



**ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020**



**C**elebrating and honoring our 100 years of service to the community was woven into all aspects of our work this past year as we recognized the progress that has been made over the past century in the areas of education, training and accessibility. As the organization has grown and changed, the original rationale for the organization, established by our founder Adam Zepp, still holds true today: to provide a voice and an array of services for individuals who are blind and visually impaired so they can achieve economic, social and personal independence.

Our mission is rooted in a person-centered approach. This tactic sets us apart from other organizations and has proven to help people thrive and achieve better outcomes. Because each person is unique and vision loss affects each person differently, individualized services are integral to progress and success. Thanks to our donors, individuals and families are receiving more advanced services than ever before, setting the stage for increased hope and opportunities in this next century for people who are blind and visually impaired.

Our supporters demonstrate the powerful impact of a community coming together to ensure that individuals with vision loss have more choices and greater access to programs and services that meet their individual needs. You are helping to transform lives, and we are grateful for your partnership. We look forward to you joining us for the next leg of our journey. The future looks very promising!

**Scott Marr**  
BOARD PRESIDENT

**Terri Davis**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



**Special thanks to IBVI for being our Centennial Sponsor, and for their continued partnership and support of our mission to empower individuals of all ages who are blind or visually impaired.**





# My Heart Is Not Blind

**In fall 2019**, Vision Forward, with the generous support of Beyond Vision, brought a unique art exhibition, *My Heart Is Not Blind*, to the Milwaukee Central Public Library. *My Heart Is Not Blind*, a travelling exhibit that pairs artistic portraits and audio narratives representing people of all ages and ethnicities who have vision loss, is accessible to people who are blind and visually impaired. Michael Nye, the exhibit's artist and creator, describes it as "bringing light into the dark misperceptions about blindness." The showing, which was free and open to the public throughout November, was viewed by more than 30,000 people of the Greater Milwaukee community.

“Our family’s ride home from the exhibition was full of poignant discussion, including one of the first times I’ve ever really discussed my own journey with our youngest.”

**ELLIOTT**

parent, art lover, and person with a visual disability

Christina and Weston's story was featured in the *My Heart Is Not Blind* exhibition.

# Preserving Our History

**F**rom the original **Badger Home for the Blind** to the Badger Association for Blind and Visually Impaired, incorporating the merger with the Center for Blind & Visually Impaired Children, to today's Vision Forward, we have a long and storied history. The occasion of our 100th anniversary in 2019 seemed an appropriate time to review and honor our past. Our long-time supporter and friend Barbara Stein agreed, generously connecting us with a professional archivist and underwriting the project's expense.

"To know one's history, to better understand the brilliance of who started it and who kept it going is so important," expressed Barbara. The archivist started his research with our late founder Adam Zepp and connected with his great granddaughters, who provided important historical documents, which are now secured and preserved.

Preserving Vision Forward's history is an important step in demonstrating the relevance of our organization and work to the Milwaukee community. We look forward to our next century of service!



“Vision Forward’s statement ‘...we focus on ability, not disability, because we know what people can do is far more important than what they can’t do,’ resonates deeply within us, as the great-granddaughters of Adam Zepp. He was an unflinching advocate for the visually impaired and he made life-changing differences for others like him. We are privileged to support this fine association and know our gifts will help to carry on the many worthwhile efforts occurring now and in the future.”

## CHRISTINE & JOSEPHINE ZEPP

Great-granddaughters of founder Adam Zepp

# Partnering for Greater Access



**In July 2019, Vision Forward received a grant** from the Racine Community Foundation to help more people in Racine County access specialized services for their vision loss. To that end, Vision Forward has been educating the community about the programs and services we offer. To complement our specialized services, we offer a transportation program, which features

specially trained drivers and dedicated vehicles that provide door-to-door service for anyone who needs help getting to our Milwaukee facility. Racine County resident Betty Larsen says the transportation program has made a significant difference for her.

“The fact that the drivers at Vision Forward were able to pick me up and bring me home to Racine allowed me to access the help I needed,” states Betty. “The Racine Community Foundation grant is the reason I’m able to do all of this!”



**Betty Larsen works with Vision Forward occupational therapist Rose to learn adaptive daily living skills.**

# Children’s Program Wins Big!



**Vision Forward was thrilled** to have been chosen as one of Potawatomi Hotel & Casino’s Heart of Canal Street children’s charities in 2019! Funding from the Heart of Canal Street is helping to improve the lives of children and youth who are blind or visually impaired by ensuring they have access to highly specialized services and programs designed to help them learn to adapt to and cope with vision loss.

