

# Report

## State Commission For The Blind



Vol. I, No. 3

December 1984

### SERVICES TO BLIND TEXANS REACH HIGH LEVEL IN 1984

Vocational rehabilitation can best be defined as the restoration of a disabled person to the fullest physical, mental, social, and economic usefulness to which he or she is capable. The primary mandate of the State Commission for the Blind's vocational rehabilitation program lies in those efforts that will help blind and visually disabled citizens secure productive employment.

With the training and assistance provided by the State Commission for the Blind, a total of 310 blind persons secured jobs in the competitive labor market at an average weekly salary of \$210. Eighty percent, or 245, of the blind clients had average weekly earnings of \$244. These 1984 fiscal year-end statistics represent record accomplishments for the agency.

During this reporting period, 9,736 individuals received individualized services through the Commission's vocational rehabilitation program. Of these, more than 2,000 blind and visually disabled persons successfully completed their training program. "The average weekly salary for all rehabilitants," notes Terry Murphy, director of Client Services, "was \$178 and represents a substantial increase over the national minimum weekly earnings rate of \$134."

Other areas of the agency's service delivery system also experi-

enced a continued demand for their services during this period. A total of 6,526 children received services through the Visually Handicapped Children's Program. The regular evaluation and training program offered through the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center in Austin served 170 blind and visually disabled clients from throughout the state. "The activities of the Center are being reassessed with the goal of having a more comprehensive and tailored training center that will include a career and guidance program with specific segments in vocational/occupational exploration, rehabilitation engineering, and job readiness," Murphy points out.

### COMMISSION SELECTS TOP EMPLOYERS

The Fort Hood Military Installation, the Texas Department of Human Resources-Arlington Region, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, and the Sheraton Reservations Corporation in Austin are the recipients of the State Commission for the Blind's 1984 "Employer of the Year" awards. Commission Chairman William C. Conner of Fort Worth made the formal presentation of the awards October 29 during a meeting of the Commission in Austin.

"The employment process is not always easy," Conner noted in his opening remarks, "but each year more and more employers join with us in the search for jobs people

can do without sight, and how they can do them." He added that employers are often the agency's best allies in spreading the news that blind employees are as productive as anyone else when given the chance.

Nominations for the awards were submitted by Commission personnel from throughout the state. The four recipients were all judged to be exemplary in their efforts to promote the hiring of blind and visually disabled Texans. "It is not important that the agency's individual success depends greatly on employers such as these; what is important is that these employers had jobs to be done and determined that blind persons could do them. We're not talking charity. We're talking about the dignity of returned value for value given," Conner concluded.

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- 1984 "Employer of the Year" award recipients
- Commission office recognized for efforts
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- Talking Book Program turns 50
- In-Brief

# From the Director



## State Commission For The Blind

314 WEST 11TH STREET, POST OFFICE BOX 12866, AUSTIN, TEXAS 78711  
WILLIAM C. CONNER, Chairman

JOHN C. WILSON, Executive Director

The Sunset Advisory Commission staff has concluded its review of the State Commission for the Blind. I am extremely pleased to report that the Sunset staff has recommended the continuance of our agency as an independent, single state authority responsible for the delivery of rehabilitation services to blind and visually disabled Texans. In its report, Sunset representatives noted that the State of Texas could potentially lose \$15 million in federal funding to the state and the fact that an estimated 9,500 blind Texans would be denied vocational assistance. In noting that Texas has had a separate agency (serving blind persons) for more than 50 years, the Sunset review indicated that lines of communication with this type of client population, never easy to establish or maintain, could be severely damaged by changing the current structure.

While the Sunset examination was a long and exhaustive process, it gave us a valuable opportunity to look closely at our entire operations and study where we've been as well as plan on where we're going. Sunset staff had an opportunity to travel across the state and visit with our employees in an attempt to gain a better understanding of what the State Commission for the Blind is all about. Consumers had a chance to voice their concerns and opinions, both pro and con, and thus allow for Sunset personnel to fully comprehend the multiplicity of issues with which this agency deals on a day-to-day basis.

In my opinion the recommendation to continue the operation of the State Commission for the Blind serves as a validation of our board's ability to adopt effective policies on the legal mandates affecting the delivery of services to the blind and visually disabled citizens of our state. It also reaffirms my belief that this positive outcome is directly related to the superb efforts of our staff and reflects their commitment to the mandates of the legislature and stronger legislative framework that will be enacted during the 69th Legislature, our Commission will have at its disposal a more verifiable means of judging our effectiveness and efficiency. I can say, unequivocally, that this organization will be a stronger and more vibrant branch of state government as a result of the Sunset review.

