



April 27, 2020

The mission of World Services for the Blind (WSB) is to empower people who are blind or visually impaired in the United States and around the world to achieve sustainable independence. Blindness is no respecter of persons. It strikes without regard to race, religion, sex or nationality. In the United States, more than 25 million people age 18 and older are blind or have severe visual impairments that have caused them to make adjustments in their careers and everyday living situations.

Students who participate in residential programs at WSB will live in dorms on the WSB campus. The campus is located on a full city block between 28th and 29th streets on Fair Park Boulevard in a residential area near the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. The campus is comprised of six two-story buildings surrounding a tree-shaded courtyard. On-campus housing is available for 51 people in our women's and men's dormitories and in two independent-living apartments. Students on our campus are provided 3 meals a day and are provided with a room and a shared bathroom.

For the last two months, the United States has been dealing with a new contagion named the Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) referred to hereafter as COVID-19 or the virus. COVID-19 is a new type of coronavirus and until late 2019, this type of coronavirus had not been seen in humans. The virus is thought to first infect the tissue inside the nose or the throat, then it can spread lower down into the lungs. In most cases, the illness is mild or moderate and most people recover. However, some people, particularly those over 50-years-old with medical problems, such as asthma or diabetes or who smoke tobacco or e-cigarettes, may become very ill and require emergency hospitalization.

For the clients that WSB serves who are blind and visually impaired, many present with a variety of co-morbid diagnoses which puts our residents at a greater risk of contracting COVID-19 if exposed and having a greater chance of complications.

The COVID-19 infection spreads between people who are in close contact with one another (within approximately 6 feet) through respiratory droplets formed when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The infection may also spread when individuals touch contaminated surfaces and then touch their face, but this is thought to be a less common form of infection than breathing in infected droplets in the air.

Covering coughs and sneezes with a sleeve or tissue, washing hands frequently with water and soap for 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and avoiding touching one's face are critical to protecting yourself and others around you.

The main symptoms of the infection are a fever of more than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, a new cough within the last seven days, shortness of breath or a new sore throat within the last seven days.

Due to WSB being a congregate setting, defined by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as an environment where a number of people meet or gather and share the same space for a period of time, it is vital that we protect our clients and employees from exposure of this virus and ensure the health and safety of all by implementing standards required to help each client to achieve their goals while protecting the well-being of all.

WSB leadership monitors the CDC website for information and resources daily and we also maintain regular contact with Arkansas's state regulatory and health authorities.

The federal government has not issued guidance specifically for residential facilities like WSB but early federal guidelines in response to COVID-19 were developed specifically for residential nursing facilities. The guidance pertaining to residential nursing facilities was adopted by WSB leadership and adapted to meet our unique circumstances. WSB will continue to strive to meet the intent of these standards with the resources that are available and consistent with the unique needs of those we serve.

WSB's response plan is provided as a reference for employees, VR partners and clients and their families. Recently the spread of COVID-19 in congregate living settings accounted for more than 82% of positive cases in one week in the state of Arkansas.

WSB immediately implemented an emergency response plan to help control and prevent the spread of the virus at our facility. Two days before the announcement of the first confirmed COVID-19 case in Arkansas, we restricted movement of clients from leaving campus, restricted outside visitors to the facility, with the exception of contractors who are restricted from direct contact with clients, and we set up isolation rooms in the event someone presented with upper respiratory symptoms or a fever.

At the time of the publication of this information, April 27, 2020, WSB is entering their 7th week of restrictions, and phase two of dealing with the pandemic. During the next two weeks we will see states "re-opening" their economies and getting back to some semblance of normalcy. With that we know that after an extended period of social distancing that people are excited to move on with the plans that ended abruptly almost two months ago.

VR counselors have been forced to work from home without face to face contact and have been creative in engaging clients. WSB is proud to partner with VR counselors to deliver services via way of WSB's distance learning platform, to allow clients to achieve measurable skills gains toward their vocational goals and remain engaged to hoard off the possible mental health effects of extended isolation from friends, family or achievement of their goals.

For clients who need more intensive life skills training, WSB is accepting new residential clients, under precautions. The application process is the same, and in fact improved for the convenience of the clients and counselors and offered online (<https://www.wsblind.org/admissions>). Admissions process will vary slightly. Clients will be asked to answer a series of questions, agree to self-quarantine for two weeks prior to their admission date and agree to check temperature twice a day and log that information and provide it to the admissions coordinator weekly during follow-ups.

Upon arrival to campus, if you traveled via private transportation you will be restricted to an isolation room for 7 days, if you travel via public transportation (air, train, bus, etc.) you will be restricted for 14 days. During this time, you will not be able to eat meals in the café but will be provided meals in the common area of the isolation rooms, where you will have access to a refrigerator and microwave. Family and acquaintances will not be allowed to enter the building, but rest assured that WSB staff will assist you every step of the way.

Your temperature will be checked twice a day and logged. You will be able to participate in activities that will allow you to safely practice social distancing with instructors, such as Orientation and Mobility (O&M), and limited Techniques of Daily Living (TDL) and Keyboarding, while wearing a double layered cloth face covering that covers your nose and mouth, and gloves. Other classes will be delivered via remote learning with an instructor as it would be in the classroom such as assistive technology, braille and adult education. Once your quarantine period ends, you will transition into the regular dorm space and be allowed to resume a full schedule in class.

WSB has employed extra measures during this period, we have a doctor on retainer who will see residents immediately in order to eliminate unnecessary exposure to emergency rooms or urgent care clinics. Only staff that has socially isolated at home and not had exposure to anyone outside of their family for a minimum of two weeks will have close contact for transport to the doctor if needed for emergencies; for non-emergencies, the doctor will see the client via video or on campus by appointment.

Additional precautions that are practiced daily include disinfecting all “high-touch” surfaces daily utilizing medical grade solvents. High-touch surfaces include phones, remote controls, counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, keyboards, tablets, and cafe tables. Commercial grade hand sanitizer dispensers are installed in each classroom and the entrance of the café line. Wipes to clean high touch surfaces such as keyboards and desks are provided to each client upon arrival to class.

WSB strives to provide clients with the training and wholesome environment that will allow them to achieve their goals successfully. Safety of our clients are always on the forefront of our minds. Rest assured that during these unprecedented times where we are dealing with many variables that are yet known or understood, WSB will strive to maintain a safe environment and is committed to an open line of communication and transparency in everything that we do.

If you have any questions about how WSB can help you achieve your goals whether on-campus or on-line, please feel free to contact us at 501-664-7100, visit our website at

<http://www.wsblind.org> to learn more about the programs and services offered or connect with us on social media. Our Director of Outreach and Recruiting, Rebecca Reid is always available to answer questions or concerns.

As CEO I employ an open-door policy on campus and to our VR partners, clients and families. You can call or text me directly on my cell at 501-766-6754 or you can connect with me via email at CEO@WSBlind.org, or on social media.

WSB is honored to have served more than 16,000 people from all 50 states and 59 countries and we hope that we can be a part of your journey. Stay well and see ya' soon.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sharon Giovinazzo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "S" and "G".

Sharon Giovinazzo
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