



Blind Frontiers Podcast Episode 6 Transcript

An Open Question

August 11, 2025

Jessica Glasebrook: 00:49

Blind. It's a pretty heavy word. Carries a lot of weight. A lot of people think we know what it means to be blind. For some people, it has a lot to do with the word "can't" – what we can't do, who we can't be. But what if – and hear me out here – what if can't never came into the picture? What if, instead of a heavy word, blind was an open question. What if when we say we're blind, what we're actually saying is that we are adventurous, bold, competent? What if blindness is something fascinating? We're only just now beginning to discover. Consider this your invitation. Let's open the door to blind frontiers.

Hello, and welcome to the Blind Frontiers podcast, created by the Chris Cole Rehabilitation Center at the Texas Workforce Commission. I'm your host, Jessica Glasebrook, filling in for Jeff Molzow. So, normally on these podcasts, we like to have a group get together so we can freely exchange lots of ideas, get lots of perspectives, really dig into the meat of a topic. But here's the thing. Many of our team members are winding up their summer projects as we come to the end of the fiscal year. So, today you'll get treated to what it sounds like when I'm left to my own devices in a podcasting studio. A lot of power for someone like me. Today, since we're flying solo, I thought we could do a little experiment. Completely harmless. Don't worry. A little experiment. So, as I was prepping this podcast, I asked my coworkers to send me the most common questions they've received as individuals who are blind out in the community. Many of the questions were ones I kind of expected. Some were philosophical. Some were practical and logistical. And some probably sounded better in the questioner's head. So, if you're listening to this podcast, you've probably had a lot of questions like this. You've probably had members of the community come up and ask you in good faith, what's going on with your cane, or whether you're able to continue to watch movies, or how you get around, or who helps you. Questions like that, those types of questions that we get almost every day. And you've probably wondered, how can I respond in good faith? How can I respond in a way that's educational and still respects my dignity? Or maybe you're someone who's sighted and you're listening to the podcast to try and learn a little something. Maybe you've asked some of these questions yourself. You'll certainly get no judgment from me. At CCRC, one of the things we teach is how to educate and advocate in the public space, so that questions can be answered in a way that respects everybody. We're all one community, and we want to make sure that everyone is being respected and uplifted in a way that supports them. Anyway, that's my little experiment. I put all of these questions as well as our staff's answers on Braille index cards suck everything in a big bucket and gave it a good shake.

So, now I'm going to pull some questions and let you know how our staff responded, as well as throw in some little tidbits of my own invention. I'll also take some time to let you know what's



happening here at Criss Cole, and what you can look forward to in upcoming episodes. Okay, here we go. That rustling noise you hear is me pulling questions. Ahha. Classic. This question is probably the most common one that I received. Out of all of the staff who responded, seven said that they received this question. What's your cane for? More commonly, people ask, what's that stick for? Because people don't really know what a cane is or does. We know that since 1931, in the United States, it's been associated with people who are blind, but we don't know why. And a lot of people, if pressed, wouldn't really know what a cane does. So, I asked our orientation and mobility department to weigh in according to our orientation and mobility supervisor, Scott Meyer. The cane serves as a mobility tool and a symbol of independence. As a mobility tool, the cane encounters obstacles and gives you feedback about your environment as you travel. It touches obstacles before you do, but in addition to that, the cane also serves as a symbol of independence and a ticket to freedom for the blind community. Now that's an answer in a nutshell, but I like to go down rabbit holes. That's why I had to cut the length of this podcast quite so much is because I kept going down rabbit holes and finding out interesting facts about our community. I wanted to give you a little rundown about the cane and its history, and how it became used the way it is. So, story goes, is that in 1921, James Biggs, who was a photographer living in Bristol in the United Kingdom, lost his vision in an accident. Now Bristol is a very happening kind of place. It's a busy town and even back then there was traffic everywhere. So, Mr. Biggs started getting really concerned that people would not see him with his walking stick traveling as he was crossing the street. At the time, he was using a traditional walking cane, which was black. So, he, being a photographer, thought color would make it pop. He got the bright idea to paint his black wooden walking stick white so that people would be able to see it and people would be able to get out of the way. The white cane really took off from there. And he's he's very much adamant that it was his idea. Although there's some dispute about that and we'll get into that later. So, the idea went over to France and there was a campaign in France to make the white cane a symbol of people who are blind. He came back over to England and in 1931, BBC radio suggested that the white cane was the official symbol of people who are blind. That's how it started across the pond. Over here in the US. It started in 1931 when the members of the Lions Club International noticed that people who are blind using black walking sticks, were having trouble drawing attention to themselves as they were traveling. So, vehicles and foot traffic were running right over them or ignoring them. And that was something that they saw as a potential problem, especially as vehicles were becoming more and more advanced. Remember, this was the 30s, so vehicles were becoming more and more advanced, and people were worried about car safety. Now we're starting to think about car safety. So, they proposed that a cane be painted white with the red circles around the bottom. So that they would pop. And then as that started becoming more and more popular, it became inextricably associated with people who are blind. All the way up to the 1960s. In 1964, President Lyndon Baines Johnson of our beloved Texas declared White Cane Safety Day on October 15th to be a holiday celebrating the importance of independence, freedom, and autonomy for the blind community. Remember, apart from being just a mobility tool, this is a symbol with a rich history that speaks to our culture and heritage of who we are as blind people. In fact, we continue to celebrate White Cane Day in Texas. Two of the regional White Cane Day celebrations that I know of are White Cane Day here in Austin on October 16th and White Cane Day in Houston on October 15th of this year. So, if you live in either of those regions, there are other white cane days. But I don't have firm dates on those yet. So, the 15th and 16th get out to



