



# Blind Frontiers Podcast Episode 7 Transcript

## Intro to the VR Process

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### Jessica Glasebrook: 00:00-00:31

What does it mean to be blind? We've all heard the stories. Blindness is a struggle. Blindness is limiting. Blindness is where the story ends. But what if – just what if blindness was the beginning of your story? What if the journey was long and mostly uphill, but also beautiful and full of possibilities? In this podcast, we'll share insights, ideas, and lived experiences from the blind community. It's your journey, but you don't travel alone. Welcome to Blind Frontiers.

### Jessica Glasebrook Program Intro: 00:38

Blind frontiers is a podcast of the Chris Cole Rehabilitation Center at the Texas Workforce Commission. To find out about Texas Workforce Commission and how we serve our community, visit [twc.texas.gov](http://twc.texas.gov).

### Jessica Glasebrook: 00:55

Hi everyone, it's Jessica Glasebrook again filling in for Jeff Molzow here on Blind Frontiers. On today's podcast we'll share some news and views from the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center, as well as answer some of your questions about the vocational rehabilitation process and how you can get involved.

Now, originally, I had conducted an interview with the Amazing Deena McWaters, a regional blindness support specialist, about the VR process and how you can become a customer. However, thanks to the dubious virtues of modern technology, that interview was promptly devoured by my computer. So y'all are stuck with me. Hurry back Jeff. Let's kick things off by checking in with our CCRC family.

What's new at Criss Cole? Last month, students and staff celebrated Braille Literacy month. Collaborating with each other, we put on a center wide Braille Day celebration, complete with singing, dancing, Braille cookies, poetry readings, and Braille trivia. Together, we lifted up Braille as a vital force in blind empowerment and education. I've linked you to our newsletter in the show notes, where our own Michelle Haproff in our outreach department has written a beautiful piece about the importance of Braille at home and work. Join me in cheering on the power of these little dots. In faculty news, we celebrate the dedicated service of Miss Cindy Wofford, our daily living skills supervisor. After 29 years, Cindy is retiring from state service. Cindy, we wish you all the best on your new frontier. A furry faculty member has joined the CCRC Technology Department. Join me in welcoming Odette. A yellow lab guide from Guiding Eyes for the Blind will be joining her handler, Miss Chloe Walton, teaching students assistive technology. Obtaining



employment might feel like a dog-eat-dog world if you're blind, but we're excited to have Chloe and Odette helping us level the playing field. My editors better not make me get rid of that pun. I'm very proud of it. In student news, Miss Rhonda Johnson has created a Braille poetry corner in our main lounge. It's a little nook with tables and chairs for students and staff to take a moment, center themselves, read something inspiring in Braille and remind themselves of their 'why' for being here. We could not be more proud of Rhonda's advocacy for literacy and education for her community. If you have a CCRC news item for the podcast, please email us at [ccrc.podcast@twc.texas.gov](mailto:ccrc.podcast@twc.texas.gov). Okay, so like I said, I had this incredible interview about the VR process for all of you with Miss Deena McWaters, but technology is only good until it isn't. So even though I'm no Deena McWaters, I'm going to take a stab at a little rundown of the VR process. So, if you're listening to this podcast, chances are good you're either a VR customer yourself or would like to become one. Maybe you've heard that VR counselors can help you get a job or get the training and equipment you need to find a job, and even help you decide what it is you actually want to do for a job. But you've probably also heard that the process is difficult. So, I want to spend some time today kind of breaking down the steps. Demystifying it a little. We're going to break down the steps for becoming a customer of vocational rehabilitation. The first step is to refresh yourself or have someone help you refer yourself for VR services. You can call your local VR office if you know where they're located. That's the quickest way. You can also call our VR main line at (512) 936-6400. That's (512) 936-6400. You can talk to someone who will take down your contact information and get some info about the kind of support you're looking for. The deadline for hearing back from someone in VR is ten days, but you typically hear back much sooner than that. According to Dena. Once you've heard back from a counselor, you'll meet with them to fill out the application for VR services. But wait, I can hear you saying, I thought you said they already took down my information. Why do I need to apply? Okay, here's where it gets a little dicey. VR is what's called an eligibility program. That means you have to meet certain criteria to work with vocational rehab. First, you have to have a documented disability. During your application, your counselor might ask you to provide medical records and documents for your disability. So, for those of us who are blind, that might be an eye report or a medical exam. If you are hard of hearing, it might be an audio logical report. It's medical documentation that says, hey, this person actually does have a disability. So, if you don't have any recent medical records, your counselor might send you for a doctor's visit to get updated information about your disability. Once your counselor has reviewed your records and determined that you are eligible for vocational rehab services, you and your counselor have 90 days to make a plan. This plan will be your roadmap. You and your counselor will work out what you need to get, where you need to go from training to equipment to counseling and guidance to technology.

