



ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE: SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND

Historic overview

The South African National Council for the Blind is recognised nationally and internationally as one of the world's leading disability organisations. The organisation was established in 1929 with the aim of raising awareness regarding eye health and the prevention of blindness. This ultimately led to the establishment of the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness in 1944, a division within the Council. Since then the South African National Council for the Blind has grown exponentially – adding education and rehabilitation (1985) as well as entrepreneurial development and support (1991) to its list of services.

The South African National Council for the Blind is a national organisation and comprises nine provincial structures and some 100 member organisations. It is also affiliated to international organisations including the Africa Union of the Blind (AFUB) and the World Blind Union (WBU).

The South African National Council for the Blind comprises four core business areas, namely Skills Development, The Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness, Education and Access/Marketing. These Divisions run efficiently with the help of the Support Services Division which includes Finance, the Central Project Office and Human Resources.

Skills Development

The Skills Development Division strives to restore the human dignity of visually impaired people by giving them the tools that will allow them to become self-sufficient, to increase their sense of self-worth and to ultimately become contributors to society. As long as blind and partially sighted people are locked in a vicious cycle of poverty and illiteracy they will remain dependant on their families, communities and the state.

This Division strives to alleviate the high rate of unemployment among visually impaired people through the provision of appropriate training. This Division comprises two larger components – Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) and Institutionalised Training, as offered through Optima College.

CBR is an outreach initiative that assists visually impaired persons in starting up their own self help groups and small businesses. Council employs Community Development Workers (CDW's) in seven of the least resourced provinces. The CDW's identify visually impaired people in these indigent areas, and then strive to equip them with the essential skills they need to become more employable. These skills are imparted via orientation and mobility training and training in activities of daily living as well as through information about group formation, self-empowerment and advocacy. This model also provides Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) and Entrepreneurial Training, which is based on international formats and standards.

Institutionalised vocational training is provided through Optima College, which is also known as *the* Vocational Training College. This facility offers vocational training courses in computer literacy, call centre operator training as well as Braille literacy. The college also contains hostel facilities that can accommodate up to 38 students at any one time.

The Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness

Council's mature and highly successful Eye Care Programme is facilitated through the Bureau for the Prevention of Blindness. The Eye Care Programme operates four mobile eye care units that provide essential eye care services – including surgical intervention – to people living in remote rural areas of the country and townships where there are limited or no services available.

Since 2006, focus on the provision of Low Vision Services has increased, with the addition of a fifth sponsored mobile low vision service unit. This low vision service provides people with diminished eye sight the opportunity to access specialist services and assistive devices such as magnifying aids, special protective sun glasses, as well as tips on how to deal with living with low vision. Comprehensive refraction services also form part of the Eye Care Programme's current service offerings.

Education

Our Education Division currently supports 19 schools. This is done by conducting workshops for educators and lobbying with government on the challenges which face these schools in relation to their ability to meet the special needs of visually impaired children from the early stages of development within the duration of their schooling career and in preparation for further education and the workplace.

The Education Support Services team provides consulting services on issues which relate to curriculum adaptation, assistive devices and technology, accessible learning support materials, bursaries and many other areas of interest to the educators, learners and their families.

This team has also been actively engaged with the national department of education in addressing the current literacy crisis in relation to the special needs of the disabled adult, with a particular interest in the provision of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) for those visually impaired adults.

Access/Marketing

The Access Division promotes accessibility to all information, products and services relevant to the blindness field. One of the Access Programme's projects is the establishment of a "Knowledge Warehouse" - a central national information repository which can be accessed by blind and partially sighted people, organisations for and of the blind, donors, foreign organisations and agencies as well as the general public. This division also produces a variety of newsletters and publications available electronically, in print form, as well as in Braille mediums. Access maintains Council's website and does whatever it can to promote access to information, news and products for visually impaired consumers, service providers in the blindness sector, schools, employers, and the broader public which comprises many supporters, funding partners and donors. Other services offered by this division include the importing and distribution of and education around assistive devices and related technology, the placement of visually impaired people in the workplace, the offering of sensitisation and awareness talks, full communication functions, fundraising and awareness.

Support Services

Support Services manage and control all the funding, assets, resources and basic staff management for the South African National Council for the Blind, and ensure accurate and efficient financial reporting.

Governance

The South African National Council for the Blind is governed by a National Executive Committee (NEC) and a National Management Committee (NMC). NEC and NMC members are elected during the organisation's Biennial Conference - also known as the Blind Parliament. A senior management team is responsible for the day-to-day running of the organisation and reports directly to the National Executive Director.