

speech recognition software to allow students with severe and multiple disabilities, including visual impairment and blindness, to have access to environmental enrichment and to encourage choice making.

The theme of accessibility reflected in this month's articles demonstrates the richness and diversity of our interests. Our continued knowledge and work in the area of accessibility will hopefully one day encourage and improve the opportunities for all individuals with blindness and visual impairment—including in the area of employment.

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## A Look Back

### 100 Years of Trends and Issues in Employment, Rehabilitation, and Legislation

*J. Elton Moore*

Employment of people who are visually impaired has been an important subject in the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness (JVIB)* and its predecessors, *Outlook for the Blind* and *New Outlook for the Blind*, since its inception in 1907. Many of the early items initially published in *Outlook* were not formal articles by today's standards, but were simply short editorials or opinion pieces that were not often attributed to a particular author. These short pieces tended to focus more on the "progress and welfare" of people who were blind, rather than specifically on employment or rehabilitation. Significant attention was devoted to summaries of state legislation affecting persons who were blind, as in the July 1907 issue, which reviewed legislation that resulted in the creation of the Colorado Industrial Workshop for the Blind. This facility was established to create jobs for people who

were blind and wanted to work outside the home in an industrial setting. Brief summaries were commonly published in the journal that highlighted the activities of individual workshops for people who were blind that were held throughout the United States; the majority of these courses offered lessons in broom or mop making and chair caning for men and basket weaving and knitting for women. Employment of people who are blind or visually impaired was typically defined in these early issues of the journal in a narrow economic sense as it related to simply earning money. Little or no attention was devoted to upward mobility or career advancement, finding jobs that were consistent with an individual's abilities or interests, or other career opportunities.

#### THE EARLY YEARS

With the United States' involvement in World War I in 1917, more attention in the journal was devoted to issues surrounding blind soldiers and the replacement of home industries for the blind with more sheltered, subsidized workshops for the blind. Home industries provided individuals with jobs primarily in their homes in arts and crafts, while industrial workshops created assembly and manufacturing jobs outside the home in segregated settings (see figure 1). This shift was significant because it created far more job opportunities outside the home at higher wage rates and provided more socialization and networking opportunities for persons who were blind.

The journal adopted an increasingly international flavor during this period and devoted more and more attention to services and workshops in other countries, especially Britain and France. In addition, more attention was devoted to self-employment opportunities, especially in what was called the "newsstand business" for blind persons, which ultimately led to the Randolph-Sheppard Vending Stand Act of 1936. It is interesting to note that there were no articles or commentary in the journal



Basket making and chair caning are practical means for training the fingers, their chief value in such a school as this.



None of the men are expected to become carpenters, but all the men are helped by the use of the simpler carpenter's tools.

Figure 1. Winter 1919 • Volume 12, Number 4, Pointing the Way: What the Government is Doing for Our Men Blinded in the War, Evergreen, Baltimore, Maryland. [Reprint.] *Outlook for the Blind*, p. 10.

on the Smith-Fess Act of 1920, which represented the beginning of the public vocational rehabilitation program in the United States. Even after passage of this historical legislation, the editorials were concerned about the lack of competitive employment and opportunities for upward mobility for people with visual impairment. In a September 1923 editorial, entitled "Getting a Job for the Blind," the lack of employment opportunities and economic improvement opportunities were frequently cited:

"Occupation(s) for the blind in competitive industry is practically a new venture. Finding a job for a man is but a small part of the placement problem. Ambitious young blind persons should never be placed in positions with the understanding that they must remain there for the rest of their lives." (pp. 23–24)

This concern remains an issue in the rehabilitation service delivery system today.

As circulation increased and the journal expanded to include more contributions in the 1920s, the table of contents lengthened with far more individual contributors or authors. At this time, the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), publisher of the journal, was becoming more widely recognized as a publisher and offered a growing number of publications on topics such as education, legislation, vocations and a catchall grouping called general. From the late 1920s to 1936, there was little reference to the Depression and its impact on the employment of persons who were blind or severely visually impaired. A new feature, "Bulletin Board," was added during this time, which included news items from agencies for the blind throughout the United States.