Even work experiences where you can try on different jobs in the community. You'll decide on your employment goal and work on your strengths and abilities. You'll decide what tools will help you be the most successful and flourish on the job. But Jessica, I can hear you asking all the way across the airwaves what happens when I get a job?

Are they just going to throw me to the wolves? Absolutely not. After you get a job, you and your counselor will work together to make sure you are stable in the new role and have all the skills you need to be successful before your case is closed. This is called job retention and post



services. You're not on your own on your way to employment. So, if you've ever thought you needed a little extra support finding and keeping a job, don't hesitate to reach out with questions and to get connected with VR. Miss McWhorter suggest calling is the best way to refer yourself. I'll leave the number in the show notes, but again, for our listeners, that number is (512) 936-6400. I have some exciting news for all of you. We're starting a new segment this month for the podcast. It's called Tech Time during Tech Time. Dustin Boggess, one of our technology instructors, will be demonstrating a piece of technology currently on the market with accessibility features. These are tools you can find in any average store or on Amazon that were made with access in mind. Over to you Dustin.

## Dustin Boggus 07:39

Thank you, Jessica, and welcome to Tech Time. My name is Dustin Boggus, and I am a training and development specialist with the technology department at Criss Cole. And today we are diving into smart speakers and how they can make a more independent to you. Nowadays, it seems like everybody, and their dog has a smart speaker. And of course, everybody knows that we can get the time and the weather and even play music, but they can do so much more for us as blind individuals. First, we should probably talk about what a smart speaker is. As the name implies, a smart speaker is, well, a speaker. But what makes it smart is that it has a digital assistant built in. They come in a variety of shapes and sizes, some with massive speakers, some with no speakers at all. Some have screens and some are even built into kitchen appliances.

While Amazon's smart speakers are by far the most well-known, offerings from the likes of Google and Apple are also very capable and are gaining in popularity. Although Apple, Google and Amazon all make smart speakers, they don't all do the same things, but they do cover a variety of basic needs like telling the time, giving you a weather report, setting timers, creating reminders, setting up calendar events, music, news, podcasts, etc. etc. I could go on and on about the pros and cons of all of these different platforms, but today's tech time is really all about how we can use smart speakers as BVLs (Blind and Visually Impaired individuals)

The first scenario we'll look at today has to do with outings and travel. Whether you're trying to hit up a new restaurant or just trying to get to an appointment on time, smart speakers can give you information like phone numbers, addresses, directions, trains at times, or just help you become more familiar with different points of interest. You can also even hail your rideshare directly from some smart speakers. The hands-free nature of smart speakers is also ideal for the kitchen. They do a bang-up job of handling multiple timers that you can actually name based on the food that you're making. For example, you can say something like set a turkey timer for two hours, but that's just the beginning. We can use smart speakers to retrieve information like safe cooking temperatures for different meats, get measurement conversions, and even get a new recipe with on demand cooking instructions as you cook. It's like taking a professional cooking class without having to shell out all that dough. Get it? Dough, baking, kitchen. All right, I should probably just stick to tech. For those of you on the job hunt, smart speakers can help you create calendar events and reminders for job interviews, help with research about your



potential employer, and can even give you some common interview questions to help get you ready for the big day. Now, we all like to have a little fun. And yes, smart speakers do a great job of providing the tunes for your soiree, but they can entertain us in other ways as well. Some smart speakers have games that don't require looking at anything at all, and can actually be really, really inclusive. If you're looking for a quiet night in with a book. Smart speakers have you covered as well. Not only are podcasts a great way to unwind, but some smart speakers can also read your audiobooks, including those from audible and even Bard. And there you have it. Some quick tips for using smart speakers to make a more independent you. I'll toss it back over to you, Jessica.

## Jessica Glasebrook: 0:11:16

Thank you so much, Dustin. The smart speaker is one of those devices that we don't typically think of as an accessibility product. Almost everyone has them. Whether you have vision or not, a smart speaker like a Google Home or an Alexa is such a useful tool for daily life. Well, friends, we've come to the end of our time together. For you seasoned listeners, I like to end each episode with a challenge. This week, your challenge is simple. If you are a VR customer, reach out to your counselor once this week. Send them an email. Give them a call. Take charge of your process and if you aren't already a customer and are thinking about becoming one. There's no time like the present. Reach out in the knowledge that you chart the course for your present and your future. See you on the frontier. Blind frontiers is a podcast of the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center at the Texas Workforce Commission. To find out about Texas Workforce Commission and how we serve our community, visit [twc.texas.gov](http://twc.texas.gov)