those white cane days. You owe it to Mr. Biggs and the Lions Club International, and all of the other blind people who put their best canes forward to get out there and celebrate. So that cane question is, is always a bit of a classic. That's always one that gets asked all the time. So, let's dig around and see if we can find another good question. Oh, here's a meaty one. Who helps you at home? Who helps you at home? Now, if you're listening to this, you've absolutely gotten this question or you've asked this question. Maybe you've seen a really, really put together blind person in your community and you want to know, how do they do that? Who helps them at home? Do they have a professional wardrobe person who helps them match those really professional put together clothes? Do they have someone who helps clean their immaculately clean house? Do they have someone take care of their kids? How does that work? You. You may have asked that, or you may have been asked that, but that's a very common question that comes up. And the overwhelming answer I got from staff members who weighed in was that we help ourselves. Yes, we're in a community. Yes, we are part of families, friend groups. We are interdependent with one another. But when it all boils down, we help ourselves. There are a critical four core component areas that you learned about in episode one, where people learn the daily living skills, technology, career guidance and orientation, and mobility skills that they will need to be successful out in their home communities. But you do not necessarily need to start at a center for those skills to start taking root. Learning alternative techniques is the baseline for being someone who helps themselves. Think about it for a moment. Even if you're new to vision loss, there has to be one task that you perform by yourself even a simple task. Maybe you wash the dishes, maybe you feed the dog. Maybe you're a young person and right now your job is schoolwork. There are tasks that we do ourselves. So, building on those foundational tasks that you can think of right now, you can start to think of all turnitin of skills that you can learn to really beef that up. So, considering for a minute the four core components here at Chris Cole, you take these four key components and think, how can I build that right here where I am? How can I learn to help myself where I am? Maybe you practice doing your schoolwork on a new piece of technology. Maybe you go to the grocery store by yourself and use your orientation and mobility skills. Maybe you learn a little bit of Braille. I've got my podcast cue cards right here in Braille. Maybe you learn a bit of braille so you can call me out for missing my cues. Next time. Think about right now something that you can do to help yourself, because that overarching answer that we got was that we help ourselves. All right. So, we're coming up to let's take one more question before we go to our break. One more question. Let's see before we go to our little break here. Oh, here's one. And this kind of dovetails for another one. How do you choose your clothes. I think I get this one almost every single day when I commute. How do you choose your clothes? So. there are I counted them. I counted the suggestions that staff member sent me. There are at least 12 alternative techniques for how to match clothing. So, the techniques that were brought up by our daily living school staff members include using braille or bump dotted clothing tags, using an app like way around, or a pen friend device to read sticker labels that you affix to your clothes using a color identification app or an app like My Eye to tell you what color you're looking at. Some people even suggested low tech solutions like hanging clothes that, you know, go together on the same hanger so that you already have an ensemble ready to go in the morning with very little work. It's something that comes up quite a bit for our people is how do you match your clothes? Another suggestion that comes up is some people might feel comfortable matching textures. If they know a certain texture goes well, they might feel comfortable doing that. There are removable clothing tags that you can wash in the laundry.



