



Quarterly Newsletter

HELPING PEOPLE DO THE THINGS THEY LOVE

The final months of 2025 were filled with fun and festive activities for all ages. We hosted Dining in the Dark in Fresno, celebrated White Cane Day, welcomed families to trick-or-treating events through our Youth Services program, and enjoyed three Holiday Open Houses. At VCB, we value every opportunity to celebrate, raise awareness and create meaningful gatherings for clients to connect with one another.

Client Story: Yocelyn Alvarez

Yocelyn has been connected with Valley Center for the Blind (VCB) for about a year and a half. Born blind, she has approached life with determination, resilience, and a strong drive for independence. Raised in Mexico, she attended school despite limited support for students who were blind or had low vision. With her mother's help in earlier years and later by advocating to attend high school independently, Yocelyn showed courage and confidence from a young age.

After moving to the United States, Yocelyn has worked hard to learn English and build connections, using technology to form friendships and grow more independent. Since joining VCB, she has participated in assistive technology and Independent Living Skills training, learning to

navigate technology, cook, and manage daily tasks. She continues to thrive academically while adapting to a new language and environment.

Known for her cheerful personality, sense of humor, and positive attitude, Yocelyn encourages others to attend VCB. She believes the center is vital to the community, providing a supportive and empowering space where individuals who are blind or visually impaired can build skills, confidence, and independence.



Yocelyn measures a cup of peanut butter in the VCB Training Kitchen to make cookies. She is standing behind a kitchen counter. In front of her are eggs, peanut butter, a bowl, baking sheets and cooking spray.

Valley Center for the Blind

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(661) 865-5115
2520 H St Suite A/B
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Fresno, California
(559) 222-4447
3417 W. Shaw Ave.
Fresno, CA 93711

Visalia, California
(559) 222-4447
220 S Mooney Blvd Suite E
Visalia, CA 93291

From Our Executive Director:



Dear Friends of VCB,

2025 was a year of near constant changes and challenges for our organization and so many others.

From shockingly wonderful highs to tough moments that demanded true leadership, I am grateful that our organization persevered as a team by keeping our mission in complete focus as our guiding light.

In 2026, we know that our community of people with disabilities will face new potential concerns, as we await clarity on how critical support programs and services will fair. At the end of 2025, the California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) announced that as of February an "Order of Selection" for new vocational rehabilitation applicants will be implemented. Order of Selection (OOS) is a federally mandated process that state agencies such as DOR must implement when they do not have sufficient resources- staff or funding- to serve all eligible individuals. This means that some applicants for DOR services will have to be put on a waiting list before they can start receiving services. It is important to note that under OOS, individuals with the most significant disabilities are given priority access to DOR services.

For VCB, we are grateful to have the peace of mind to know that individuals who are blind or low vision will be a top priority under OOS and are not likely to face impact to their training or support through DOR. For other individuals facing a disability, it may take some time before they are able to get access to these services. As we discussed at our recent staff Town Hall, VCB will continue working hard to ensure the same level of care and service to people living with visual impairment in California through advocacy, innovative programming, and a strong, sustainable service model. We are grateful for our ongoing partnership with DOR and all that we are able to do to serve this state together.

With state funding concerns and uncertainty in federal programs, your support of VCB is more important now than ever. We thank you for your consideration of the enclosed letter and wish you all the best in this new year.

Shellen Heber

Shellen Heber
SHeber @my VCB .org 559-222-4447 or 661-865-5115



Shellen is speaking in front of the Fresno Dining in the Dark guests



David is speaking in front of the Fresno Dining in the Dark guests

Fresno Dining in the Dark

On September 11, the Fort Washington Golf and Country Club was buzzing with over 150 energetic guests for Dining in the Dark. It had been five years since this event had been in Fresno and the crowd couldn't have been happier to have it back. Attendees enjoyed a blind wine tasting, four course meal where they could wear a blindfold and the opportunity to bid on silent auction items. Over \$35,000 was raised to benefit VCB's programs and services. A huge thank you to our sponsors, table sponsors, and attendees. We look forward to seeing you on September 24th, 2026, at the next Dining in the Dark in Fresno!

Trick or Treating at VCB

In 2025, VCB ramped up youth services and provided fun gatherings throughout the Central Valley. For Halloween, each office hosted an opportunity for youth and their families to dress up, enjoy snacks and create crafts. Gillian Conrad, Youth Services Coordinator, shared "Our Trick or Treat events this year were a big success. It was heartwarming to bring together both parents and children who are blind with their sighted family members in an inclusive environment. We look forward to more events that promote this type of family bonding and community building for families affected by vision loss". If you are interested in learning more about Youth Services or want to receive the Youth Services Newsletter, please email GConrad@myvcb.org or call 559.222.4447.



Rey and other VCB staff handing out candy to kids trick or treating at the Visalia office.

White Cane Safety Day

VCB hosted picnics in Fresno and Bakersfield to celebrate White Cane Day and raise community awareness. White Cane Day is an annual celebration on October 15 that recognizes the independence, mobility, and civil rights of people who are blind or visually impaired, highlighting the white cane as a symbol of freedom and equal access. VCB staff and clients enjoyed food, games and a group walk that highlighted independence and mobility. Events like these provide meaningful opportunities to connect, celebrate, and spend time with others who share similar experiences. We hope you join us in 2026!