Thank you, Potawatomi!



# Judith — Making Great Strides!

**B**orn prematurely with a weight of less than two pounds, Judith has had significant delays in the development of communication and motor skills. Her journey since birth has been uphill. However, working with the Vision Forward team of teachers, therapists and vision specialists since she was 11 months old, Judith has made great strides.



Today, at five years old, Judith is walking on her own and communicating her needs through simple sounds and sign language. She enjoys playing and engaging with other children in the classroom, and music therapy is helping her master additional movements as well as speech and language skills.

Judith's family is very proud of her hard work and the great strides she has made

developing skills for independence. Her mom lights up when Judith calls her "Mama," and her siblings enjoy playing with her and hearing her laugh and call them by special nicknames she has for them.

Support of our Children's Program gives Judith and hundreds of children like her access to highly specialized education and therapy services that help them have a strong, healthy start in life.

**90%** of the children receiving services achieved at least one of their established developmental milestones.

**96%** percent of parents and caregivers reported that they learned from the program to care and advocate for their child.



# Jim's New Outlook

**A**fter a lifetime of struggling with his vision, Jim came to Vision Forward at the age of 50 not knowing how to tell others about his vision loss or how to ask for help. A lack of confidence and a feeling of hopelessness caused him to keep his partial vision a secret and his expectations low.

Jim has retinitis pigmentosa (RP), a group of inherited eye diseases that affect the retina (the light-sensitive part of the eye) and worsen over time. His vision had deteriorated to the point that he could no longer hide it.

After participating in support sessions at Vision Forward and meeting other people with similar challenges, Jim began to open up. He was finally able to express how painful it had been struggling alone for so many years, and he quickly realized he was not the only one. By connecting with others, Jim gained the confidence to advocate for himself and became determined to not let his vision loss hold him back.

He recently moved into a new place and secured a job. With help and training from Vision Forward, he learned to set up his new home, prepare meals, and safely get around the neighborhood. For the first time in his life, Jim feels completely in charge and he couldn't be prouder!



**89%** of clients feel more positive about living with their changing vision and receiving services at Vision Forward Association.

Dr. and Mrs. Herbert Giller's legacy gift provides adults with the training necessary to gain employment skills for independent living.



## Empowered by Volunteering!

**R**osy Goodrich has been a long-time volunteer at Vision Forward. She always radiates optimism and good cheer as she and her guide dog Yaffa, a beautiful golden retriever, travel through the halls to the volunteer office, and she has never let her blindness keep her from helping others

Over the past 22 years, Rosy has served as a Board member, a fill-in receptionist, and an excellent role model to others who are blind or visually impaired. She leads a book group and teaches individuals how to crochet, sharing her talents and skills to help others find theirs. She also spends hundreds of hours each year brailleing documents, calendars and newsletters so that people with vision loss can stay informed and participate in activities and events that enrich their lives.

As appreciative as we are for Rosy's dedicated service, Rosy is grateful to have a place where she can do things that she loves while making an impact on others. Her selfless commitment empowers others with vision loss to pursue opportunities to fully participate in life and showcase their gifts to the world.

“It's a special place where you get to see a lot of people that you know are like family to you. It's important to be surrounded by those people. It feels good to share my knowledge and passions.”

**ROSY**

Vision Forward volunteer

**174**  
volunteers  
GAVE OVER  
**3,750**  
hours  
FOR A MONETARY  
VALUE OF  
**\$96,225\***  
\*INDEPENDENT SECTOR



12,647

hours of therapy, education and support helped children and adults learn to live successfully with vision loss



33% of children and 50%

of adults served came from households with an annual income of less than \$25,000



Nearly  
**4,000**  
people were  
impacted by our  
outreach, store,  
and services.



