

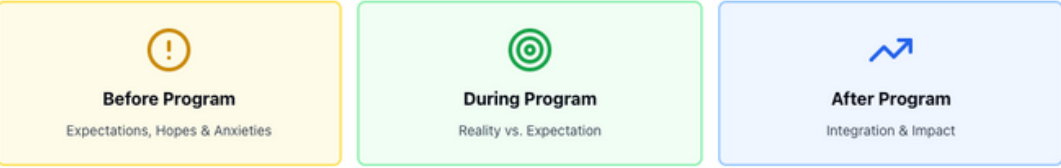


The Veteran's Journey

VA Blind Rehabilitation Program Experience Synthesis

A holistic understanding of the veteran experience before, during, and after attending the VA Blind Rehabilitation Program, derived from comprehensive interview synthesis.

The Complete Journey



Before Arrival: The Decision Phase

What Drives Veterans to Enroll?

- **Influence of a Key Person**

Trusted recommendation from another veteran, family member, or healthcare provider
- **A Specific Event**

Particular incident or notable decline in functional ability acts as a tipping point

What Veterans Hope to Achieve

Goal	Description
Gaining Specific Skills	Practical, life-altering skills to navigate daily environments with confidence and safety
Achieving Independence	Return to self-sufficiency, reducing reliance on others and regaining control over their lives
A Worthwhile Experience	Valuable and validating experience confirming the time commitment was a worthwhile investment

Post-Program Challenges

- Adapting skills to unique home layout without structured support
- Navigating lack of the center's daily routine and staff guidance
- Well-meaning family members being overly helpful, hindering independence practice

Critical Follow-Up Support Needed

Support Type	Purpose
Accessible Refresher Training	Reinforce skills that may have become rusty or need home adaptation
Peer Support Networks	Share experiences, strategies, and encouragement with other graduates
Technical & Logistical Support	Help with acquiring or troubleshooting assistive devices and local resources
Family & Caregiver Education	Help support system understand new capabilities and how to assist without undermining independence

Core Program Evaluation

Aspect	Veteran Feedback	Impact
Most Valuable	Practical, transferable skills and hands-on training	Directly increases independence and safety at home
Most Challenging	Rigorous pace of learning and emotional toll of confronting limitations	Requires strong staff support and peer encouragement

Moments of Pride: Tangible "Firsts"

Veterans are most proud of concrete achievements that rebuild confidence:

- **Navigating** a street independently
- **Preparing** a meal safely
- **Using assistive tech** to read a letter

Life After Rehabilitation: Long-Term Impact

Most Frequently Applied Skills

- **Orientation & Mobility**

Safe travel techniques
- **Daily Living Skills**

Cooking, home management, personal care
- **Assistive Technology**

Communication and information access

Actionable Recommendations

1. Bridge Information Gap

- "What to Expect" welcome packet
- Video tour of facility
- Peer-to-peer contact program

2. Ease Travel Anxiety

- Dedicated travel coordination service
- Step-by-step travel instructions
- Travel companion or group travel options

3. Strengthen Post-Program Support

- Formalize follow-up protocol (30 & 90 days)
- Launch alumni support group
- Create resource library with skill refreshers

4. Support Family Systems

- Family and caregiver education resources
- Guidance on supporting independence
- Address family concerns proactively

Key Barriers & Concerns

Logistical

- Travel to unfamiliar location
- Navigating journey with vision loss
- Transportation complexities

Emotional

- Being away from home & family
- Leaving support systems behind
- Family concerns about wellbeing

Program-Specific

- Uncertainty about daily routine
- Questions about training intensity
- Doubts about ability to succeed

On-Site Experience: Reality Meets Expectation

First Impressions: Surprises

Positive Surprises

- ✓ Supportive nature of staff and peers
- ✓ Quality and comprehensiveness of program
- ✓ Newfound sense of community and shared purpose

Difficult Surprises

- ! Emotional challenge of being away from home
- ! Intensity of the daily training schedule
- ! Unexpected frustrations with specific elements



The Core Message: Veteran-to-Veteran

"While the decision is difficult and the experience is challenging, it is also fundamentally life-changing. Embrace the opportunity, trust the staff, and commit fully to the process—because the independence and confidence gained on the other side are worth every moment of uncertainty."

— Unified message from program graduates