Clients and their families holding up a White Cane Day Banner at The Park at Riverwalk in Bakersfield.

Holiday Open Houses

This year, we invited staff, clients, and community members to break out their best ugly holiday sweaters and join us for a festive celebration filled with delicious treats. All three of our sites enjoyed a joyful day of seasonal fun, complete with photos with Santa and plenty of holiday cheer. A heartfelt thank-you to the wonderful businesses who generously provided sweets and beverages—your support made this celebration truly special.



Staff at the Holiday Open House in Fresno posing for a group photo with their holiday sweaters.

Save the Date

February 21st

Braille Challenge (Fresno)

Join VCB as we host our 3rd annual Braille Challenge. The BRAILLE CHALLENGE® is a very special competition that motivates students who are blind or have low vision to improve their braille reading and writing literacy skills.

Fresno Office
3417 W Shaw Ave
Fresno, CA 93711

March 6th

Dining in the Dark (Bakersfield)

Join us for a special dinner at Luigi's Warehouse. Dining in the Dark is a unique experience that will involve low lighting and the option to dine wearing a blindfold to further heighten other senses and experience dinner like our blind and low vision clients would.

Luigi's Warehouse
725 E. 10th St.
Bakersfield, CA 93305

September 24th

Dining in the Dark (Fresno)

Join us for a special dinner at the Fort Washington Golf and Country Club. Dining in the Dark is a unique experience that will involve low lighting and the option to dine wearing a blindfold to further heighten other senses and experience dinner like our blind and low vision clients would.

Fort Washington Golf and
Country Club
10272 N Millbrook Ave
Fresno, CA 93305

Thank you, donors!

Thank you to the following donors for your contributions of \$100 and above between September 2025 and December 2025 to our important mission to support, train, and employ people with vision loss. Your support has given us the resources needed to ensure the Central Valley's blind and low vision community has access to assistive technology and training needed to continue doing the things they love.

Advanced Retina Care (Dr. Vivian Kim)

Adventist Health - Hanford

Olga Andrade

Barbara Angone

Anthem Medi-Cal

Navjot Basra

Joseph Blair

John Breen

Baljeet Singh Buttar

Bonnie Campbell

Carl's Jr.

Carolyn Cave

City of Fresno

Vernon Crowder

Leonard Deal

Celeste Demonte

Marvin & Debbie Douglass

Michael Douglass

Eye-Q Vision Care

Ruben Fernandez

Garrett French

Fresno Dolphins Swim Team

Jamie Gibson-Barrows

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Hudson & Company, Inc.

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Christina Linneman

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Mutual of America Life Insurance

Kyle Nabors

NIB - National Industries for the Blind

Sonia Niemotka

Elizabeth Norton

Gabrielle Osdale

P.F. Chang's

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SCAN Small Grant 2023

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The Law Office of G. Bryan Pinion

Jeff & Sheri Tosc

Roger Tucker

Tulare Hospital Foundation

United Way of California Capital Region

Valley Skin Institute

Henry Vehrs

Virginia & Alfred Harrell Foundation

Regina Webb

Ryan Wullsleger

Will You Help Us Protect This Important Work?

Dear Friends of VCB,

Recently, I shared updates about the important work ahead as we continue our mission to **support, train, and employ people who are blind or have low vision**. Year after year—now **seven years in a row**—VCB has seen the number of people receiving services grow significantly.

VCB is proud of the **strong foundation** we've built through earned revenue. Through contracts and fee-for-service partnerships, we have expanded high-quality programs, offered competitive wages and benefits, and created more employment opportunities. This is especially meaningful because **more than 75% of VCB's staff are people who are blind or have low vision**.

This year, major shifts in government priorities resulted in **unexpected reductions** to some of our earned-revenue programs. These changes **threaten the stability of critical disability services** for people who are blind across the Central Valley.

David—pictured seated second from the right—shared his story at one of our recent Dining in the Dark events. He said:



"I worked to get a job for more than a year, interviewing over and over and not getting hired due to lack of work experience. I was excited when VCB offered me the document conversion project, allowing me to gain experience. Now, I enjoy my job because I get to help individuals learn how to communicate in a work setting and help them like VCB helped me. I hope people support VCB so others can regain their independence and find employment, just like I did."

Members of the Valley Center for the Blind Staff at a Recent Event



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When our document conversion project was unexpectedly cancelled, **VCB remained committed to David's employment.** Instead of enacting broad layoffs, we invested in upskilling him and promoted him into a new role—ensuring that future clients receive training from someone who truly understands their experience.

To continue supporting staff like David and meeting the growing needs of our community, we are asking for your help. A monthly gift of **\$25, \$50, or \$100** over the next year will make a meaningful difference in keeping people employed and clients served.

At VCB, **our people are our mission**—and your support directly sustains their success.

Thank you for believing in this work and for being part of the VCB family.

Warmly, with gratitude and in service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shellen Heber".

Shellen Heber
Executive Director



Hope Needs Champions — Thank You for Being One.

To give or set up your reoccurring donation, visit myvcb.org and use the "Donate Today" button at the top of the page, or scan the QR code above.

You can also give via check made payable to "Valley Center for the Blind" mailed to 3417 W Shaw Avenue, Fresno, CA 93711.



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TRAIN



EMPLOY