



**Blind Children's  
Learning Center**

Destination → Independence

## **Strategic Plan July 2015 through June 2018**

Blind Children's Learning Center  
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## ***Introduction***

In 1962, six blind adults formed The Blind Children's Learning Center, originally called Services for the Blind Orange County. The founders knew the critical needs of the blind, and turned to one another for support, suggestions and solutions. They quickly agreed that the key to helping children with a visual impairment was to start working with them at a very young age. Equally important was the need for follow-through during their school years to build confidence and self-esteem. Only then could visually impaired children overcome the many obstacles they would encounter as they grew and matured. Since 1962, Blind Children's Learning Center has designed and delivered a comprehensive array of quality programs for children who are blind, visually impaired and deaf-blind to maximize their full potential and meet meaningful goals and objectives. Parents and family members are involved and receive support and encouragement during each and every step of their child's journey toward independence.

## ***Mission***

To prepare children with visual impairments for a life of independence through early intervention, education and family support.

## ***Vision***

Every blind, visually impaired or deaf-blind child has the opportunity to integrate fully into the community.

## ***Values***

We believe all blind, visually impaired or deaf-blind children deserve services and support to reach their full potential. We believe the parents of blind, visually impaired or deaf-blind children deserve support and education to become the best first teachers and effective advocates for their children. We believe the community can and should embrace these special children and their families.

## ***Program Initiatives***

- 1. Global Infant Development--Infants and Toddlers from Birth to Three Years of Age:** Provides direct services in the home or natural environment to educate families and caregivers to the unique developmental needs of their infants who are blind, visually impaired or deaf/blind. Infant vision stimulation specialists meet with caregivers to demonstrate how to engage the infant to receive reciprocal responses. They assist in formulating a comprehensive family service plan in their home or natural environment. Infant vision stimulation specialists meet with families to provide critical early intervention and support to the child. The program includes therapeutic services performed in the home or natural environment, under the direction of licensed occupational therapists (OTs), speech and language pathologists (SLPs), physical therapists (PTs) and marriage and family therapists (MFTs). Often times, infants are medically fragile or there are transportation issues that prohibit a family from seeking additional necessary program services to meet the needs of the child and family. When ready, children are transitioned into the Center's onsite Bright Visions Early Childhood Center for socialization, academic development and optimum growth.
  
- 2. Bright Visions Early Childhood Center--Children from Six Weeks through Six Years of Age:** Bright Visions has an inclusive setting for typically developing children and children with disabilities. Bright Visions Early Childhood Center is a state licensed and accredited preschool that educates children with visual impairments in an environment that is rich in sensory approach, technology and therapeutic services. In the Infant-Toddler classrooms, teachers focus on socialization and communication skills. They work in collaboration with specially credentialed Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and therapists to create the most appropriate learning environment for each individual child. TVIs take the lead in the preschool, pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms to be sure that each child is immersed daily in a sensory and tactile environment with vision stimulation for students with low vision and orientation and mobility for the blind and visually impaired. Adaptive technology in the classroom plays a key role in providing a stimulating environment for these children. Eye exams are available onsite through a pediatric optometrist who provides consultations and reports for each individual child. Children learn at their own pace in both an academic and developmental environment while meeting Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) goals. Children leave the program with a greater independence, and a solid educational foundation. Upon graduation, the children transition to classrooms within their neighborhood schools.
  
- 3. Youth Outreach -- Kindergarten through High School:** The Outreach collaborate with the school districts to ensure success and increased student independence in school, home and within the community. Specially trained TVIs provide one-on-one educational services to the child and interface with district classroom teachers to provide classroom adaptations, educational resources, Braille transcribing, consultation and adaptive technology training. They may also consult with parents in the home or at the child's school. The orientation and mobility (O & M) credentialed instructor provides training

in life-long skills to ensure the student's safety, confidence and independence for a successful transition into the community.

