



Deutscher Verein der Blinden und Sehbehinderten
in Studium und Beruf e.V.

The German Association of Blind and Partially Sighted Students and Professionals (Deutscher Verein der Blinden und Sehbehinderten in Studium und Beruf e.V. - DVBS) is a self-help organization of blind and partially sighted people striving for independent living and professional success, despite their handicap. DVBS operates throughout the Federal Republic of Germany. The accredited non-profit-making organisation is based in Marburg/Lahn.

Self-help Pays Off!

The main goals of DVBS are promoting the self-help principle and representing the interests of its members. The association supports all blind and partially sighted academics and people in related professions, as well as in vocational training and in retirement. It takes up their social, cultural and legal needs, paying special attention to the questions of vocational orientation and training, and integration into the labour market as far as career planning and reintegration are concerned.

In order to accomplish these goals the association cooperates with politicians, government agencies, other self-help organisations, and welfare providers, on a national and international scale. The general assembly is the supreme organ of the association, and is held every two years. Every four years its members elect the board comprised of 5 members.

The association members are organized in one or more special interest groups and also join the district group at their place of residence. The chair persons of the special interest groups and of the district groups make up the so-called DVBS work community, which is responsible for developing guidelines for the association as well as controlling the board in the name of the general assembly.

Our Services

DVBS provides differentiated and fundamental services which are need oriented and upgraded continuously in parallel to media-related technologies. These services target young and old, members, their families and friends, the broader public, political actors, organisations and institutions.

The **DVBS counselling services are based on the principle of help for self-help**, specifically taking into account the needs of those affected by or at risk of developing a visual disability. Counselling always is done autonomously.

- We help in mentally coming to terms with the disability by providing contacts to other members similarly affected.
- We support the development of new personal perspectives for training and career and accompany on the way to get there.
- We provide information concerning the individual right to assistive technology and help with the enforcement of such claims.

General advice is given by the team in the DVBS office. It also refers individual queries be it on financial support for the way through college, on vocational orientation, on work assistance, on special sources for literature, on financial benefits for the blind, ICT as well as on assistive technology or on software applications to the appropriate experts and contact persons. **Vocational guidance** is offered by the DVBS general executive Michael Herbst and the chair persons of the DVBS special interest groups. In addition, members in comparable professional situations are happy to be at your disposal for sharing their experience and conduct peer counselling. **Counselling for senior members** is available through the management committee of the DVBS Retirement group.

Legal advice: On October 1st, 2009, the non-profit making company rbm – Rights of disabled people (rbm gemeinnützige GmbH - Rechte behinderter Menschen) began work as a joint legal venture of DVBS and DBSV (German Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted). General executive is the blind lawyer Dr. Michael Richter. Members of DVBS can be legally represented by rbm when pursuing personal claims related to a visual handicap in the field of social and administrative law (www.rbm-rechtsberatung.de).

The DVBS **text service** offers a recording service for specialized and technical literature, on individual request of blind and partially sighted persons. It produces DAISY digital talking books. (DAISY stands for „Digital Accessible Information System“, which is an open international standard for accessible multimedia.) The text service archive contains a stock of some 5000 books. The text service further more deals with requests to convert information into a suitable format for blind and partially sighted, e. g. in the context of elections, and the transfer of printed text products into accessible multimedia, so that e. g. a CD-ROM with the digital text version can be added to a normal book. Moreover it publishes periodicals in DAISY format, e. g. the German magazine „Bild der Wissenschaft“, and co ordinates the production and distribution of audio information magazines compiled by different DVBS special vocational groups (textservice@dvbs-online.de).

Profile

Some 25 per cent of our **1350 members**, are students or participate in vocational training. They receive support in order to improve their training conditions and career opportunities, and are organised in the special group “Vocational Training”. In Addition, as students seeking a professional career, they are invited to get involved in the following **11 special interest groups**:

- Education and Science
- Law
- MINT (Mathematics, ICT, Natural and Engineering Sciences)
- Media
- Music
- Partially Sighted
- Self-employed
- Social work and psychology
- Theology
- Administration
- Economics

Members having finished their professional career, make up the group „Retirement“ in order to pursue their specific concerns.

Professional group seminars help to acquire knowledge and skills. They are designed to fit in with the special needs of our members, focussing on handicap specific topics and on aspects of vocational training, professional issues and problems of senior citizens. The contents and agenda are, for the most part, defined by the professional groups themselves. Conferences and workshops dealing with such topics encourage participants to overcome their anxieties and strengthen their skills in the context of lifelong learning. These seminars are available to all members regardless of their adherence to any professional group and are prepared and organised by the DVBS office staff with support from our volunteers.

Apart from the special interest groups, organized on a national level, DVBS comprises district groups to enable members to have an exchange on various subjects of daily life, close to home. Activities in these groups range from regular informal get-togethers to cultural events and joint excursions or activities highlighting local politics. The DVBS office will connect you to the various persons in charge of these groups.

