assist in streamlining the client's experience and most importantly, provide team members with a platform for success."*

## Did you know?

Approximately **half of all eye injuries** happen at home, but only about **3 out of 10 people** wear protective eyewear during home projects that could hurt their eyes.

Source: American Academy of Ophthalmology

## Have you listened to the VCB Podcasts yet?

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

**Episode 7 is out now!**

**Now serving Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, and Kern Counties.**

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