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**Community Non-Profits Join Forces for Low Vision, Blindness Services**

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – Serving the West Michigan community for 106 years, staff members at the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired have improved life for thousands of children and adults who have low vision or blindness. Determined to design the future so ABVI could grow its programs and services, leaders looked to affiliate with an organization with similar values, rehabilitation expertise and a heart to serve. Their solution was only blocks away.

The Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired becomes an independent subsidiary of Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital on Jan. 1. It’s a coming together of two non-profit organizations with missions to restore hope and maintain independence for those they serve. Joining forces means offerings at both organizations will be enhanced.

ABVI Executive Director Richard Stevens is retiring after more than 17 years of leading the organization. Marcus Manders is a Mary Free Bed Hospital leader who will assume operational leadership of ABVI.

Plans for ABVI include:

* Expanding the scope of services offered
* Enhancing coordination of services for ABVI clients and Mary Free Bed patients
* Increasing the geographic footprint to serve more people
* Educating healthcare providers about programs and services available
* Enriching collaboration with referring clinicians and organizations.

**Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

**Joins Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital**

**Fact Sheet – Dec. 20, 2019**

**Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

* Clients
  + 937 clients served between October 2018 and September 2019
  + 504 clients evaluated in outreach screenings
  + About 10% are blind and 90% have varying degrees

of vision impairments

* + Two-thirds are 70 years or older
* Outcomes
  + 95% success rate
  + Metric = Ability to maintain or improve independence after services
* Areas served
  + 13 West Michigan counties: Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, Ottawa

**Mary Free Bed Rehabilitation Hospital**

* One of largest and most comprehensive rehabilitation hospitals in the United States
* Not-for-profit and nationally accredited with more than 110 medical and sports rehabilitation programs
* Clinical results consistently exceed national averages and lead the way in some areas
* Inpatient satisfaction scores are in the top one percent in the nation
* Rehabilitation Network with 36 acute care hospitals, managing care

for 350 inpatient beds in nine Michigan cities

**Historical similarities**

* Both organizations:
  + Have more than a century of serving people with disabilities using therapeutic interventions and specialized technology
  + Founded by forward-thinking women dedicated to:
    - Making life better for others
    - Helping society understand people with disabilities

are valuable and engaged citizens

* Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired
  + Losing her sight as a child, Roberta Griffith is believed to be the

first blind woman in the United States to graduate from a school

for sighted students

* + - Women’s College of Western Reserve University

(now Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio)

* + - Completed studies in three rather than the typical four years
  + Roberta had a passion to ensure persons who were blind or visually impaired had the skills to become employed
  + She worked with Helen Keller to standardize braille code throughout the nation
* Mary Free Bed
  + Small group of women sought to help people who couldn’t afford health care
  + Passed a little black purse asking anyone who knew someone named Mary, the most popular female name of the day, to donate 10 cents
  + The women raised enough money to endow a local hospital bed, which became known as the “Mary free bed.”
* Roberta Griffith and the Mary Free Bed Guild both honored by being inducted into the Michigan Woman’s Hall of Fame