**4. Youth Services:** The objective of this program is to provide positive and practical experiences for school age children and young adults, while building self-esteem and independence. This objective is achieved through the following after school opportunities:

- **Mentoring:** young adults with visual impairments offer mentorship to current students at the Center through hands-on educational activities, companionship and emotional support
- **Tutoring:** provides additional academic support for students in all subjects. Tutors are often blind or visually impaired alumni of BCLC programs and also serve as role models
- **Independent Living Skills Classes:** students increase independence by learning about personal safety, effective communication, shopping, preparing meals, and handling money. Added benefits include developing friendships, improving self-confidence, and learning from the success and challenges of other students with visually impairments
- **Social Outings:** field trips to neighborhood establishments provide opportunities for students with visual impairments to translate the lessons learned in Independent Living Skills Classes to real world experiences. Students interact with the public through social and mock-professional scenarios and develop the skills to thrive as independent adults

### ***Critical Issues***

The committee reviewed issues that may or will arise over the next three years that could prove crucial to the overall success of the organization's mission. These issues present strategic implications related to a core organizational function. If not addressed, they could become a problem that may negatively affect the mission of BCLC. Taking action on such critical issues could equate to the overall success of the Center. For more than 50 years, BCLC has provided early childhood education and supportive services to children who are blind and visually impaired. To survive and thrive, an organization with a long history must be willing to adapt to change, while keeping the integrity of its mission. The following critical issues will be addressed through initiatives under Strategic Priorities.

**A)** Increased community awareness, outreach and marketing will help ensure the success of BCLC programs and services.

**B)** Collaborative relationships with community and nonprofit organizations and communication with referral partners will allow the families of children who are blind or visually impaired to be fully informed of all services available.

- C)** Family support is part of BCLC’s mission and values. This includes education, engagement, communication and the opportunity to network with other families to gain resources and share experiences.
- D)** Strategic expansion of services may be an opportunity for growth.
- E)** Diversified revenue streams allow BCLC to sustain a change in revenue of a negative nature and remain on course to deliver program services in alignment with its mission. Revenue from social enterprise—parents paying for preschool, child care services and insurance—is now a part of program revenue. Without multiple sources of revenue BCLC’s financial stability may be threatened.
- F)** Contributions from the community are needed to maintain organizational sustainability. Bequests, through wills and trusts, have allowed BCLC to operate during recessions and through difficult times. Healthy reserves equivalent to six months of operating cost must be preserved.
- G)** Maintaining best practices in the field of early childhood education, encouraging continued education for staff members and using up-to-date technology will allow BCLC to function at a level that is expected by families, referral agencies, stake holders, and the State of California Department of Education.
- H)** Access to assistive technology is critical for visually impaired children to master skills necessary for future independence.
- I)** TVIs are at the core of BCLC’s mission. They are required by the State of California Department of Education to serve as lead classroom teachers at BCLC and are contracted out by the organization to teach in the school districts. Retention of these teachers is vital to the organization.
- J)** Improved data collection and the ability to report measurable outcomes will result in confidence in BCLC, increased funding and referrals.
- K)** Technology related to day-to-day operations is outdated, ineffective or nonexistent. Research is needed to implement the most appropriate tools for accounting, data collection and reporting outcomes.

## ***Strategic Priorities***

The four strategic priorities addressed in this plan include a set of initiatives aimed at addressing the organization's critical issues: Early Intervention, Community Support, Excellence in Education and Optimization of Infrastructure. These priorities were selected because they meet BCLC's Values. Organizational planning is focused in three directions to ensure the success and sustainability of BCLC and its mission.

### ***I. Strategic Priority – Early Intervention***

Students come to BCLC through a broad network of referring professionals. Among them are children's hospitals, medical center neonatal care units, pediatric ophthalmologists, pediatricians, OTs, PTs, optometrists, regional centers and school districts. Families discover BCLC through community resources or internet research. Key strategies will focus on raising awareness of program services. The goal will be to increase communication and marketing. The outcome will be an increased number of children served each year.

**Strategy 1.1**            Staff and board members will increase efforts to reach out and to connect with medical professionals to create awareness of BCLC's mission and programs.