Some people use found objects to label. For instance, they will, sew a small button on the inside of their clothing or a small safety pin so that they know what they're feeling, and they know what they're looking at. That's a very low tech, cheap solution. Most of the solutions that were suggested were either free on your phone or free that you can find anywhere. Anyone has a drawer full of buttons and safety pins kicking around. So, labeling your clothes is actually one of those foundational skills that I talked about earlier that we can use to help ourselves. Think about your closet. How are you labeling? Maybe there are some labeling skills that you could try, some labeling hacks that you could try at the end of this episode. Okay, that brings us to our break, where we talk a little bit about Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center and the work that we do, as well as what is coming up here for the podcast. Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center is part of the Texas Workforce Commission. To learn more about services offered by the Texas Workforce Commission, visit twc.texas.gov. Again, twc.texas.gov. Now, some of you may have noticed the Blind Frontiers podcast has been out of the game for a minute. We're so excited to bring it back online. We'll be releasing episodes twice a month focusing on subjects that are important to our community. The upcoming episodes will feature topics like how to use smart home technology, caring for kids as a blind parent, how to make the most of your vacation travels, and how to land that perfect job. No vision required. If you have a topic that you'd like to see featured on the podcast, hop over to our Facebook page and leave us a comment. You can also shoot us an email at ccrc.podcast@twc.texas.gov. Again, that ccrc.podcast@twc.texas.gov. All right; I think we have time for a couple more questions. Let's see what the bucket has for us. Oh, this one's one of my favorites! Okay we have to do this one. I know it's supposed to be a random draw, but I like this one. So, we're going to do it. And I have the editing power. So there here we go. Do you dream? And if so, do you dream in color? I get this question a lot. A lot of us got this question quite a bit. In fact, five staff members of the group who answered reported receiving this question as the most common. This one gets us a lot more than we think, mostly because the subject of dreams is a mystery to everyone, including people with vision. In fact, psychologists still devote a great deal of study to the how and why of dreams. Maybe I'll do a podcast on it, and the next time they let me have the studio to myself, I instead of having to do a lot of research for this one because everyone answered differently based on their vision, condition. First of all, everyone dreams. Period. The psychologist Mary Whitten Hawkins discovered that humans dream anywhere from 6 to 8 times a night. Now, the million-dollar question for blind people, of course, is about the content of our dreams. I think people pretty much accept that we dream. But what's the content of our dreams? According to research done by the National Institute of Health. People who have lost vision after the age of seven are far more likely to retain visual imagery while dreaming. Their research showed that those who are congenitally blind, that is blind from birth, are far less likely to experience visual images in their dreams. Instead dreaming in sounds, textures, and other sensations. So, after seven, if your vision after seven, you're much more likely to retain that visual nomenclature and that visual imagery. When you dream. If someone does not have color vision or they haven't had color vision before, they won't experience color in their dreams. But if they had color vision in the past, they may still experience color vision when dreaming. It just might not be quite as clear, but they will probably experience color vision in their dream. If they had color vision at any time in the past. Because colors are vibrant. The National Institute of Health published a paper in 2020 detailing their findings, and I recommend it if you're interested and don't mind looking at a lot of tedious charts. I think they made it extra boring to help people sleep so they could get



more people for their study. So, it's something to ponder as people who are blind these types of philosophical questions. Sometimes it can feel a little bit like sophistry, right? People asking, you know, do you dream? You know. But it's important to consider that dreams are a mystery to everyone, and we should explore that mystery together as a community. So, I actually am thrilled when somebody asks me that, because it means I get to do research and engage my curiosity. Okay, here's another extremely common question. Do you watch TV or movies, and if so, how? So, the answers I had from staff members who had lost their vision later in life is that people ask them what you miss the most about being blind.

