



The Sight-Loss Support Group of Central Pennsylvania, Inc.

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The OUTLOOK

February 2015

**Official Newsletter of the Sight-Loss
Support Group of Central PA, Inc.**

A New Direction for the SLSG

It has been my honor and pleasure to serve as the Director of the Sight-Loss Support Group for the past two years. I will be retiring from this position at the end of February; a decision that leaves me with both sadness and a sense of satisfaction. It has been a privilege to work with a group of people who are unwavering advocates of people confronting the challenges of sight loss.

I joined the group in 1998 when I moved to State College with my two children and started graduate school at Penn State. I have served as a member of the board of directors, as the organization's programs director, and as executive director. I take with me a wealth of memories and lasting friendships. I will

continue to be involved with the Sight-Loss Support Group but in a significantly reduced capacity. As this chapter of my life ends, I look forward to a new direction in my future.

The Sight-Loss Support Group of Central PA will still be here. The board of directors is currently mapping out the future of the group. We will be moving out of the office at 111 Sowers Street at the end of February and creating a virtual office with a greatly enhanced website. So, stay tuned. This is my last newsletter, an endeavor I have thoroughly enjoyed for the last six years and one I part with reluctantly. But, in the words of George Harrison, "All things must pass."

- Josie Kantner Smith

Audio Description Takes Away the Winter Doldrums, and Heralds Spring!!

Brighten your evenings – and afternoons! – with some fabulous theatre, both local and professional, and audio described by the SLSG's very own cast of "View Via Headphones"!

**SISTER ACT: Tuesday, February 10, 7:30 pm,
Eisenhower Auditorium**

Broadway's feel-amazing, smash hit, musical comedy tells the story of Deloris Van Cartier, a wanna-be diva whose life takes a surprising turn when she witnesses a crime. The cops hide her in the last place anyone would think to look — a convent! (Remember Whoopie Goldberg in the movie?) Under the suspicious watch of the Mother Superior, Deloris helps her fellow Sisters find their voices as she unexpectedly rediscovers her own. A sparkling tribute to the universal power of friendship!

ANNIE, GET YOUR GUN: Sunday, February, 15, 3:00 pm, The State Theatre

Annie Oakley, the best shot around, supports her siblings by selling the game she hunts. When she's discovered by Colonel Buffalo Bill, he persuades the sharpshooter to join his Wild West Show where it take only one glance for her to fall head over heels for shooting ace, Frank Butler. She soon eclipses Butler as the main attraction, good for business, bad for romance. The sure-fire finale hits the mark every time in a testament to the power of female ingenuity.

THE LIGHTENING THIEF: Sunday, April 12, 2:00 pm, Eisenhower Auditorium

New York City's Theatreworks USA brings to Central Pennsylvania a musical adaptation of the first book in Rick Riordan's popular *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series. A great family show...for all ages! Theatreworks USA creates, produces, and provides access to professional theatre for children and families nationwide. Since its creation in 1961, the company has performed for more than ninety million people in 49 states and Canada.

CAMELOT: Monday, April 20, 7:30 pm, Eisenhower Auditorium

Experience "one brief shining moment" as Lerner and Loewe envisioned it in a legendary musical. The time-honored legend of King Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, and the Knights of the Round Table is recounted in an enchanting fable of chivalry, majesty, and

brotherhood in this four-time Tony Award-winning show. The celebrated score includes classics "If Ever I Would Leave You" and the title song, "Camelot." You'll leave the theatre humming the tunes – or singing aloud!

CURTAINS: Sunday, April 26, 2:00 pm, State College Area High School North Auditorium

This musical is a take-off of backstage murder mystery plots. Set in Boston, Massachusetts, 1959, the plot details the fallout after the supremely UN-talented star of "*Robbin' Hood of the Old West*" is murdered during her opening night curtain call. It is up to Lieutenant Frank Cioffi, a police detective who moonlights as a musical theater fan, to save the show, solve the case, maybe even find love before the show reopens...and all without getting killed himself!

NEWS from North Central Sight Services

Centre County Low Vision Store & Office in Bellefonte

In order to better serve those who live in Centre County, North Central Sight Services (NCSS) will be opening a new Low Vision Store and office on the corner of North Water Street and West High Street, Bellefonte. The grand opening will be set for some time this spring. The Store will offer a wide range of low vision products and tools to enhance daily living and to promote independence. We are hoping to appeal to all, those who are just starting to struggle with some vision loss to individuals who are blind. We will also have an office where you can meet with our staff to discuss any special needs.

Here are just a few of the benefits of purchasing these types of items from our new store:

- **Try before you buy!** How do you know which magnifier to get, or if the talking watch is loud enough for you? Try the product at our location to be sure it's the right product for you! No need to worry about extra fees...let us handle the order and return hassles.
- **Support a local non-profit:** The proceeds from our store go directly to our programs and services in Centre county. We provide free vision screenings and education programs for all ages. We also promote independence to our community members who live with vision loss.
- **Education and Training:** We can offer free education on the various items that need a little extra explaining or training. Our VRT (Vision Rehabilitation Therapist) can teach you various skills, from using a magnifier to reading braille. This is available by appointment on-site or in your home.
- **Resources and Networking:** Do you or someone you know live with vision loss? We can connect you with other community members who do as well. Sometimes sharing thoughts and feelings over a cup of coffee is just what you need. Or maybe you need a little help trying something in a new way. People share tips and ideas that work for them. We are here to help you remain independent!