- Increase communication, including personal visits, mail, email and Center updates to hospitals, pediatric ophthalmologists, family optometrists, pediatricians and others in the medical community
- Distribute collateral materials to medical providers for these families, including brochures, newsletters, e-newsletters, website promotion, etc.
- Use BCLC staff and strategic partners to educate hospitals, social workers and medical professionals on developmental delays which may occur in children with a visual impairment. Utilize BCLC staff and strategic partners

**Strategy 1.2**            BCLC management will continue to foster a mutually beneficial collaborative partnership with Regional Center Orange County (RCOC).

- Offer presentations to RCOC parents through Comfort Connection
- Ensure that bilingual brochures and resources are available to families

- Offer educational programs to RCOC Early Start case workers on visual impairments in the 0-3 population
- Keep lines of communication open between BCLC and RCOC management through e-mail, e-newsletters and resource publications
- Continue to offer grant-funded early intervention services

**Strategy 1.3** Enhance the BCLC website to increase traffic and provide educational information. This will allow families of children with visual impairments an opportunity to find answers for their children.

- Increase search engine optimization (SEO) to bring visitors to the BCLC website
- Offer educational information and resources to families using active links and contact information
- Maintain monthly blog for families with information written by medical and educational professionals

**Strategy 1.4** Explore opportunities for strategic expansion to establish and meet a growing need for service.

- Braille Institute
- Inland Regional Center
- School districts in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties

## ***II. Strategic Priority – Community Support***

As of 2014, approximately 60% of BCLC revenue comes from community support. This includes, but is not limited to, individual donors, corporations, clubs and organizations, volunteers, families, staff and foundations. Of the remaining 40% of BCLC revenue coming from program fees, 12% comes from social enterprise, and 28% is from the regional center, school districts or charter schools. Key strategies will be determined to continue to diversify and increase revenue. The goal is to ensure long term sustainability of the organization and its programs. The outcome is to maintain healthy reserves in excess of six months of operation.

**Strategy 2.1** Staff and board will determine marketing strategies for BCLC’s social enterprise.

- Plan opportunities to bring the community (parents, collaborative partners, community supporters, medical professionals) to the Center, including an open house in the spring of each year

- Create brochures in keeping with BCLC standards for marketing
- Continue to work with community partners on producing videos
- Enhance the Bright Visions website to attract private pay students
- Utilize Learning Link to increase enrollment in Bright Visions

**Strategy 2.2**            The Fund Development Committee will prepare an annual plan, outlining cultivation efforts and establishing financial goals to increase support.

- Cultivate foundation and individual support for increased donations
- Engage corporations in Center activities for event sponsorship or corporate grants
- Grow the organization’s two key events: the Destination Independence 5k Walk in May and the Golf Classic in November
- Incorporate Planned Giving in the form of bequests, wills, and trusts into annual plan

**Strategy 2.3**            Staff will continue to nurture parent and family support through enhanced communication, engagement and networking to maintain a high level of satisfaction so BCLC remains the provider of choice.

- Maintain an annual plan and calendar for Family Visions meetings featuring speakers and resources for parents
- Arrange regular support group meetings for parents and caregivers
- Identify a parent leader to assist in establishing a Parent/Teacher Organization (PTO) to communicate specific requests for support of BCLC

**Strategy 2.4**            Provide educational opportunities to the Board of Directors so they may increase community support.

- Encourage board attendance at Center events
- Plan board training to review opportunities for networking and fundraising support
- Enhance board knowledge of BCLC programs
- Provide opportunities for board members to hear children’s success stories and program accomplishments from the staff

***III. Strategic Priority – Excellence in Learning***



BCLC management and staff are committed to ongoing program improvement to meet the needs of children from birth to age 21 who are visually impaired. Teachers and service providers nurture the child in an educational environment filled with sensory and tactile experiences and adaptive technology such as tablets, Brailers, CCTVs and light boxes. Integrating multiple services supports both the child and the family. Key strategies will focus on maintaining best practices, encouraging collaborative partnerships, retaining key employees and continue training in technology. The goal is to increase the quality of services provided to the children. The outcome for children will be increased learning and communication for a successful transition into higher education.

