



American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults

Federally Registered Operating Name of the American Brotherhood for the Blind

Annual Report 2016

Providing Hope for the Blind

The American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults (AAF) knows that when blindness comes upon an individual or a family, it can seem like a devastating blow. However, the AAF also knows that blindness is not the defining characteristic of a blind person's life. Therefore, the organization gives blind people a fundamental belief in their value, their capacity for contribution to our society, and their ability to live an exciting and fulfilling life through education, training,

and alternative methods of accomplishing the tasks that this exciting life demands. For over ninety-five years the AAF has been developing programs to support the blind, and the principal message we have is that the right perspective about blindness gives hope and provides opportunity. The AAF is not the only organization serving the blind, but we provide hope to blind people, and hope is the most critical element in transforming the lives of blind people.

Background and Purpose

The American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults is a not-for-profit organization incorporated under the laws of the state of Maryland. It was established in 1919 to provide blind people with reading material, to educate the public about blindness, to give aid to the deaf-blind, to provide adaptive equipment to the blind, to offer expertise to governmental and private agencies serving the blind, to help older Americans adjust to vision loss, to offer services to blind children and their parents, and to do any other lawful thing that it can to improve the quality of life of blind people. The AAF also partners with organizations of blind people to create and enhance innovative and imaginative programs and services that allow blind people to achieve their dreams. For example, the organization supports groundbreaking education programs that teach blind children and youth that they can participate fully in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, which have been traditionally and falsely thought to be closed to the blind. The organization also supports programs to introduce Braille to blind pre-school children so that they can experience the independence and joy that Braille brings while their peers are discovering print. This helps children understand that Braille is a reading

medium that is equal to print and that will allow them equal participation in education and employment. The AAF continues to provide Twin Vision® (books that contain identical print and Braille text side by side) and Braille books throughout the early childhood years, so that the imaginations and expectations of blind children can be kindled by reading.

It is often wrongly assumed that blind children cannot draw or be taught to do so, but drawing can be as exciting and inspiring for blind children as for sighted children if blind children are able to learn the basics of drawing and to touch the artworks they make. For this reason, the AAF recently initiated a pilot project to distribute tactile art boxes to blind children aged two to eight. The boxes contain paper, substrates (such as sandpaper), and implements to create raised drawings that blind children can enjoy by touch.

The American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults also provides direct personal and financial assistance to blind and deaf-blind individuals when needed. For example, recently the AAF was able to assist a blind woman with medical bills related to a life-threatening condition.

Structure and Governing Board

The AAF has offices in Baltimore, Maryland, and Tarzana, California. The Tarzana office houses a large Braille lending library of great documents in American history and a collection of many thousands of Twin Vision® books for children. It utilizes a large number of volunteers who assist staff members to produce and distribute Twin Vision® books and Braille calendars, and also to operate the lending library.

From the Baltimore office, the AAF carries on a widespread campaign of public education, administers a program of scholarships and financial assistance to

blind people, conducts seminars about blindness, and carries on its other activities. The day-to-day activities of the AAF are overseen by an executive director, currently Dr. Marc Maurer of Baltimore.

The governing body of the AAF is an eleven-member Board of Directors, all of whom are blind and receive no financial compensation for their services. The members of the board have experienced success in a variety of occupations and activities and have mentored many other blind people so that they too can achieve their dreams.

Board of Directors

BARBARA LOOS, President
Chair, Nebraska Commission for the Blind
Lincoln, Nebraska

RAMONA WALHOF, First Vice President
Businesswoman
Boise, Idaho

SANDRA HALVERSON, Second Vice President
Medical Transcriptionist
Arlington, Virginia

GARY MACKENSTADT, Secretary
Retired Businessman
Sequim, Washington

JAMES OMVIG, Treasurer
Attorney
Des Moines, Iowa

JULIE DEDEN, Board Member
Executive Director, Colorado Center for the Blind
Littleton, Colorado

MARY ELLEN GABIAS, Board Member
National and International Employment for the
Blind Advisor
Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada