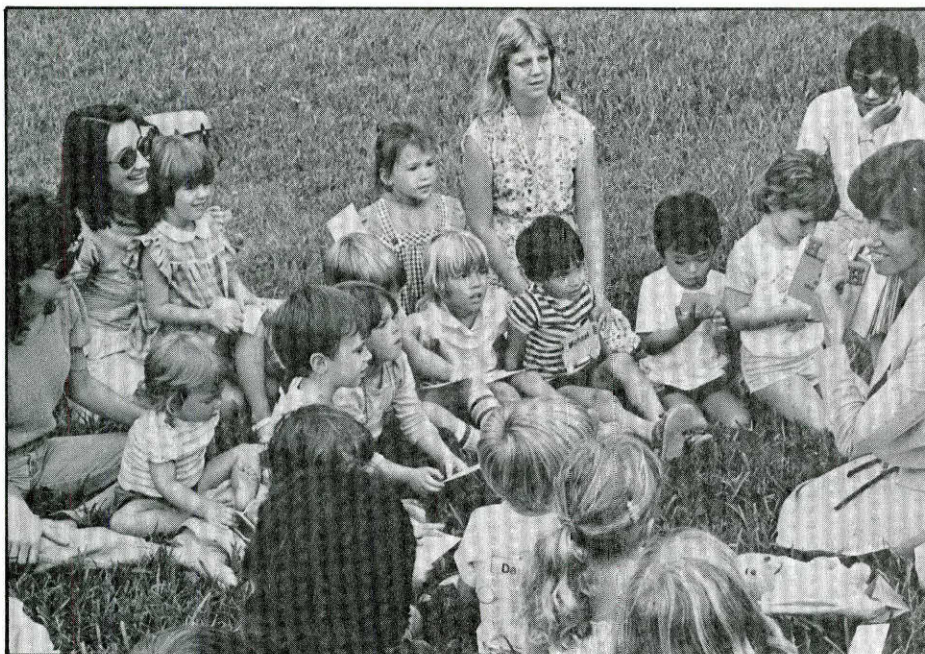
John C. Wilson  
Executive Director

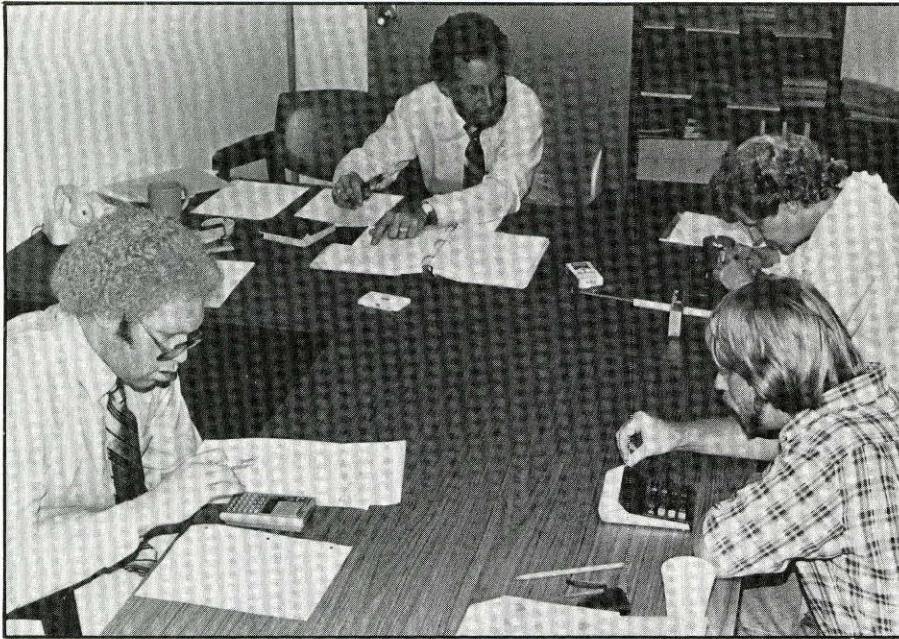


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As part of a week-long study on "Handicapped Friends," a group of Austin preschoolers met on the State Capitol grounds in September to learn about blind and visually impaired people. Linda Woodbury, a member of the Commission's public information office, described how canes, braille watches, talking clocks, and other aids and appliances are used by people with little or no vision. Woodbury, who has provided a similar orientation for children enrolled in co-op nursery schools in Austin for the past three years, read from the braille side of a "twin vision" Charlie Brown book while the children followed the print and touched the raised pictures. After the story was read one child observed: "People don't always have to have eyes to read or play, do they!"

