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Julie Bernas-Pierce, Executive Director, Blind Babies Foundation

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Organization

HQ: Oakland.

Mission: When an infant or preschool child is identified as blind or vision-impaired, we provide family-centered services to support the child's optimal development and access to the world.

Founded: 1949.

Milestone: We are celebrating our 60th anniversary.

Annual budget: \$1.8 million.

Expense allocation: 27 percent to overhead; 73 percent to programs.

Corporate support: 8 percent.

Corporate supporters: Carl Zeiss Meditec, Singapore America Business Association, Wells Fargo, Weil Gotshal & Manges, Wilson Sonsini.

Board chair: Dorothy Bridge.

Board members: 13, including Kevin Dorwin, Amir Atashi Rang and Beverly Libaire.

Employees: 25.

Volunteers: About 100.

Events: Annual gala in February and beeper egg hunt.

Telephone: (510) 446-2229.

Web site: www.blindbabies.org.

Office issues

Recent challenge: To keep up with technology and maintain our efficiency with limited resources.

Measures of success: The number of visits we're able to provide to families in order to meet their needs. In 2007, we delivered approximately 2,500 home visits. We attended over 200 medical appointments with families. And we provide trainings to physicians and educators who need to learn how vision loss affects development in infancy; we do about 20 trainings a year to several hundred professionals.

Smartest move: To maintain a program model that is flexible and responsive to the needs of our clients ... and building a committed board that's passionate about the mission and understands its fiduciary responsibilities.

Missed opportunity: We've had opportunities to expand the organization's reach to a national level. It's an opportunity we continue to examine — again with limited resources — because I think the model works for families and there are more needs.

Misconception: That we only serve children who are blind. We serve children who are visually impaired as well, and we serve children with multiple impairments in addition to visual loss.

Professional insights

Personal path to nonprofit work: I was originally a teacher of the visually impaired, and was asked to serve on the board here in 1991. ... When the executive position came open in 2005, I was asked to interview for it.

Toughest aspect: The financial challenge. Ours is a very small niche we serve, so increasing our visibility in the community, garnering funds to make sure that our mission is served and our staff receive fair and equitable pay for their high skill level.

Most surprising aspect: The extraordinary resilience of the families that we see every day.

Biggest pain: For our staff, because we serve so many children with multiple impairments, babies die on our caseloads. That is the most dramatic thing for all of us on staff. We're all aware when an infant dies on one of our staff caseloads, and it affects all of us.

Greatest pleasure: The children and the families.

Introspections

Best recent moment: The February gala. It was a gathering of so many friends to celebrate our 60 years of service.

Worst recent moment: The uncertainty of what's ahead this year and the next.

Dream for another life: I love working with children, but I've always wanted to be a pilot.

Greatest inspiration: It really comes from what I said earlier regarding the resilience of families. That was an unexpected and powerful benefit of doing this work.

Down time: I have four (grown) sons ... and I love keeping up with them. Travel, reading, gardening.

Causes: Primarily, causes that impact children.

Most like to meet: Madeleine Albright.

—*Sarah Duxbury*