JOHN PARÉ, Board Member
National Consumer Representative
Baltimore, Maryland

BENNETT PROWS, Board Member
Health Information Privacy Specialist
United States Department of Health and Human
Services, Office for Civil Rights
Kirkland, Washington

DR. FREDRIC SCHROEDER, Board Member
President, World Blind Union
Vienna, Virginia

KEVAN WORLEY, Board Member
Businessman
Colorado Springs, Colorado

American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults Statement of Program Service Activities

BRAILLE PUBLICATIONS AND LIBRARY

The AAF produces and distributes Twin Vision® books for small children. Young blind children, like their sighted peers, can learn about books as toddlers by reading with parents and friends. They do not need to

wait until school age to begin to learn about Braille. Blind children are as eager to learn as sighted children. Braille is as exciting and as challenging to a toddler who is blind as print is to one who can see. Just as

BRILLE PUBLICATIONS AND LIBRARY, *continued*

sighted children turn the pages of books and make up stories even before they learn to read the print on the page, blind children can feel Braille dots and imagine the stories they contain. In this way, they learn that Braille is a source of stories even before they learn to read it. Blind parents and blind teachers who use Twin Vision® books with sighted children are also extremely enthusiastic about these books.

The Kenneth Jernigan Lending Library, operated by the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults, distributes Twin Vision® books, free of charge, throughout the United States, to state schools for the blind, regional Braille libraries, blind children and blind parents, institutions serving the blind, and schools and libraries in many foreign countries.

Each year, the AAF produces tens of thousands of Braille calendars and sends them to blind individuals free of charge. Sighted individuals receive calendars as gifts, or can walk into many stores to buy a print calendar. A blind person cannot get Braille calendars from stores and is not likely to receive one as a gift. The convenience of a calendar may seem a small thing, but it is very useful. Thousands of blind Americans depend upon the AAF for Braille calendars.

Young sighted children learn a great deal from pictures. Young blind children explore with their fingers and

learn a great deal from this exploration. The AAF has developed a series of books, “The Shape of Things,” so that blind children can enjoy pictures they can touch, just as sighted children enjoy pictures they can see. Also, in an effort to help young blind Americans become more aware of our nation’s history and traditions, Braille copies of great American documents are published and distributed free to schools and libraries by the AAF.

The organization also produces and distributes a popular series of Braille books geared toward children and young adults. It makes an ongoing effort to get Braille versions of current, popular books into the hands of these readers so that they are reading what their sighted peers are reading. These books are delivered by mail and can also be downloaded from the website of the AAF, www.actionfund.org. While the Braille books are meant for children to keep, since Braille books can be hard to find and expensive to purchase, they are sometimes returned when the children outgrow or no longer wish to read them. The AAF donates these gently used Braille books to an annual Braille Book Fair conducted by the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children, or sends boxes of them, upon request, to blind individuals or to entities serving the blind in foreign countries. In 2016 books were sent to Jamaica, the Philippines, India, Canada, Nigeria, and Ecuador.

ADVOCACY AND PROTECTION OF CIVIL RIGHTS

The American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults provides advice, counsel, resources, and advocacy services relating to protection of rights under federal and state labor, civil rights, and rehabilitation laws, as well as enforcement of anti-discrimination provisions of such laws. The organization works to eliminate discrimination in employment, educational opportunities, and use of public accommodations and transportation. The AAF works to strengthen state and local self-help and self-care organizations of blind people. It also participates in developing and conducting

seminars to assist the blind in understanding methods and techniques of organizing local groups for self-help, methods and techniques available to blind individuals for self-advocacy, relationships between consumer groups and governmental and private agencies, and the provisions of federal and state laws affecting the blind. Several hundred blind individuals receive such assistance each year. All blind people (approximately seven million in this country) benefit from these civil rights and anti-discrimination activities.

SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults provides scholarships to blind individuals, distributes specialized aids and devices, provides

assistance in developing specialized programs and services for the blind, answers written and telephone requests for information, and makes individual referrals

SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS AND SERVICES, *continued*

to appropriate governmental and private service resources. Through a mass communication program, the AAF seeks to make systemic and permanent changes in the way people think about blindness and blind people, thereby changing the actions they take when encountering blind people in daily life. Attempts are made to ensure that blind people and those who are losing vision, their families, and their friends know that help is available and how to acquire it. The expected result is improved lives for blind people.