**Strategy 3.1**            The Center will serve a model training facility by providing practicum for TVI candidates, MFT interns, student teachers O&Ms, PTs, OTs, SLPs, nurses and other educational and health specialists.

- Research and apply for accreditation as a practicum site so that graduate students may acquire hands-on experience in working with children with visual impairments
- Seek opportunities for staff and management to present at applicable conferences and offer continuing education units

**Strategy 3.2**            Staff will continue providing excellence in learning within the Bright Visions Early Childhood Center, Youth Outreach and Youth Services programs.

- Incorporate California Preschool Learning Foundations and curriculum framework into appropriate goals and measurable outcomes
- Ensure a standardized curriculum with screening and assessment tools
- Continue alignment with Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in the Kindergarten class
- Retain Teachers of the Visually Impaired through competitive benefits

**Strategy 3.3**            Increase the availability of appropriate assistive technology for children with visual impairments.

- Develop and implement three-year technology plan
- Allocate financial resources for equipment, software, maintenance and training
- Implement plan for staff training and professional development
- Implement plan to measure outcomes

#### ***IV. Strategic Priority – Optimization of Infrastructure***

BCLC's IT infrastructure is outdated and data is not easily accessible across departments. Key strategies for improvements include upgrading existing hardware and software, providing staff training and improving data collection systems and processes. Additionally, the current property lease expires in August 2019. Key strategies for future planning include exploring all opportunities for possible future sites as well as options for remaining in current location. The goal is to increase the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the organizational infrastructure. The outcome will be improvements in day-to-day functions (accounting, billing, payroll, student data collection, etc.), access to accurate data, and an increased ability to report meaningful outcomes to stakeholders.

**Strategy 4.1** Board and management will develop a plan for site location and/or long term lease agreement for the Center prior to the end of lease in August 2019.

- Negotiate possible lease extension
- Research new alternative locations
- Consider capital campaign to raise funds to purchase property

**Strategy 4.2** BCLC will Increase efficiency and effectiveness in all areas of operations (service delivery, database management, marketing, communications, fundraising, administrative functions, data collection and reporting, and training).

- Develop a three-year technology plan addressing key areas of day-to-day operations
- Identify appropriate technology solutions
- Establish budget and allocate financial resources
- Implement training plan
- Secure adequate IT support

**Strategy 4.3** Develop and implement improved systems to gather data, evaluate student and program outcomes and report results to stakeholders

- Update request for demographic data to be distributed in student registration packets
- Select and implement new student database
- Fully utilize the Desired Results Developmental Profile 2015 assessment tool and DRDP*tech* software
- Develop mechanism to report outcomes to appropriate stakeholders (parents, donors, school districts, regional centers, etc.)

**Blind Children's Learning Center Strategic Planning Committee Chair**

Gene Micco – Immediate Past Chair, Board of Directors

**Blind Children's Learning Center Board Members**

Jeri Konopisos – Board Chair

Barbara Alvarado – Governance Chair

Evangeline Andersen – Governance Committee

Jeffrey Fohrer – Governance Committee

Margaret Moodian – Program Committee

**Blind Children's Learning Center Staff**

Kathleen Buehler – President/Executive Director

Carolyn Baker – Fund Development Director

Irene Takahashi – Outreach Services Director

Lilian Ulloa – Bright Visions Early Childhood Center Director

**Community Partners**

Carina Morris – Grant writer

Ron Rothschild – Supporter and Volunteer

Cinda Muckenthaler – Children and Families Commission Orange County

John Zeimantz – Regional Center Orange County

Kevin Fuhrmann – VISTA

**Blind Children's Learning Center Staff Focus Group**

Dalit Bruchstein – Infant Stimulation Specialist/Counseling Advisor

Danette Davis – Teacher of the Visually Impaired

Tricia Houlihan – Deaf-Blind Intervener

Alicia Aguilera – Infant Stimulation Specialist

Raj Singh – Pre-Kindergarten Teacher

Tana Jimenez – Physical Therapist

Kay Johnson – Case Coordinator