Centre County Support Groups & Activities

Another valuable service that NCSS offers those with vision loss is Life Skills and Education and Support Groups. Our staff will prepare a vision-related topic or theme for the month, which will include tips and information, occasional speakers and various low vision aids. These groups will meet at various times and places throughout Centre County. If you are interested in learning more about our groups and activities, please sign up for our newsletter or contact one of our staff members listed below.

Some of our topics include:

- **Kitchen Safety: no burnt hands or pans!**
- **Acceptance and Understanding: vision loss affects you and your family**
- **Identify Theft: How to protect what's yours**
- **Fun and Games: large print, braille or tactile games to make you smile**

We are always looking for new ideas. Please let us know what you would like to learn about.

"Our Focus is Your Vision" Newsletter

Our newsletter includes new products, group details, employee updates and much more. To read our newsletter please:

Visit www.ncsight.org and click on "Our Focus is Your Vision" or, contact us and be added to our mailing list.

- **Heather Engle, Community Educator:**
heathere@ncsight.org or 570-494-8916
- **Alyssa Burns, Life Skills Coordinator:**
alyssab@ncsight.org or 814-280-2390

Until then....keep an eye on NCSS in Centre County!

Great Expectations and the Biology of Belief

Let's start with a few seemingly absurd, provocative questions. Do you need eyes to see? (Well, of course you do.) If we changed our expectations for blind people could they come to see? (Say what?)

National Public Radio (NPR) has a new show called "Invisibilia" that looks at human behavior and how invisible things like beliefs and ideas shape our lives. A recent broadcast, entitled "How to Become Batman", featured Daniel Kish who lost his vision to cancer in his first years of life. When he was a toddler he intuitively taught himself the technique of echolocation. By pressing his tongue on the roof of his mouth he makes clicking noises that bounce off his surroundings giving him a sonic representation of what is around him - just like a bat. By continually clicking he understands where he is in space which allows him to hike, climb a tree, navigate a foreign city, run and ride a bike.

As a child Daniel's single mother made the brave decision to not hold her adventurous, blind child back. He was allowed to wander the world as freely as any sighted child. He grew up outside the debilitating force field of low expectations that our society imposes on blind people. The psychology of "blind people can't do those things" was not inculcated in Daniel. Growing up he trusted his senses and listened attentively to his surroundings. Using his clicking technique and his white cane, he moved with fluidity and confidence through his world. Of course he had accidents, but Daniel says "Running into a pole is a drag, but not running into a pole is a disaster."

The expectations we have in our heads and the expectations instilled within us by society are powerful. Daniel Kish believes that blind children (and blind adults) are a product of a culture and a system defined by low expectations. They are slaves to what others think a blind child is capable of. Daniel believes that the constraints of society often extend to our school systems and blindness organizations, the very institutions intended to help blind people. The National Federation of the Blind advocates that the only thing standing between blind people and walking around the world is belief. Expectations, high or low, profoundly affect our lives; constantly acting on us, relentlessly shaping our thoughts and behavior. When we see a blind person we can't help ourselves; we assume they need our help. "Blind people can't do those things" is a deeply ingrained belief, seeping into our minds from a collective, cognitive landscape.

When Daniel clicks and moves through space he says he does not feel blind. Instead, he sees images of spatial character and depth. His brain is actually constructing images. This brings us up against another question – what is sight? The image we "see" is constructed by our brain behind the eye. Different parts of the brain's visual cortex deal with different aspects of sight. Neuroscientists now know that the visual cortex does not go dark when you go blind. The visual parts of the brain are activated by sound and touch. In Daniel's case, the part of the visual cortex dealing with motion and orientation lights up like a disco ball. When neuroscientists look at the brains of other echolocators their brains light up as well. For blind people who do not echolocate, there is very little activity in the visual cortex.

So, we return to our first provocative question - Do we need eyes to see? Are Daniel and his fellow

echolocators actually seeing? Research from the field of neuroscience does indeed suggest that you may not need eyes to see.

As to our other question - If we changed our expectations for blind people could they come to see? Daniel Kish's answer to this question is a resounding "YES." For Daniel, blindness is a social construct, a set of beliefs and thoughts. A thought is just a thought and a thought can be changed.

Daniel has plunged headlong into this quagmire of societal beliefs. He founded the non-profit "World Access for the Blind" in Long Beach, California in 2000. He teaches echolocation to blind children, a technique that is harder to learn the older one gets. (Many blind children instinctively click when they are very young as they explore their surroundings, but this behavior is generally not understood or encouraged.) Daniel's mission is nothing short of liberation - liberation from a society that expects very little of blind people. Daniel offers blind children a gateway to an unfettered world; a world where "Blind people can't do those things" is a foreign concept.

To listen to the broadcast of Invisibilia's "How to Become Batman" in its entirety, log onto National Public Radio (www.npr.org), click on Stories and Programs and scroll down to "Invisibilia".

"While they were saying among themselves it cannot be done, it was done." - Helen Keller



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