



REACHING OUT

NORTH DAKOTA VISION SERVICES/SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

#96

January 2021

Superintendent's Scoop

There has been much written about people fearing and resisting change in their lives. This year, however, I believe most of us would challenge that notion. We desperately want change--for the better. We have all been learning to adapt and thrive in new ways in our personal lives, in our communities and in our work as we grapple with the pandemic. At NDVS/SB our work has changed in many ways, but we have risen to the occasion and see a good light coming sometime in 2021.

Here are a few examples of our work and activities this fall:

- In lieu of regular Short-Term Program weeks, a number of virtual instruction sessions have been very successful. Teachers have been very creative and become Zoom masters.
- NDVS/SB continues to work with the North Dakota Association of the Blind to host a topic-centered, weekly Coffee Chat and a Tech Talk for adults that are visually impaired. This has truly been fun and meaningful for all.
- Every other week, a young adult group meets via zoom to discuss a variety topics of interest to them.
- We did have a number of staff that were exposed to Covid-19 and needed to quarantine (including myself). Unfortunately, some did test positive and manifested symptoms. I am happy to report that all have recovered and returned to work.

- The long overdue renovation of our 2nd floor bathroom came to completion on Friday December 4th. We are pleased with the new amenities that will serve our staff, students and the Mayville State Head Start children.

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- A very exciting thing happened in November. NDVS/SB was nominated and won the **Friends of VR Award** for 2020. We cherish our partnership with ND Vocational Rehabilitation and were both humbled to receive this great honor!
- Earlier in the fall we submitted a budget proposal based on the guidance provided by the Office of Management and Budget. Although every state agency was required to make reductions and to reprioritize some funding for the purpose of enhancing efficiency, I feel confident as we approach the legislative process in January 2021. We are grateful for the resources that will be appropriated to carry out our mission in 2021-2023.

—Paul Olson

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Region 1 & 2 Coordinator Erika Moulton

Hello from Western North Dakota! I am Erika Moulton and I am a teacher of the visually impaired and I serve students birth to eighteen in northwest North Dakota. I was previously located at Town & Country Shopping Center in Minot, but I have transitioned to a home office outside of Voltaire, ND.

I am currently in the middle of my fifth year with NDVS/SB! Time sure is flying by. I was hired to start with NDVS/SB in August of 2016. I received my bachelor's degree in elementary education and a concentration in reading from Minot State University in December 2015. I took a job as a kindergarten teacher in Turtle Lake, ND in January 2016 and finished out the school year there before being hired by NDVS/SB. I started my Master's in Special Education in the summer of 2016 while working as an outreach teacher in training and I completed my degree in August of 2019. I chose a profession in education because as a child it was always a dream of mine to be a teacher, and now I am fulfilling my lifelong dream. I have always loved working with children and watching them accomplish their goals is so rewarding.

When I was in high school my mom was a special education teacher at a small rural school, when she started working with her first student with a visual impairment. While working with him, she went to school for her Master's in Special Education and eventually ended up working as a teacher of the visually impaired for NDVS/SD. I saw how much she loved her job and how rewarding it was for her, so when she moved to Texas, I decided to apply for her position.

I serve regions one and two in northwest North Dakota and before COVID, I spent a lot of my time traveling around my corner of the state to see my students in their homes and their schools. I complete a lot functional vision evaluations on a wide age range of students. I enjoy doing these because it's almost like putting together the pieces of a puzzle. When you determine what the infant or child can or cannot see, it opens up a whole new realm of possibilities to them. While working with the parents, educators, and other support professionals we are able to adapt their everyday needs to fit their life.

I live in the country outside of Voltaire with my husband TJ, Timmy (11), Marlie (2) and our three dogs. We just recently moved out to the country and while it was an adjustment for me as I have never lived in the country before, I am loving all of the new space that we have!

—Erika Moulton



Reading in the Age of COVID

If you're anything like me, you are tired of hearing the phrase "due to COVID-19." We have been forced to change so many things in our lives "due to COVID-19," and reading is no exception. I realize that reading is not a life or death matter, but it is important, and libraries provide vital services to communities. Reading does indeed improve quality of life, and I know that reading is a necessary part of many of your lives, like it is for mine. However, many libraries are closed to the general public, and that has forced many people to change their reading habits. But there are still many ways to access books, and this is a perfect time to try out some new ways of reading. Here are 7 ways to access books during this pandemic.

1. **Curbside pick-up or delivery** – Although most libraries are closed to the general public, they are offering curbside pick-up and other methods of getting you the books you want. Call, email, or go to your local library's website to find out what services they are offering. If you can't get to the building to pick-up books, simply ask them if they'll mail books to you. In all likelihood, they will. Many libraries are also forgiving past fines because they want to make sure everyone is able to access books throughout the pandemic.
2. **Digital Collections, such as Libby, Overdrive, or RBDigital** – The North Dakota State Library and most local libraries provide access to e-books and audio books through an online library such as Libby, Overdrive, or RBDigital. Because libraries can pool their money to buy e-books, the collections are often bigger and more current than a library's print collection. Another plus is that you can borrow books at any time, day or night, no matter where you are or what time it is, from your computer or personal device.
3. **Talking Books & BARD** – [North Dakota's Talking Book library](#) is a favorite of many of NDVS/SB's clients. They are still sending out digital players and books on cartridges for people who prefer that, or you can download your own books from the [BARD](#) (Braille and Audio Reading Download) website. To sign up for BARD, you just need to contact the staff at the ND Talking Book Department (tbooks@nd.gov; 701-328-1408) so they can register you. You can also call them (or me, or any of NDVS/SB's Adult Outreach Coordinators) to find out how to register for Talking Books.
4. **Audible & other audiobook sources** – For a monthly fee, you can access thousands of audiobooks on [Audible](#). Because it's an Amazon company, there are some additional benefits for Amazon Prime members. If you are someone who does not like to wait for the library's most popular titles or for the library to add the newest titles, Audible or other subscription-based services (Scribd, Kindle Unlimited, etc.) may be your best bet.



