

History of BSBP's Youth Low Vision Program

The terms partially sighted, low vision, legally blind, and totally blind are used in the educational context to describe students with visual impairments. The inability to fully utilize one's vision substantially impairs how a child manages their environment. Social and often physical development can be substantially delayed, especially for very young children. These limitations will impair the child's ability to integrate with their environment and maximize their ability to function. Children are natural explorers, and a large portion of what a child learns typically occurs incidentally through sight.

In 1973, the Michigan Optometric Association (MOA) formed a Low Vision Committee and adopted a Low Vision Specialty Certification Program in conjunction with Indiana University College of Optometry and later with the Michigan College of Optometry and Ferris State University.

In 1985, the Michigan House and Senate held hearings on a proposed "Youth Low Vision program." A budget line item is approved to support this unique state-funded program. The Youth Low Vision program in Michigan officially began on October 1, 1985.

Several notable persons instrumental in establishing Michigan's Youth Low Vision program included Gov. James J. Blanchard; Commission for the Blind Director Phillip Peterson; Commission Chairperson Dale Strong; Michigan low vision practitioners: Susan Gormezano, OD, Phillip Raznik OD, Allyn Uniacke OD Ph.D.; Western Michigan University Marv Weesies and Bob La Duke; MI School for the Blind Charles Harper, to name a few.

According to available State fiscal records, the Youth Low Vision appropriation was \$94,894.47 in FY2004. It then remained constant at \$241,800 until the legislature eliminated the Youth Low Vision line item in the State's budget FY 2015. However, BSBP continued historic services related to the Youth Low Vision program employing a portion of its state general fund appropriation. The Youth Low Vision program now competes for funding that historically is directed to federal grant matches and other non-match funding mandates such as the Business Enterprise Program retirement benefits.

As costs and demand for approved low vision devices increased, BSBP shifted the focus of the Youth Low Vision program to students under the age of 14 to allocate scarce resources. Students 14 and older who have been determined legally blind continue to have access to low vision devices that contribute to achieving their stated vocational goal by applying for Vocational Rehabilitation services offered by BSBP.