The AAF helped to establish the International Braille and Technology Center for the Blind (IBTC), located

in Baltimore, and assists in its ongoing operation. The IBTC has an extensive collection of Braille embossers, electronic Braille notetakers and displays, accessible mobile phones and tablets, devices for producing tactile pictures and graphics, accessible voting machines, and other technology of significance to blind people. This center makes it possible for people to visit one facility and gain hands-on familiarity with dozens of devices from numerous manufacturers and distributors from around the world.

All of these activities are targeted to reach in excess of seven million Americans.

PROGRAM SERVICE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

With effective training and equal opportunity, blind individuals can succeed along with the sighted in the everyday pursuits of education, employment, and community life. Nevertheless, there remains work to be done, and the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults remains fully committed to the job. Thanks to the decades of public education on the part of the AAF and like-minded organizations of the blind speaking for themselves, it is now more widely accepted that the blind have a right to equal opportunity to pursue a full life.

In 2016, the AAF continued to promote full lives for the blind through a wide range of services to stimulate effective education and information on blindness and the positive and realistic view that it is respectable to be blind. By helping communicate to the public the view that the blind and deaf-blind can be capable parents, workers, and contributors to community life, and by assisting the blind to acquire the resources, training, opportunity, and self-confidence to excel in home life and careers, the AAF continued helping clear the way for blind individuals to contribute their share to the collective strength of our nation.

Whether through outreach to parents of blind children and professionals who work with them, provision of things that so many of us take for granted in daily life like Braille calendars and reading material, or active support of programs exposing blind youth to possible careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, the AAF is visible and effective.

For example, the AAF in 2016 advanced opportunities for the blind by:

- Participating in the 2016 annual conference of the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children in Orlando, Florida, in July;
- Editing and publishing the quarterly *Future Reflections* magazine, the leading publication in the nation devoted to the education and training of blind children and an invaluable resource for their parents and teachers;
- Maintaining contact with lawyers who provide pro bono advice and assistance to blind people from across the country through the Volunteer Lawyers for the Blind pro bono legal outreach project;
- Supporting the 2016 Jacobus tenBroek Law Symposium, one of the premier conferences for lawyers and legal scholars focusing on protecting the civil rights of people with disabilities;
- Sponsoring the 2016 National Federation of the Blind Kenneth Jernigan Scholarship in the amount of \$12,000, which was awarded to Maria “Conchita” Hernandez of Washington, DC, who is pursuing a career in special education;
- Coordinating a nationwide network of volunteers donating hours of service to organizations serving the blind;
- Assisting in conducting leadership development seminars for promising leaders of the blind, both at state gatherings of the blind and in Baltimore;

PROGRAM SERVICE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, *continued*

- Advocating for the rights of blind people across the nation through counseling on civil rights issues involving denial of access or opportunity; and
- Helping blind and deaf-blind students meet the increasing costs of higher education and to gain access to the latest technology and training necessary to prepare for productive careers by funding grants to support blind people.

The AAF also directly assisted blind individuals in learning Braille and gaining other skills that will equip them for future success by:

- Distributing print/Braille packets for parents of pre-readers to spark and nurture their blind children's interest in learning Braille through the innovative Braille Reading Pals Club, because Braille literacy is the key to success for blind children;
 - Promoting and assisting in registration for "Braille Slate Pals," a free program of the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children that matches children in kindergarten through grade twelve who wish to correspond by exchanging Braille letters;
 - Providing monthly mailings through the 2016 AAF Free Braille Books for Blind Children program to blind children, teachers, and libraries so that blind children can have books at the same time that sighted children can buy them in the bookstore, serving 3,615 patrons and mailing a total of 67,536 books to those patrons, including titles in the popular *Pete the Cat* and *Thirty-nine Clues* series,
- as well as a special holiday book, *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey*;
- Enabling 221 active patrons—parents and children—to read together when one or the other is blind through Twin Vision® books, circulating 3,580 books, and producing 218 new Twin Vision® and Braille-only titles for circulation through the Kenneth Jernigan Library for Blind Children, containing over twenty-six thousand books;
 - Providing 7,432 free long white canes for independent travel to blind children and adults;
 - Furnishing an extensive collection of Braille books to the Braille Book Fair conducted by the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children in July in Orlando, Florida, providing hundreds of Braille readers of all ages from across the country the rare opportunity to build their very own collection of Braille books, free of charge;
 - Producing 11,922 compact and useful Braille calendars for distribution to blind and deaf-blind individuals and agencies serving them;
 - Continuing to change the way the average American thinks about blindness and to ensure that those who are blind or may become blind, along with their families and friends, know that support is available and are informed about how to obtain it.