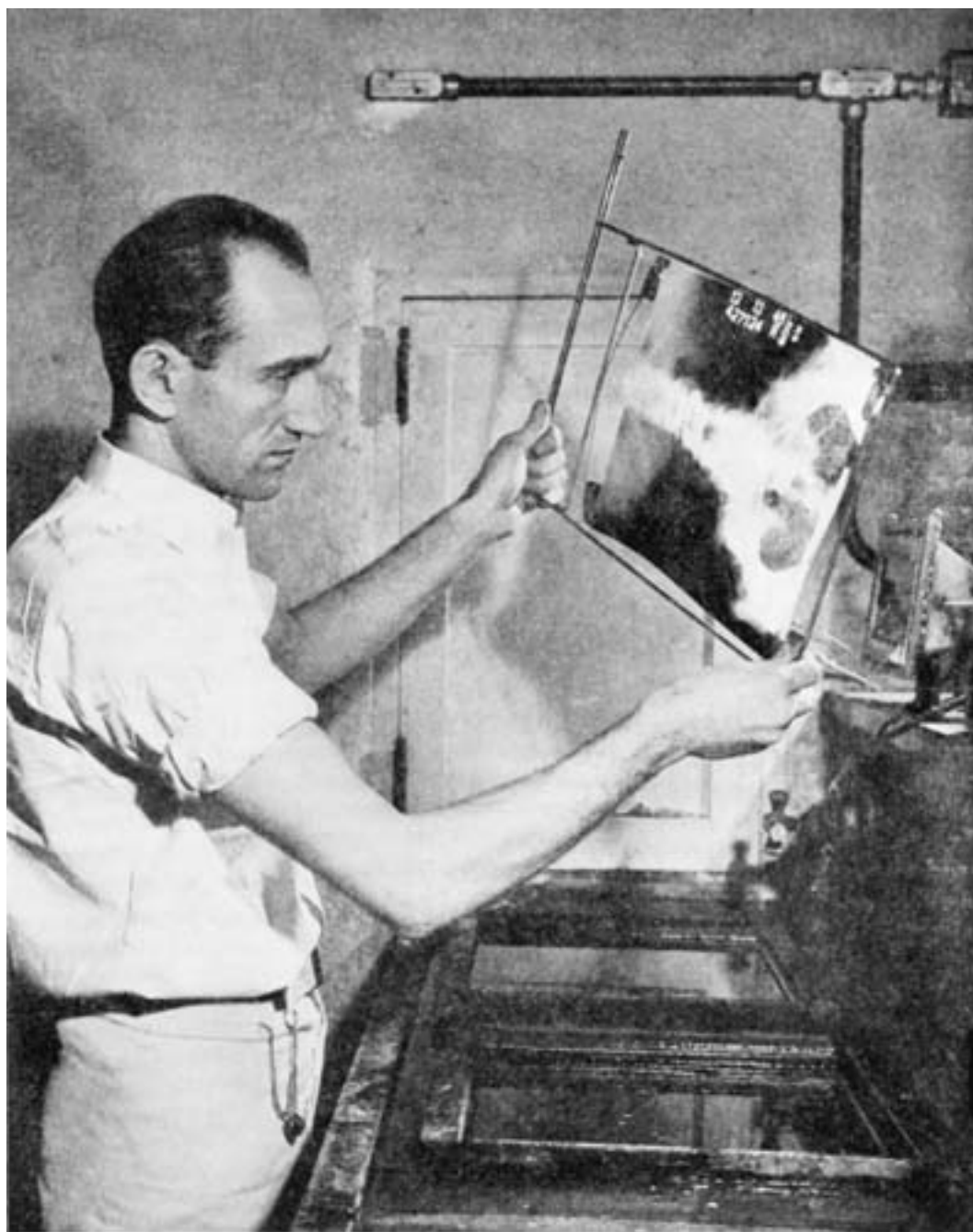
#### COVERAGE OF MAJOR LEGISLATION

As one might imagine, significant attention was devoted to both the Social Security Act

of 1935 and the Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936. Both pieces of legislation had a significant impact on the lives of persons who were blind. The Social Security Act established state plans for aid to the blind, and the Randolph-Sheppard Act authorized vending stands in federal buildings for the purpose of "providing blind persons with remunerative employment, enlarging the economic opportunities of the blind and stimulating the blind to greater efforts in striving to make themselves self-supporting."

Likewise, there was significant attention devoted to the Wagner-O'Day Act of 1938, which mandated that the federal government purchase designated products from facilities for persons who are blind and the Bardonia-LaFollette Act of 1943, which provided for the first federal-state rehabilitation support for persons who are blind. Considerable attention was devoted to soldiers who were blinded during World War II and what employment opportunities would be available to them (see Figure 2).