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Meeting the Needs of Adults with Vision Loss During the Pandemic

North Dakota Vision Services/School for the Blind is committed to the continuation of wholistic Adult Services during the Coronavirus Pandemic! Although some of our services may have changed in appearance, they have not changed in heart or ability to meet the needs of our clients. We began our quest to provide Virtual Adult Services in mid-March and have only grown in reach and power. It began as a hope to reach our clients without in-person visits/programming. It has blossomed into a way of providing more frequent and comprehensive services. We have met the challenge with a smile and a creative mind, allowing us to meet our client's needs. The phrase, "Hey, what if we try this" has become a consistent and powerful part of our willingness to meet the ongoing needs of our clients. Some of the ways we are meeting our client's needs is by:

- Tech Talk Tuesday – this is group that meets via Zoom on Tuesday afternoons at 3pm. It is led by Tracy Wicken. The group has speakers on tech-related merchandise, instruction on assistive technology, client-led discussions on their favorite technology, and much, much more!
- Coffee Chat on We Care Wednesday – this is a group that meets Wednesday mornings at 10am via Zoom. This group is facilitated by Amy Osvold. The focus is discussions on topics such as Resilience by our Psychology Intern, Sky Gabel, a Book Club by Emily Stenberg and Trampes Brown, a social time to discuss memories from NDAB

Adult Camp, and client-led discussions on many, many topics!

- Support Group – Sky Gabel started an emotional support group that meets via Zoom on Monday mornings at 11. The focus of this group is to discuss emotional issues the members might be facing around their vision loss, personal issues, and the pandemic. This group is not meeting in December but will resume in January.
- Independence Thursday – this is the newest member of our Adult Programming at Home groups. It is facilitated by Amy Osvold. This is a group meets via Zoon at 2pm. It focuses on the Daily Living Skills needs of our clients. This group has only had one session thus far, with the topic of "Life Hacks". This included tips on how to do things around your kitchen, eating skills, and their favorite independent living tools. Our other topics for the month of December are Knife Skills on December 10th and Cleaning Skills on December 17th. This group will be using the skills written in the book, "Recipes for Living with Vision Loss" by Pam Haus and Amy Osvold.

All of these groups are made possible by a partnership with the North Dakota Association of the Blind!

If you are interested in joining one or all these groups, you can contact Pam Haus in the east at 701-795-2719 or Amy Osvold in the west at 701-340-9226.

—Amy Osvold

Reading in the Age of COVID (Cont. from page 3)

4. **Bookshare.org** – Anyone with a reading barrier (visual impairments, physical disabilities, dyslexia, learning disabilities, etc.) can sign up for [Bookshare's library](#). It is free for students, and the \$50 yearly fee for adults is worth the price for anyone who wants easy access to books that can be read visually, listened to, or accessed via a braille device. I also like that you can request books be added to their collection, and they will notify you when that book is available.
5. **Project Gutenberg** – There are over 60,000 free e-books available from [Project Gutenberg](#), but keep in mind they are all books for which the U.S. copyright has expired. But if you enjoy reading classics, check out this site.

Finally, utilize **the Vision Resource Center!** The library at NDVS/SB is small but mighty. You can search our collection by going to [North Da-](#)

[kota Vision Resource Center \(odinlibrary.org\)](#)

If you find something you'd like to check out, contact me at estenber@nd.gov or 701-795-2709. I'd be happy to mail them to you.

There are many other ways to access books and other reading materials in today's digital world. But I hope that this list inspires you to try at least one new way of reading. You may even find a new favorite book or author "due to COVID-19"!

I'd also like to invite you to join NDAB's new Book Club, which will kick off in January. I am excited to be a part of it and hope that you will join us. Contact me (estenber@nd.gov; 701-795-2709) or Trampes Brown (trampes@independencecil.org) for more information.

Happy New Year and Happy Reading!

—Emily Stenberg

New NDSGC/School for the Blind Scholarship

Through a partnership with the [ND Space Grant Consortium](#), we are excited to announce a new scholarship opportunity for college students who are eligible for NDVS/SB services. Up to five scholarships totaling \$2,500 will be awarded to students pursuing STEM with at least a 3.0 GPA.

More scholarship information and the application form can be found here: <https://ndspacegrant.und.edu/scholarships/ndvssb.html>

Please share this opportunity with any students who may be interested in this scholarship.

—Emily Stenberg



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Christmas in the Park



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