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A career in the food service industry has proven to be a very successful endeavor for many blind and visually disabled Texans. Through the Business Enterprises Program (BEP), Commission clients are given an opportunity to manage food service and vending facilities on public and private properties throughout Texas. The BEP offers three months of intensive, formal training in food service management for persons accepted into the program. During the last training class held in Austin, Clarence Williams (left), David Nall (lower right) and Geneva Wade (upper right) participated in academic training led by Don Sims, staff training officer. Wade, a BEP operator at the Federal Building in Dallas, signed up for the training class in order to familiarize herself with the latest developments in managerial techniques and developments in the food service industry.

### **COMMISSION PAPER ACCEPTED FOR DELIVERY AT NATIONAL CONFERENCE IN WASHINGTON**

A national conference on the special needs of disabled persons who are members of minority populations was held November 7-9 in Washington, D.C. Sponsored by the Howard University Center for Handicapped Children and Youth, the meeting drew rehabilitation professionals from throughout the country for a forum on key issues, problems, and effective approaches relative to the needs of non-white disabled persons.

The conference title was "Meeting the Challenge of Providing Rehabilitation to Non-White Persons with Disabilities." Workshops were held on several topics, including the media and the disabled, career exploration, incidence of disabling conditions in minorities, and the sociocultural aspects involved in serving minorities. Rolando Garza, public information officer with the Commission, delivered a presentation on the "Socio-Economic and Cultural Problems Affecting the Delivery of Rehabilitation Services to Hispanic Blind and Visually Disabled Persons."

The training conference enabled participants to gain added information concerning the theories and practices relative to the needs of special population groups as well as provided an opportunity to examine and develop innovative approaches to the working with various social and cultural factors which impact upon a substantial segment of the disabled population in the United States.

# 50th

### **TALKING BOOK PROGRAM OBSERVES 50TH ANNIVERSARY**

October marked the 50th anniversary of the Talking Book Program. Financed by the United States Congress and administered by the Library of Congress, the program was started by the American Foundation for the Blind. More than 635,000 blind and physically handicapped persons in this country benefit from this effort that allows readers who cannot read conventional printed material to keep up with the news, study for academic courses, and read for entertainment.

Here in Texas the State Commission for the Blind is responsible not only for the distribution of the talking book machines, but also for their storage and maintenance. According to Marie Deekard, the supervisor of the agency's Talking Book Program and a veteran with more than ten years of experience in this activity, there were 8,000 talking book machines and 15,000 cassette tape players distributed through the program during the past biennium.

The program is available without cost to individuals who can't read or use printed materials because of a visual limitation or a physical disability. A statement by a physician is preferred as a means of certification whenever the applicant can obtain it without too much inconvenience or expense. Where the person's disability is obvious or is known to a person working with the individual in a professional capacity, certification may be made by that person. In addition to the equipment, the Commission also distributes remote control units, headphones, pillowphones, and other auxiliary attachments to help recipients in their use of the equipment.

## MEDICAL ADVISORY GROUP PLAYS VITAL ROLE

The Medical Advisory Council of the State Commission for the Blind is comprised of ophthalmologists from across the state. Although no specific statutory authority requires such an advisory unit, it was developed by the Commission in cooperation with the agency's state medical consultant and the ophthalmological community.

Currently, there are 19 members serving on the Council. The membership includes three representatives from the Texas Ophthalmological Association; nine ophthalmologists in private practice; the agency's medical consultant; four ophthalmologists affiliated with medical schools in Texas, and two practicing pediatric ophthalmologists. The Council meets annually, usually in conjunction with the Texas Medical Association's yearly meetings.

"Members of the Council do not discuss specific medical questions relating to individual clients," says Scott Bowman, agency planner who serves as staff liaison to the group, "but rather concentrate on topics that are limited to issues of a programmatic nature." The Council acts in an advisory capacity to the agency's executive director, John C. Wilson. The group has three basic functions: (1) to advise the administration on issues pertaining to the provision of medical services through various programs of the Commission; (2) to interpret the Commission's policies on medical services to the medical profession within the state; and (3) to serve as a forum for establishing and maintaining dialogue among all interested parties, both medical and lay, on matters pertaining to the prevention of blindness, standards of eye care, and related matters.