The DVBS office also assists our volunteers by planning and coordinating various projects. Other office activities include Managing our text service, taking care of public relations, enhancing the counselling services, and further more dealing with plenty of administrative work. **horus** – Marburg Contributions for the Integration of the Blind and Partially Sighted (Marburger Beiträge zur Integration Blinden und Sehbehinderter) is the name of the magazine published four times a year. For members of DVBS it is free of charge. **“horus aktuell”** is a newsletter published at least once a week. Originally launched as an express communication medium during the dispute for retaining financial allowances for the blind in the Federal states nowadays, the multifaceted political newsletter updates recipients on topics such as disability compensation, social law, education and labour market integration issues. The audio journal **“ansicht”** (opinion) is devoted to the in depth analysis of diverse issues concerning the blind and partially sighted, and offers data and facts, opinions and views interspersed with audio clips of blind and partially sighted musicians. The **DVBS job service** is an open mailing list. Input includes job offers by the DVBS office, the German labour market agency, and by members of the list themselves. Interested recipients are invited to subscribe. How to apply for work assistance? What basic social welfare is due for unemployed? How to effectively utilize my reduced vision? Answers to these and further questions are provided by **DVBS leaflets**. They are at your disposal for free in the DVBS office and via download from our website.

Our community foundation: People for people

Initiated by Dr. Otto Hauck, the former chairman of DVBS, and founded in 1998, the Community Foundation for the Blind and Partially Sighted Students and Professionals (Gemeinschaftsstiftung für Blinde und Sehbehinderte in Studium und Beruf) invites citizens to a joint involvement. Its objective is to sustainably support the blind and partially sighted members of DVBS. Accumulating the foundation capital should help to sustainably safeguard the idea of self-help in the future, since technical devices need to be adapted continuously, computer work and internet permanently call for

new and flexible solutions, and rapid changes in the areas of training and vocational life demand qualified adaptation as well as the development of new solutions. Our community foundation is focussed on the promotion of blind and partially sighted students, technological developments, and seniors struggling with vision problems. The community foundation has set up a nationwide network of personalities, who are at your disposal for contacts. The chairman of our community foundation is Uwe Boysen, chief judge at Bremen district court and chairman of DVBS. Managing director is Michael Herbst.

Assuring and Developing Active participation

As a self-help organisation and interest group, DVBS's goal is to insure and develop vocational and social inclusion for the blind and partially sighted. The way to accomplish this goal has to be discussed and redefined again and again. Self-help succeeds, if we manage to inspire people inside and outside of our community.

The initial idea for founding the association, today called DVBS came about owing to the first world war. Soon after its outbreak, soldiers returned home, who had lost their sight. Professor Alfred Bielschowsky, director of the ophthalmic hospital of Marburg University initiated rehabilitation courses. The student Carl Strehl, himself blinded in 1907 due to a work accident, taught them Braille and typing. Among his students there were grammar school pupils, students and young academics for whom education and career opportunities seemed to have come to a sudden end, since at that time traditional handicrafts for blind offered no appropriate alternative,. On March 6, 1916, Strehl, Bielschowsky and further personalities sharing their ideas founded the German association of blind academics (Verein blinder Akademiker Deutschlands - VbAD), renamed Verein der blinden Geistesarbeiter Deutschlands - VbGD) after the second world war, and, since 1983 called „Deutscher Verein der Blinden und Sehbehinderten in Studium und Beruf“ (DVBS).

Starting in 1971 DVBS special interest groups were set up. Accompanied by specific further training and information services, they are a strategic core part of our self-help work. In 1978, DVBS inaugurated the first German recording service for scientific literature, providing text books in accordance with special standards, thus enabling work in the academic field, in particular by correctly citing via listening. In 1990, district groups were founded in the new East German federal states, and in 1994, DVBS was significantly involved when **article 3 section 3 S. 2** was incorporated into the German Constitution: “nobody may be discriminated against because of his or her disability” („Niemand darf wegen seiner Behinderung benachteiligt werden“). Since then, DVBS works on implementing this principle in all parts of society. Accordingly, e.g. the legal implementation of the claim to work assistance (Anspruch auf Arbeitsassistenz, in the year 2000), was followed by the **accessible information technology act** (Barrierefreie Informationstechnik-Verordnung - BITV, 2002), and the **equality treatment act** (Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz, 2006), which makes it easier to access insurance contracts under private law.

From 2006 to 2009, DVBS was successfully involved in the campaign for the maintenance respectively the reintroduction of the **central employment agency for handicapped academics**, hitting its peak in 2007 during the DVBS coordinated campaign of the network for vocational inclusion (Netzwerk berufliche Teilhabe - NBT). In 2006, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the **Convention**

on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by the German parliament in spring 2009. Since then DVBS is committed to its complete and efficient implementation, in particular in all areas concerning education, profession and social inclusion.