As the journal evolved, more attention was devoted to rehabilitation service systems in other countries and employment opportunities outside sheltered settings. By 1947, the name of the journal had changed to *Outlook for the Blind and the Teachers Forum*, and more scholarly articles began to appear, such as "The Employment of the Blind in Unsheltered Occupations," by Eric Page (1947) of the National Institute for the Blind in England, which ran in that year. A classic article by Douglas MacFarland, entitled "Some Guides to Placement Procedure," was published in 1954—the same year that the Randolph-Sheppard Act was amended to expand employment opportunities on federal properties, the Vocational Rehabilitation Act was amended to include college and university funding for preparation of rehabilitation professionals. MacFarland provided an unusually frank and candid discussion of the placement process and stated emphatically that "what we need most of all is



HOME FROM THE WARS

MICHAEL KRALOVICH, WAR-BLINDED VETERAN, AT WORK AT NEW YORK HOSPITAL  
WHERE HE HOLDS DOWN A JOB AS X-RAY DARKROOM TECHNICIAN

Figure 2. February 1946 • Volume 40, Number 2, Home from the Wars. *Outlook for the Blind and The Teachers Forum*, frontispiece.

not more experts, but people who are willing to discuss their failures and how they overcame their problems” (p. 100).

Similar articles started to appear in the 1950s that focused for the first time on employment for older workers who were blind (Hoffman, 1954). *New Outlook for the Blind* contained more employment-related articles focused on sheltered workshops. “Sheltered workshops” referred to agencies and industries that employed persons who were blind to produce goods and services under the Wagner-O’Day Act. They were considered sheltered because they functioned outside the competitive labor market and generally required that at least 75% of the direct labor and production jobs be performed by blind employees. Following the Vocational Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1954, some authors (Altman & Baumann, 1956; Gorthy, 1955) felt that rehabilitation had suddenly come of age and had become an effort of national importance. Gorthy (1955) felt that public acceptance of the public rehabilitation program had been “apathetic” but stated, “Today we stand on the threshold of an era that should see the spread of sound rehabilitation practice so that the disabled everywhere may benefit.”

By 1957, special issues were beginning to appear, such as the September 1957 issue that featured a collection of articles under the theme “Sheltered Employment—A Symposium.” Many of the articles in this issue presented reprints of speeches given at national conventions, primarily those of the American Association of Workers for the Blind and the National Rehabilitation Association.

### **JVIB EVOLVES**

As the journal and the professionalization of the field of visual impairment and blindness evolved in the 1960s, a new feature appeared called Research in Review, and many of the articles in this category focused on issues related to employment. As the format of *New Outlook for the Blind* grew in 1964 to a larger

trim size, so too did the number of scholarly articles on employment and rehabilitation issues. A Report from Washington feature was added in 1967 to capture current legislative updates.

With societal and cultural attitudes placing more emphasis on employment of persons with disabilities, federal legislation was passed in the form of the Javits-Wagner-O’Day Act of 1971 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, both of which had a significant impact on the employment of persons who are visually impaired. Interestingly enough, neither piece of legislation was highlighted in the “In Brief” section that existed at that time. The first reference to either legislation appeared in May 1974 in the form of an announcement of the creation of the Office for the Handicapped, which had been authorized under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973—the basic enabling legislation governing the present-day state and federal rehabilitation service delivery system.

In 1977, *New Outlook for the Blind* became the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness (JVIB)* and adopted a more scholarly attitude toward research and peer-reviewed articles. The variety of research and practice-oriented articles evolved, and currently includes both scholarly articles and Research Reports and Practice Reports (previously known as Research Notes and Practice Notes). As the journal continued to develop in this direction, Congress passed several historic pieces of legislation, including the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. These and other rehabilitation-related measures had a significant impact on the lives of individuals who were visually impaired, with an increased emphasis on competitive employment in integrated work settings for individuals with the most significant disabilities. *JVIB*’s Special Issue on Employment, published in September 2002, highlighted the latest research and best practices associated

with employment outcomes and issues affecting the employment of visually impaired persons. As described in this essay, there is a significant difference between the caliber of articles and issues that were addressed in 1907 and those published in the Special Issue on Employment in 2002, yet many of the employment and upward mobility issues are the same today as they were 100 years ago. *JVIB* continues to be the “journal of record” that publishes scholarship and information associated with the employment and rehabilitation of persons who are blind or have low vision. This information has added to our knowledge base and to the quality of life for our visually impaired citizens for the past century, and may it continue to do so for 100 years to come.

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