Truly, as its accomplishments in 2016 indicate, the AAF remains one of the leading entities partnering with the blind to help them to realize their full potential and to contribute their talents, energy, and skills to our society.



If you, your family, or friends can benefit from our resources and services, or if you can help provide service on a volunteer basis, please contact us.

American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults

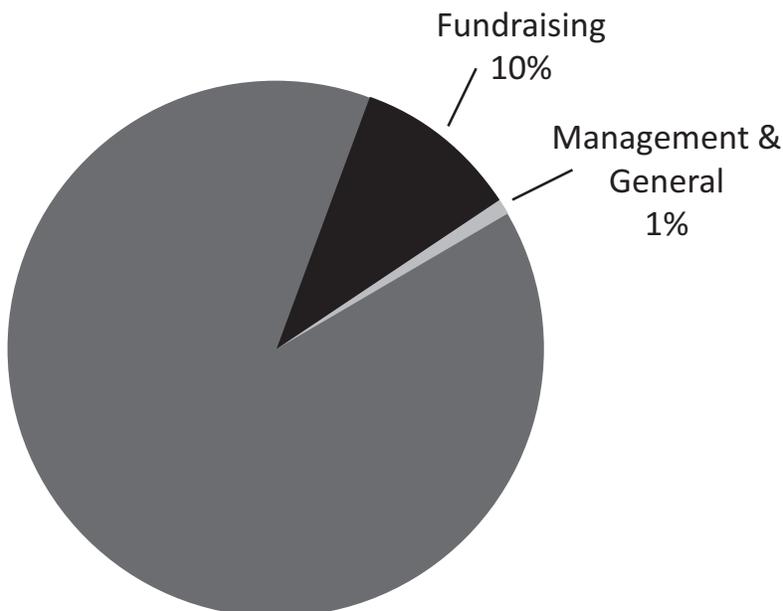
1800 Johnson Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21230 • (410) 659-9315 • www.actionfund.org

If you or a friend would like to remember the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults in your will, you can do so by employing the following language:

"I give, devise, and bequeath unto the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults, 1800 Johnson Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21230, a Maryland nonprofit corporation, the sum of \$_____ (or "_____ percent of my net estate" or "the following stocks and bonds:_____") to be used for its worthy purposes on behalf of blind people."

Statement of Activities

The American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults is a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Federal Internal Revenue Code, and contributions to it are tax-deductible. AAF will supply a complete certified audit of its activities upon request.



Management and General and Fundraising Expenses as a Percent of Total Public Support

YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2016

Revenues and Gains and Other Support

Public Support:	
Contributions	\$4,136,506
Donated Services	1,494,578
Total Public Support.....	5,631,084

Revenue:	
Investment Income	1,285,320
Total Revenue	1,285,320

Total Revenues and Gains and Other Support \$6,916,404

Expenses

Program Services:	
Braille Publications and Library	\$646,697
Advocacy and Protection of Civil Rights.....	1,271,835
Specialized Programs and Services.....	2,497,138
Total Program Services	4,415,670

Supporting Services:	
Management and General	100,636
Fundraising	723,906
Total Supporting Services	824,542

Total Expenses..... \$5,240,212

Changes In Net Assets	\$1,676,192
Net Assets - Beginning of Year	\$26,055,171
Net Assets - End of Year	\$27,731,363