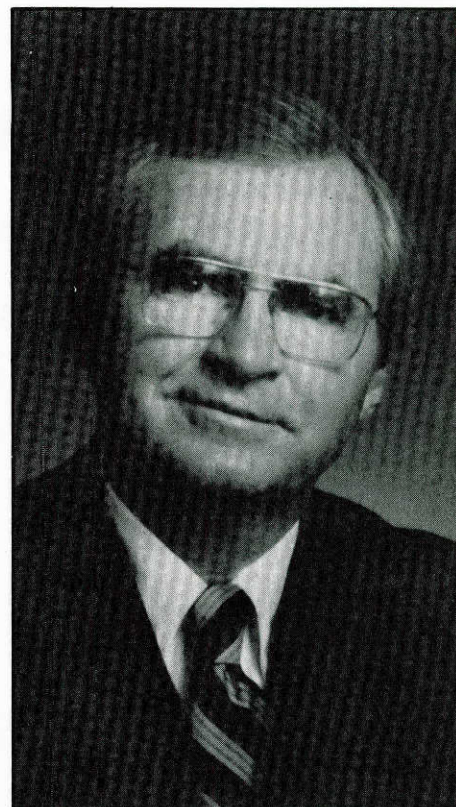
An ad hoc committee of pediatric ophthalmologists was formed last year in response to some medical issues and budgetary decisions affecting the agency's Visually

Handicapped Children's Program. "This group has been instrumental in offering suggestions in coordinating our services with outside funding sources and helping us extend our limited state funds to as many children as possible," notes Bill Agnell, assistant director of Client Services.

The Council is also instrumental in recommending payment ceilings for specific medical procedures outlined in the agency's Maximum Affordable Payment Schedule (MAPS). "Right now," says Bowman, "the allowable payments in the MAPS for eye surgeries are running somewhere between 30-50% of typical private patients' fees being charged by ophthalmologists." Members of the Council play a valuable role in promoting the spirit of cooperation that exists between members of the medical community and the Commission.

"Essentially, the overall function of the Medical Advisory Council is to provide the framework upon which the medical community and the Commission can provide high quality medical care to clients, while insuring the greatest possible savings to taxpayers," points out Wilson. Through the effort of Dr. Wootten Brown of Austin, who has served as the agency's state medical consultant since 1965, a clear line of communication is maintained between the Commission and the medical community. Additionally, the Commission has a network of local medical consultants who assist counselors and caseworkers in interpretation of medical reports and recommendations for further treatment or specialty examinations.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** A handbook for ophthalmologists entitled "Working With TCB Clients" gives an overview of agency services, examples of appropriate referrals to the Commission, a directory of agency offices and supervisors, and a sample from the payment schedule. Copies are available upon request. The next meeting of the Medical Advisory Council is slated for May 11, 1985 in San Antonio.



Dr. Wootten Brown  
Medical Consultant

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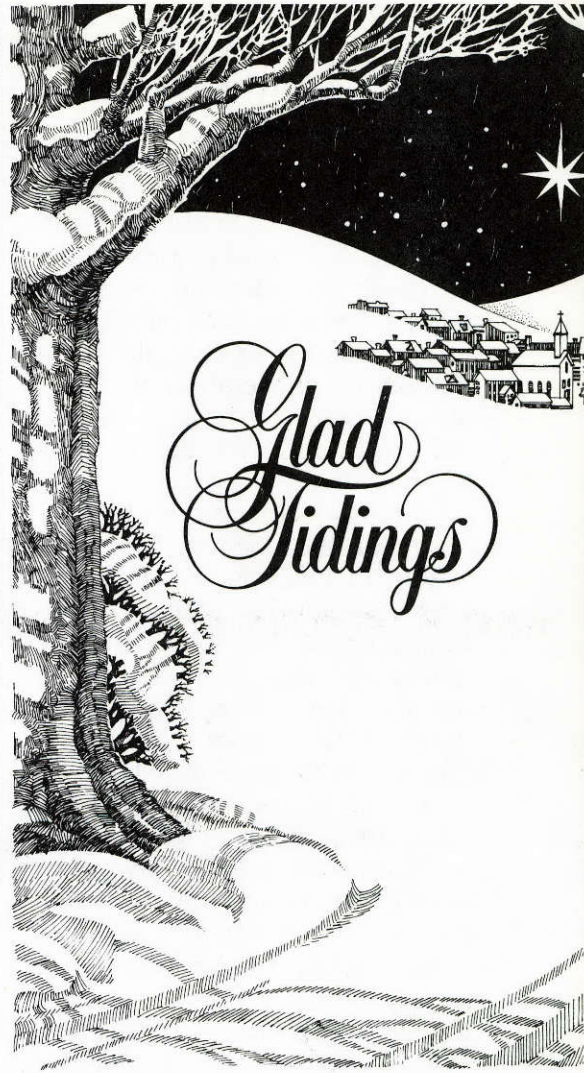
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William C. Conner, Chairman  
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Joan Cox, vocational rehabilitation teacher in San Angelo, accepts the State Commission for the Blind's "Governmental Agency of the Year" award from San Angelo Mayor Tom Parrett. The award was presented by the San Angelo Mayor's Committee for Persons With Disabilities at their annual awards luncheon in September.



# Glad Tidings

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