

I am Lucy Edmonds, and I grew up in a small town in Michigan near the capital city -- Lansing, Michigan. And I am totally blind. I come from a big family of six girls.

I went to a school for the blind from kindergarten through 12th grade. I skipped the second grade, so I actually graduated from high school at 16.

And then I moved away and lived in another town in Michigan called Kalamazoo. And I went to college there, and then ended up working there for 24 years. Then I moved back to Lansing in 2001 and went to work for the state of Michigan and retired in 2017.

I was introduced to ACB in, I think, about 1979 or 1980, first on the local level, and I obviously joined the national organization when I joined my state affiliate. And there was a period of time when I wasn't very active in ACB, and that was when I was working for the state of Michigan because I worked for the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons. And they pretty much asked us to remain neutral as far as consumer organizations of the blind were concerned. So I really did not become active again until I retired in 2017.

I have had various positions within the organization at a local, state, and national level. I have been president of local chapters and did one term as president of the state affiliate in Michigan. And I also was on the national resolutions committee for probably about five or six years at least. So ACB has meant a lot to me throughout the years. I have learned a lot as far as advocacy, leadership, and just networking with different people.

I love attending national conventions. I remember my first one was in 1993, and it was in San Francisco. And I was astounded at the number of people who are blind that were there. I had never been around that many people. I think there was like 1,200 to 1,500 of us at that time that attended national conventions. State affiliates and special interest affiliates were quite large then. Some of us are getting smaller, the groups are getting smaller. But just to be introduced to that number of people who are blind that were professionals, and to be introduced to all the state affiliates that you can join, it was just amazing to me. And so I was really hooked at that point after attending my first national convention, even though I had been a member of ACB for quite a few years before that.

I have attended a lot of national conventions. Two just virtually, and then the one we just had in July, which was a hybrid convention, which was very cool. It was virtual and in person. And I thought it went very, very well.

Right now I am really, really involved with what we call the ACB Community. And this was started on March 17th of 2020 right after the lockdown for the pandemic -- national lockdown. It was started by Cindy Hollis, who at that time, I guess her title was membership services coordinator. It's changed now, as most titles do and most acronyms for organizations. [Laughs] This was started so that we could, as an organization, remain connected and even become more connected than we had been in the past. So if there is any silver lining to the pandemic of COVID-19, ACB Community is definitely it.

Because Cindy started out with, I think, two calls during the week of March 17th, 2020, and it has grown to sometimes, most times over 100 calls per week.

We started out using the national phone conferencing lines, and then eventually moved on to the Zoom meeting platform. And it has just grown by leaps and bounds. And I just can't tell you how much it has meant to me and hundreds of other people that have joined these community events just as a way to remain connected, meet new people, learn new things.

We have calls on so many different areas -- technology, cooking, exercise, health, social calls, music -- just to name a few. And it's just amazing how it's grown. We have tons of volunteers that help to make this happen. We learned a lot about Zoom, and learned that in order to prevent calls from becoming chaotic, we needed some kind of control, and so we started using raised hands and training hosts to monitor and make the rooms secure. And our motto for community events is safe, respectful, and welcoming. So that's what we try to strive for in all of our community events. I think we have probably about 150 trained hosts who also help out with opening of Zoom rooms and different volunteer areas.

Because this community has grown so much, President Dan Spoone decided in -- oh, I believe it was October of 2021 -- to form a committee to support the community and those involved in making it work. And we call ourselves the Community Support Committee. And I am the chair of this committee currently. So we're kind of new as far as ACB committees go.

We are still kind of exploring different things that we can do to help Cindy Hollis and her administrative assistant, Kolby Garrison, to help them come up with guidelines to present to the ACB Board to keep our community safe. And also if there are any problems that community participants or facilitators have, they can bring it to the committee before it goes to Cindy if they wish. That's been really fun.

The committee is comprised of people from different aspects of the community. We have two people on the community that are participants. We have two that are hosts/facilitators. We have two board liaisons and two staff liaisons from the ACB staff.

So right now, one of our main focuses is to provide some assistance to those who wish to, or are interested in, let's say, starting new community events, if they need assistance in learning how to prepare for a call, so that it runs smoothly, and you have enough content. So we're putting together a panel, and we're going to have a community call about how people prepare for calls. We're having some seasoned community facilitators come on that panel just to give some feedback as to how they prepare for a call and keep it running smoothly. And anybody who is a facilitator who might need a little bit of refresher, you know, who might think, "Well, you know, I already run an event, but I want to go on this call to see how other people do it." That should be fun. We're just there to kind of support the community.

So I feel the community has really helped me. Because after I retired, I wasn't really involved in too much. And I had been in leadership roles before, like I said, in my state

affiliate, local, and on the national level to some extent. The community kind of helped me get back into wanting to be more involved in leadership. And I guess I never really thought that I would be the chair of an ACB committee before community, but I'm so dedicated to what we've done that it made me say, "Yes." Otherwise, I probably would say, "Oh, no. I don't want to be the chair of a committee."

But I'm so impressed with what we've done and how we've been able to help people, I guess. So that's kind of -- maybe I might want to be on the ACB Board someday. You know, it's kind of strengthened my leadership, wanting to be more of a leader, I guess. There are a lot of calls that have started out small. There's one gentleman that runs a call called the Breakfast Bunch on Sunday mornings. This was a call that was started by another young lady, but she had to step back, so this gentleman took it over.

And at the beginning, he was really nervous and didn't think it was going to succeed. And now he just comes up with great topics to discuss. And there are actually a lot of calls that that happens with, and it's not necessarily the calls that I want to say succeed, but it's the people.

People start out being kind of nervous and thinking that they can't come up with enough topics to discuss. And then as time goes on, and they do more calls, they find that it's really fun. And it does bring people out of their shells, which I absolutely love.

There was a young lady that joined the community about a year-and-a-half ago, and she would never speak during social calls. She would just sit and listen. So I would try to,

you know, welcome her, bring her out, talk to her. And then much later, she became an intern for Cindy Hollis. And now she's running community calls, she's doing a lot of volunteering. I'm so proud to see who she has become. That happens with a lot of us that start out just coming to calls thinking, "Oh, gosh. Everybody knows each other, and I'm an outsider here."

That's kind of how I started. I did not start out at the very beginning of the community. I went to a couple of calls, and then I didn't start coming until maybe about three months after the community began. So I know exactly how it is when you step into a call, and you don't really know anyone.

So it has just made an impact on me, and I know lots and lots of other people. I don't know what I would have done without it, being isolated and everything for as long as we have been.

And I did forget to mention that we do have people from around the world that have joined the community, which -- oh, my gosh -- I just think it's awesome. We have people from Canada, Finland, The UK -- gosh -- the Philippines. This has been so interesting to get to know these people and to find out how people who are blind are treated there and in their different countries, and just talk to them about what resources they have available -- technology, employment -- to find out different areas of aspects of blindness that we sometimes take for granted. We have some people from Africa also. It's just very, very cool to see how we are all connected.

If I were to give any message to my ACB family, it is that we are in a very unique period of history of ACB. The reason I say that is that in the past, we basically could only become connected to one another at the time of national convention, and we would see each other once a year. We would go to, you know, a general business meeting of ACB. Now that we have Zoom, and because of the community, we can tune in on ACB Media to the board meetings, to, you know, the Board of Publications meetings. We can really participate in so much of the day-to-day dealings of ACB. We can now vote. Whereas before, only if you were at the convention could you vote. Now every member can vote. So I just think that is just so awesome.

I guess my message would be, stay connected to one another through Zoom and community. Thanks.