Is it watching movies? It's that's how the question is framed. So usually what happens is the answer is yes. The answer was universally yes. For people who answered this question, yes, people who are blind, including the staff members who answer this question, do watch TV and movies. If so, how? Which is the next half of the question? If so, how? Well, many of us have access to streaming services. In fact, streaming services have effectively replaced typical network TV in a lot of homes of those streaming services. Many have access to audio description; audio description is an audio track that plays alongside the TV show or movie that describes the stage directions and scene of what's going on on screen and allows us to experience the director's vision for what they wanted the audience to see. This allows people who are blind to have a unique insight into the script of what they're watching, because you're seeing what the director wanted you to see. Not necessarily what is being visually represented. Not all audio description is created equal. Some of it is much more precise, and some of it is much more poetic. So, it's a preference thing of what you would like to see and hear. Would you like to see more of the director's vision, or would you like to see someone reporting more on what they actually are seeing in front of them? Recently there's been a migration over to trying to do audio description using AI, but I am not as much of an expert on that. We'll have to get one of our AI people in here on the next podcast when they're all freed up. Something else I wanted to call to attention is for the handful of people who still like to go to movie theaters. Occasionally, there are headsets that you can pick up at the movie theater when you're picking up your popcorn, that will have the audio description track in your ear, so you can wear a headset and listen while you're watching your movie. I'm also curious that people who are sighted have enjoyed having audio description when watching a show, because usually when you're watching a show at home, you're doing something else, right? You're cleaning, you're playing on your phone, you're doing all kinds of other stuff that is taking your eyes away. So having audio description in the background means that you can follow the plot and still do what you're doing. We're nothing if not multitaskers. Okay. By the way, \$500 word for y'all. When that when someone uses a technique that's ostensibly designed for people with disabilities. But it makes everyone's life easier. That's called universal design. And universal design is one of the things that we're incredibly passionate about here at CCRC. I think we have time for one more question. One more question. We go. All right. Last question. Do you wish you could see, or do you miss being able to see? That's a really huge question. And I want to give it its due diligence because it could honestly be its own podcast episode. To be frank, every single one of these questions could be their own podcast episode and probably will be once my team returns. So, when I asked this question, our training manager, Ada Mendoza, who's been in the VR field for a very long time, let me know a little bit about her experiences with the adjustment process. As someone who has been a vocational rehab counselor as well as an instructor and a manager of trainers, she's noticed that people who are blind naturally go through a process of adjustment.



No one woke up one day knowing how to do all of these skills. So, if you see someone who's blind out in the community who's doing an amazing job, they didn't just wake up like that. They learned. They went through a strong adjustment period where maybe they had to reinvent themselves or find themselves all over again or discover who they were as a person without vision. It's something that's important to keep in mind that there is an adjustment process, and some people do report feelings of loss or feelings of anger or feelings of worry. But other people report feelings of having a clean slate – starting over. Being open to self-discovery. All of those feelings are valid. It's important to know there's no one right way to adjust to being blind. There's no one right way to do blindness. And Ada, talked to me quite a bit about the adjustment process and what she's observed as people learn skills over time is that the more, they learn skills, the more confident they become and their ability to live independently. As someone who is blind. Something else that was brought to my attention and that I also want to stress, as someone who is blind myself, is the importance of adjustment in community. You cannot adjust to your vision loss in a vacuum. Even those of us who have been blind our whole lives, we're going to hit adjustment every so often. And we can't do that in a vacuum. You can't do that as an island where none of us are islands. The best way to they speak to this adjustment process is in community. I wanted to talk about two very important organizations who can help you find that community where you live right now, people you can go on their website, you can call them right now, and I'll put their names and contact information in the show notes. They're the [National Federation of the Blind](#) and the [American Council of the Blind](#). These are two affiliate organizations that form communities and advocacy groups for people who are blind that support social health, employment empowerment, advocacy, and a chance to find a place of belonging for people who are either blind or low. Vision. So again, National Federation of the blind, an American Council of the blind. Both groups have local chapters in all of the major cities in Texas and both of them have national and state conventions that meet annually. So, you can have a big family reunion as well. So, if you're somebody who's lost their vision and is looking to get plugged into a community, they're your people. National Federation of the blind, an American Council of the blind. Like I said, I'll put that in the show notes and make sure that you have access to that so that you can go find it right now. Also, we we quote a lot of their work on our social media. Well, everyone, I promised our communications team, I keep it brief. And I think I hear somewhere deep in the communications department, someone's giving me the wrap up sign. So, I'll leave you with just a couple more thoughts. The late, blind great Helen Keller was reported to have said, life is either a daring adventure or nothing. I really hope she actually said this because it's something we as a blind community need to hear more often. And adventures always start with questions. So, I want to give us all a challenge this week. I'll do it too, I promise this will be a real challenge because we all know how much fun some of those awkward questions can be. So, here's your challenge. When you're out in the wild, out in the community, living your life, and someone approaches you with a question. See if you can treat it as an open door. A chance to call someone into the conversation. There's always room for more adventurers on the blind frontier. Thank you all for joining me today. As always, if you have feedback for us, follow us on Facebook or shoot us an email at ccrc.podcast@twc.texas.gov. Thank you so much. See you soon.