

People **RESOLVING** the daily challenges
of living with visual impairment



The Metrolina Association for the Blind




THE METROLINA ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND
serves individuals in the Charlotte metropolitan area
who experience blindness or severe visual impairment.

There are approximately **8,000 PEOPLE** in
MAB's service area that could directly benefit
from MAB's programs.

In conjunction with client services, MAB serves
an **IMPORTANT NATIONAL NEED** for
Braille, large print and audio document transcription
for schools, banks, utility and telecommunication
companies and other businesses who are meeting
their customers' needs for accessible materials.

Since 1934, MAB has assisted thousands of Charlotte-area residents who have resolved the challenges of vision loss. Today, MAB continues to be the source of much needed support and services for those who must learn to live with blindness. MAB's clients learn new skills and alternative ways of accomplishing everyday tasks, thereby increasing independence and reducing the isolation that can result from blindness.

MAB strives to extend its reach in the community, providing vital support services to those in need, when they need it.



“Independence has always been important to me and MAB understands that. Because of them, I have been able to remain independent.”

Peggy Carr, Age 74

Peggy has lived with visual impairment her whole life but her vision has deteriorated in recent years. Her daughter often suggested she contact MAB and, when she finally did, she could not believe she had waited so long. MAB has provided support and taught Peggy skills she uses everyday. MAB staff came to her home as she learned daily living skills. And, when she wanted to learn to use a computer, MAB was the place she turned. Now, she uses her computer and especially loves to exchange emails with her granddaughter in Colorado.

MAB is committed to responding to the **UNIQUE CHALLENGES** posed by visual impairment through both its direct client services and its document transcription operations.

- *MAB's client services are provided through*
PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT AND REHABILITATION – PAR.
- *MAB provides document transcription through its*
ACCESSIBLE BRAILLE SERVICES PROGRAM – ABS.

Both programs are staffed by highly qualified and experienced professionals who are committed to MAB's mission and possess the unique knowledge to provide quality service to MAB's clients and customers. Among MAB's staff are blindness professionals, social workers and Braille experts whose skills are critical to the success of the agency.



PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT AND REHABILITATION

Personal Adjustment and Rehabilitation (PAR) has made a critical difference for thousands of people who have turned to MAB for help in coping with blindness and vision loss. Individuals experiencing vision loss connect to MAB through a variety of referral sources which include ophthalmologists, optometrists, social service agencies and school professionals and through MAB's public education, marketing, local events and presentations.

Clients have access to a wide range of services through PAR. A case manager serves as the first connection for a new client. Together, the client and case manager develop a plan specific to the client's needs. Each client and case manager work as a team, evaluating options and selecting appropriate services throughout the client's MAB experience. In developing individualized overall goals for each client, the case manager helps incorporate services available through MAB as well as referrals to other agencies in the community.

"We are so pleased with the progress Noah has made and know his MAB mobility instructor has been a big part of Noah's success. Noah loves the time he spends with his MAB mobility teacher."

Misty Davis, mother of Noah, age 7

Once connected with a case manager, the client has access to the services MAB offers.

- Individual, group and family counseling can make a significant difference in the successful adjustment to vision loss.
- Orientation and mobility training teaches the client how to travel safely and provides individualized instruction in the client's own environment.
- Vision rehabilitation therapy, which typically occurs in the client's home, provides training in the many skills needed for daily living following vision loss:
 - Communication skills such as Braille, adaptive computer technology, use of audio and recording devices
 - Personal and home management skills including cooking, home repairs, money management, personal hygiene and organizational skills
 - Leisure activities and community recreational opportunities.
- Low vision services include a clinical exam and functional low vision evaluation.

The PAR program is staffed by professionals who provide MAB clients the opportunity to learn the skills needed to achieve personal goals.

These professionals, when required, are certified by The Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP). Among the professionals working with clients at MAB are:

- Orientation and mobility specialists who are university trained and bring extensive experience with individuals having a wide range of vision impairment.
- Vision rehabilitation therapists have the comprehensive expertise needed to teach Braille, assistive technology and independent living skills.
- Low vision therapists provide training to maximize use of vision, and demonstrate and issue low vision devices to meet client needs and goals.
- The low vision optometrist provides clinical exams, counseling specific to the eye condition, explanation of eye reports, special attention to overall health of the eye, updated eye-glass prescriptions and medication prescriptions.
- Case managers who are licensed social workers are uniquely qualified to team with MAB clients and promote the achievement of individual goals.



Noah began to learn Braille in school when he was about 4. There, his parents learned that MAB could provide individualized mobility training for Noah. Through MAB, Noah has learned to use a cane. He takes it with him to school and whenever he goes out. Noah has become much more independent and more confident.



