

Blind and Deaf Children's Needs Can't Wait

Parents always remember the key moments in their child's life. "Diagnosis Day" is one of those milestones that not all parents have to endure. For parents of deaf and blind children, Diagnosis Day (when you learn for certain that your child is deaf or blind) is often a life-changing event that turns joy and hope into fear and concern for how they will be able to raise a child with unique needs and challenges. How will I communicate? Will they be able to go to a regular school? Get a job? Live an independent life? Be happy? Where do I turn to for support, to learn, and to cope with these new and unknown things that our family will now have to face?

Arizona Blind and Deaf Children's Foundation is the only organization in the state that serves the needs of both deaf and blind youth. The Foundation's focus is on those things that fall outside the responsibilities of the education system, but which are still required for a successful and fulfilling life. The four main mission areas cover Literacy, Fitness, Arts and Life Skills. The Foundation works with service providers, schools and other agencies and non-profit organizations to develop, implement and deliver innovative programs to blind and deaf youth throughout the state. These programs supplement the educational programs to enhance the chance of success for these children and young adults.

Every day blind and deaf adults, and those with hearing loss or low vision, work as engineers, lawyers, politicians, teachers and in many other professions. Becoming a productive and independent adult requires more than just an academic education. The unemployment statistics for the blind and deaf are disheartening. Often those who are able to find employment are constrained to jobs that are minimum wage, requiring little in the way of knowledge or skill.

Today all non-profit organizations are under extreme financial pressure. I can attest to the fact that, with the right intervention at the right time, blind, low-vision, deaf, and hard-of-hearing children can deliver on a promising future—for themselves, and for our community. Investment in education and programs for blind and deaf children will pay dividends in future years as they mature into productive, tax-paying members of our state and country, and do not become consumers of public funds through Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid and other Government programs.

Arizona Blind and Deaf Children's Foundation helps these youth deliver on that promise. It may be easy to put off a vacation or the purchase of new TV or car, but children cannot wait to grow up. Education and other support services are critical in a child's formative years. Support of worthwhile non-profit organizations through individual and corporate charitable contributions are equally critical to ensure that all children are successful, especially in the present economy. It is not only the prudent thing to do in terms of investment and return for our future, it is the right thing to do so that these children and young adults can realize their goals of independent and productive lives.

Joe Hayden is the Chairman of the Arizona Blind and Deaf Children's Foundation. Go to www.azblindeafchildren.org to find out more about the Foundation, or make a donation. To contact Joe email him at: chairman@azblinddeafchildren.org