

November 30, 2005

To: Darlene Staffeldt, Montana State Librarian
Montana State Library Commission

Fr: Christie Briggs, Supervisor
Montana Talking Book Library

Proposal: Participate in a pilot outreach project mobile unit called "Low Vision Montana"

Goal: Reach Montana's rural citizens needing low vision services. Educate and inform potential patrons of MTBL services. Commit \$5,000. Trust Fund monies towards the Information and Referral goal of this project.

History: The Montana Lion's Club sponsored a "Low Vision Clinic" in both Helena and Billings which closed its doors over five years ago. This service was a tremendous referral resource for the Montana Talking Book Library services. In addition, it was the only support resource for other Low Vision Services in Montana.

Montana citizens now have to travel great distances to receive sight evaluations and procure resources for their low vision needs. Blind and Low Vision Services (BLVS) of the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) has shouldered the burden of trying to reach citizens in need through their four offices located in Butte, Missoula, Great Falls and Billings. These offices have done an outstanding job. However, without backup resource support similar to the previous Low Vision Clinic anywhere in the state, the challenge to reach the majority in need has become overwhelming. The Montana Talking Book Library (MTBL) has greatly benefited from the BLVS referrals to our services and wants to continue our support.

Although MTBL has done a great deal of outreach with Optometrist and Ophthalmology practitioners and clinics, our statistics reflect that they are not referring as many patrons to MTBL as does the BLVS support staff. As well, no matter how many outreach efforts MTBL is involved in, we still consistently find that Montana citizens with low vision needs are not aware of our services until much later in the advancement of their vision impairments.

In early 2005, a group of interested individuals from state related agencies, professional groups and non-profit organizations formed a Steering Committee dedicated to developing a "Low Vision Montana" mobile unit that would replace the two previous "Low Vision Clinics". A survey (attached) of Montana citizens was conducted under the guidance of the Montana Independent Living Project. This survey indicated an acute need for more options and solutions in reaching Montana regions far from urban centers. Another reference source used in gathering valid statistics is the 2003 Montana Census Report, and "Vision Problems in the U.S. - Prevalence of Adult Vision Impairment and Age-Related Eye Disease in America" (2002). The latter source projects three times the vision impairments within the next five to ten years, nationwide. References are available upon request.

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The Steering Committee has focused on three goals: 1) Establish a mobile unit named 'Low Vision Montana'; 2) Develop an Information and Referral Service connected with "Low Vision Montana" but not confined to the mobile unit; 3) Develop Community Peer Mentorship projects in conjunction with five communities in Montana that would be situated in key rural areas to cover the majority of population needing low vision services.

To meet the first goal, a 501c3 was established, along with Bylaws by the Steering Committee. The Montana Lion's Club, Montana Blind and Low Vision Services and Montana Talking Book Library developed an initial inventory and mobile unit resource, service information and cost list. Based on the survey results, The Steering Committee decided to make Goal 2 a priority in establishing an Information and Referral Service. Interviews are currently in process to hire an AmeriCorps*VISTA volunteer to coordinator Goal 3- Community Peer Mentorship projects which will be developed in conjunction with several BLVS vacant FTE positions to support the success of this project.

Given the identified needs, committed resources of several partners and the attainable goals of this project, I propose the Montana Talking Book Library commit \$5,000. to this project from its Trust Fund monies with the State Library. I believe this is a small amount to contribute towards a project that has the potential reward of reaching more Montana citizens in acute need of our services.