“MAB is a great support for anyone who is blind or visually impaired. It doesn’t matter if you have been blind all your life or have just recently lost your vision, you are always needing to learn new skills and MAB will be there for you. I feel like I have grown up with MAB.”

Calvin Thompson, Age 24

Blind since birth, Calvin connected with MAB when he was only 12 and attended a summer camp MAB conducted for blind children. Calvin went every summer until he was 18, then he worked there for several years. Calvin continued to turn to MAB for support, to learn new skills or refresh old ones through high school and college and beyond. MAB Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, Danelle Volk-Heimbach, works with Calvin in his home as he improves his independent living skills.



ACCESSIBLE BRAILLE SERVICES

Accessible Braille Services (ABS) began in 1985 as MAB discovered an unmet national need for accessible documents for thousands of visually impaired people. Complicating the adjustment to vision impairment is the loss of the ability to read a wide range of print materials that are encountered in everyday life. Bank statements, insurance policies, utility bills and textbooks are just a few of the materials that require reading but are not accessible to those who are blind or severely visually impaired. Without transcription to large print, Braille or compact disc, many visually impaired people are dependent on sighted family members or friends to read these documents for them. The ABS program was conceived to provide those materials in a format that people with visual impairment can access independently. As the population ages and the incidence of age-related vision loss increases, MAB expects the demand for ABS services to grow.

Today, the ABS program meets the needs of a variety of customers:

- Schools utilize ABS services to transcribe textbooks into Braille or large print to meet the needs of blind and visually impaired students.
- National corporations contract with MAB for transcription of their monthly statements or invoices into Braille, large print or compact disc to meet the needs of visually impaired customers or clients. MAB produces the statement or invoice and mails it directly to the visually impaired customer.
- Other customers often utilize MAB's ABS services for Braille or large print transcription of a variety of items including menus, employee orientation documents, voting materials, legal papers and insurance policies.

ABS services are all provided by professionals trained in Braille transcription.

In addition to meeting a critical national need, ABS services generate revenue for MAB that provides for expansion of its client services. ABS services are competitively priced and MAB sees significant opportunity for growth in this market.

OUR STORY

In 1934, services for blind individuals did not exist in the Charlotte area. With the assistance of the American Foundation for the Blind, a group of Charlotte-area residents decided to change this. They conducted a survey to determine the incidence of severe vision problems and were convinced there were needs in the community that were not being met. With the assistance of the Charlotte Lions Club, the Mecklenburg County Association for the Blind opened its doors in October 1935 under the leadership of Dr. Edward Gammon as President. Its mission was “to further the interest of the blind and to open to them all possible avenues of independence and self-support through investigations, education and recreation.”

The Association quickly emerged as an active provider of services in the area. It became a member agency of the Charlotte Community Chest in October 1937. A few years later in 1942, the Variety Club established an eye clinic and the Association handled intake for clinic cases, a practice that continued until 1945 when the Department of Public Welfare assumed this responsibility.

Local Lions clubs were again instrumental in 1949 when they raised funds for the Association to expand its services to children and families. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the Association continued to grow. In 1967, the Association moved to its current home and in 1989 a second floor was added.

In 1977, the name Metrolina Association for the Blind (MAB) was adopted to better reflect the agency’s service area. The first computerized Braille embosser was acquired in 1985 and opened the door to efficient Braille transcription. With the development of an in-house program for Braille transcription, the Association began to contract with area businesses to produce statements in Braille. This program expanded to a national level within a few years.

Today, MAB continues to meet the needs of those in the Charlotte area who are blind or visually impaired with the continued support of the United Way of Central Carolinas. Personal Adjustment and Rehabilitation services teach the skills needed for independent living. The Accessible Braille Services program provides document transcription to Braille, large print and compact disc for a wide variety of national customers. MAB will continue to evolve and expand its services as the needs of the local and national community change and demand from clients and customers increases.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Since 1934, MAB has provided critical services that have **EMPOWERED THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE** to improve their lives. Financial support from the community has always been instrumental in our ability to respond to the needs of the community.

Looking to the future, the demand for MAB's services will grow as the incidence of visual impairment increases, especially among the growing population of senior citizens. Furthermore, it is our goal to reach more of those in need and to reduce or eliminate any client waiting time. However, there are costs involved in reaching these goals. Connecting with more of those needing assistance requires expanded public awareness efforts including community events, presentations, publications and marketing. Adequate staffing must be a priority so we can ensure that we respond to the needs of clients without delay.

Financial sustainability for the future is essential. Plans to expand our Braille transcription services will provide an increase in revenue but support from the community is required to provide for the future and allow expanded services.

MAB plays an important role in our community; join us as we ensure its future as a critical support to our neighbors facing vision loss.



Robert Scheffel
President and Chief Executive Officer





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for the Blind

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MAB is a member
agency of the
United Way of
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