75%

of our clients are adults receiving specialized services to maximize independence and enhance quality of life



983

people found product solutions to make daily life easier for living with vision loss

# Statement of Activities

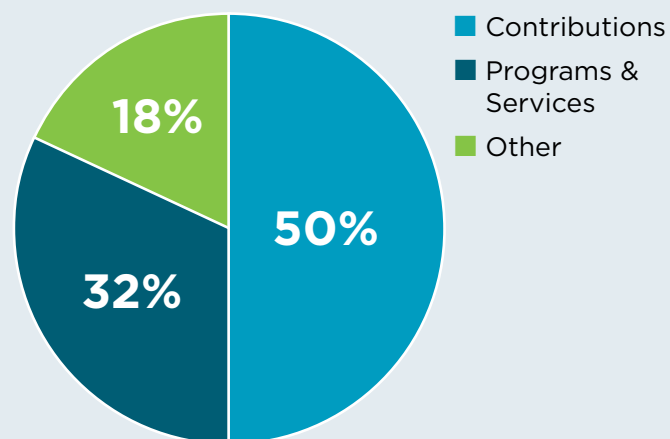
YEAR ENDING MARCH 31, 2020

**Total Assets** **\$ 6,022,482**

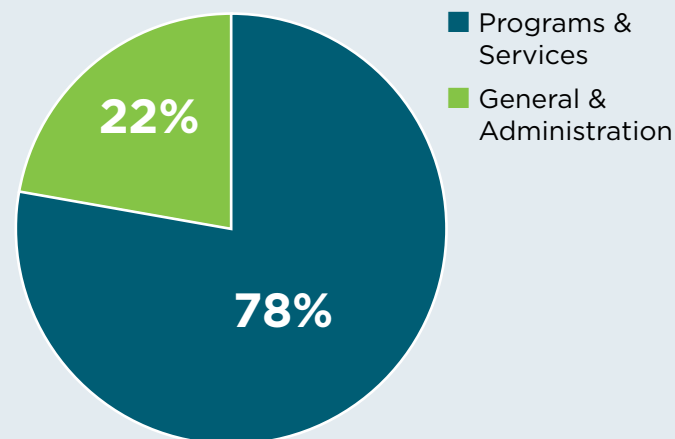
**Total Liabilities** **\$ 79,039**

**Net Assets** **\$ 5,943,443**

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## EXPENSES



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“I have been volunteering with Vision Forward for over 35 years because their mission of empowering individuals with vision loss is close to my heart. I am proud of the work we have done, are currently doing, and what we will be doing to serve children and adults in need as we advance into our second century of service.”

**DAVE STRELITZ** Foundation Board President

# Thank You!

The support of our donors has allowed thousands of people living with vision loss and their families to access life-changing services at Vision Forward.

Thank you for your commitment to our mission!

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Vision Forward Association is truly grateful for every gift, in whatever amount, which helps support our vital work. Every effort has been made for accuracy. Should there be any errors or omissions, we apologize and ask that it be brought to our attention by calling the Philanthropy Department, 414-615-0117.



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National Baking Company  
Network for Good  
New Berlin Lioness Project  
New Berlin Lions Club  
North Point Lighthouse Museum  
North Shore Country Club  
Northern Sky Theater  
Oak Creek Lions Club  
Orange Hat Publishing  
Outpost Natural Foods  
Pabst Brewing Co  
Paddock Lake Lions Club  
Pizza Shuttle  
Polish Heritage Alliance  
Port Washington Lions Club  
Potawatomi Hotel & Casino's Heart of Canal Street Program  
Present Music  
Print n Press  
Prospect Lions Club of New Berlin  
PRP Wine International  
Pump It Up  
Ravinia  
Ray's Wauwatosa, Inc.

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Roots Salon & Spa  
Saint Vincent Pallotti Parish  
Schlitz Audubon Nature Center  
Schubert Theatres South, LLC  
Scottfree Salon  
Shedd Aquarium  
Sherper's Inc  
Shoot the Moon Photography  
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Skydive Milwaukee / Sky Knights SPC  
Skylight Music Theater  
South Milwaukee Lions Club  
Sprecher Brewing Company, Inc.  
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Twisted Path Distillery  
Union Grove Lioness Club  
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Widmer's Cheese Cellars  
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Wisconsin Maritime Museum  
Wisconsin Philharmonic  
Wisconsin Restaurant Association  
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*By including Vision Forward  
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people who are blind or  
visually impaired.*

Estate of Irving Chortek  
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Nancy Lee Tapper

\*Deceased

## MISSION

Empower, educate, and  
enhance the lives of individuals  
impacted by vision loss  
through all of life's transitions.

## VISION

All individuals with vision  
loss have reached their full  
potential to lead active,  
independent lives.



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