ANNUAL REPORT
APRIL 1, 2021 – MARCH 31, 2022
At Vision Forward, we are very deliberate in fulfilling the three key elements of our mission, which are to empower, educate and enhance the lives of individuals with vision loss. Our mission also includes a strong commitment to provide our services through all of life’s transitions, be they small or great, and whether they occur early or later in life.

Featured among these pages are the stories of three adult clients who each share a unique transition to vision loss. Not one was born blind, but all lost vision in the prime of life. And each is currently living successfully, having established new ways of discovering and accomplishing purpose while giving back to the community.

As demonstrated in this annual report, one of the greatest assets for people with vision loss is assistive technology (AT) designed especially for those who have vision challenges. AT is empowering people with vision loss to lead more productive and independent lives in a world where information is often presented and accessed visually. The extensive training we provide is helping to open up new opportunities for those we serve, creating limitless possibilities for engaging in school, work and life.

As we look back on another year of accomplishments, we celebrate all of you who partnered with us in our mission to enhance the lives of those who are blind and visually impaired through empowerment and education. Together we are building a community that will be more inclusive and accessible to all who are living with vision loss.

We truly appreciate you!

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BOARD PRESIDENT

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Events

Dining in the Dark

Dining in the Dark was once again an in-person event in 2021, hosting 228 guests for a special mission-driven evening of dining under blindfold at the Italian Community Center on Thursday, November 4th.

The event, emceed by WISN 12 news anchor Toya Washington, featured one of our clients, Brittny Hodson, who shared her story of losing vision rather suddenly and how it impacted her life. You can read more about Brittny in our client spotlight (page 6). Dining in the Dark supporters contributed more than $132,000 for Vision Forward’s programs and services.

Vision Connections

On Thursday, September 30th, 77 working-age adults connected virtually to Vision Forward’s annual Vision Connections event where they were inspired by a panel of nationally-recognized technology experts, including Vision Forward’s own technology team, on cutting-edge hardware, software and phone apps. Vision Connections was made possible by a grant from the Irving L. Chortek Charitable Fund in Memory of Robert & Jenny Chortek of the Jewish Community Foundation of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation and from the Racine Community Foundation.

DEI Summit

All Vision Forward staff were fortunate to be able to participate in the positive-impact, three-day virtual summit How To Be An Ally, conducted by local power couple Deanna Singh and Justin Ponder of Uplifting Impact. The summit is designed to help people develop the skills to positively talk about and take action on racial equity in their places of employment as well as in their communities. Attendance was made possible by a generous grant from ibvi, Industries for the Blind and Visually Impaired.
Technology Creates Possibilities

Look in a dictionary and you will see Assistive Technology (AT) defined as any item, piece of equipment, software program or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities. Meet someone who is blind or visually impaired and you will see simple examples of AT being put to practical use including a magnifying glass, a watch that speaks the time with the push of a button, or a bright orange, raised sticky bump dot that is used to mark a key button on a remote control. More complex examples of cutting-edge AT might include computer software that speaks text aloud, a specialized cell phone app that provides information from the bar code on food packaging, or a device worn like a pair of glasses that can magnify a TV screen or a street sign.

Vision Forward not only sells a wide variety of AT tools, but also provides training on them to help people with vision loss better communicate, more easily manage their everyday lives, and stay connected with the world around them. Our two AT experts on staff, Cory Ballard and Luke Scriven, have both earned the designation of Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist (CATIS). In addition to providing training, our staff offer hands-on demonstrations that allow people to experience firsthand the effective use of different products, which in turn helps them make good decisions when purchasing a device that best fits their needs.

“For people without disabilities, technology makes things easier.
For people with disabilities, technology makes things possible.”

IBM Training Manual

During the 2021-2022 fiscal year, our technology team provided 848 hours of one-on-one technology services. We also produced 38 instructional videos, which had a total of 91,750 views on our YouTube channel and 8,450 total hours of watched content.
Our Children’s Program has been serving children, ages newborn to six years, who are blind and visually impaired for 55 years. Last fiscal year, we provided more than 7,031 hours of direct service to young children with vision loss, including those with additional disabilities, helping them build a strong foundation of skills on which to learn and grow.

YoungStar, Wisconsin’s child care quality rating and improvement system, awarded our Children’s Program a top five-star rating. Our commitment to quality puts us in the top 15% of centers. Our specialized vision teachers and therapists (music, occupational, physical and speech-language) make us one of a kind in Wisconsin.

91% of children receiving services demonstrated improvement in their social-emotional skills.
Children’s Program, continued

According to Wisconsin Babies Count, the percentage of children in Wisconsin who do not get access to a Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and/or an Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) is four times greater than the national average. Vision Forward’s new initiatives to provide services throughout the State of Wisconsin are filling this gap.

"Since working with Vision Forward, we have seen more progress than we could have imagined with Hadley. We continue to get the tools and resources from them to make an easier and more accessible future for her."

LAYCI, Mother of Hadley
Brittney Hodson: Perseverance Is Key

In 2016, Brittney Hodson was living her best life in Onalaska, Wisconsin. A snowboarder, jeweler, wife, and mother of an active toddler, her life was full.

Then, Brittney was diagnosed with *pseudotumor cerebri*, a condition that occurs when pressure inside the skull increases for no apparent reason, causing the optic nerve to swell. In her case, the swelling stole her vision.

For Brittney, blind at age 29, life lost its purpose. She was sure she’d never work again and worried she’d never be happy. She felt her life was over.

Fear, anxiety and loneliness became Brittney’s constant companions. She didn’t want to do anything because she was afraid she couldn’t. But when she got connected with local vision rehabilitation and orientation and mobility services, life began to change.

First came a job with Kwik Trip as a call center representative in early 2020, which gave her renewed purpose. Then came training with Cory Ballard, Director of Technology at Vision Forward, on JAWS (Job Access With Speech) to help her with specific work tasks.

“Cory makes things easy . . . he makes things visual for me. I’m really grateful for his help.”

**BRITTNEY HODSON**
Vision Forward Client
Brittney’s story, continued

JAWS is a computer screen reader program for Microsoft Windows that allows users who are blind and visually impaired to read the screen either with a text-to-speech output or by a refreshable Braille display. Brittney learned keyboard shortcuts within Microsoft Office, including Word and Outlook, to make her job easier and to make her more efficient.

Now, six years after losing her vision, Brittney feels she can do pretty much anything with a little modification . . . and the help of her new guide dog, a black Labrador retriever, named Gracie. Gracie accompanies her everywhere, giving her a stronger sense of independence and confidence as she ventures on her own into new surroundings.

With Gracie at her side, Brittney is once again socializing and finding the joy in life. Her motto moving forward is “Never give up,” and we can’t wait to see where it takes her next! •

In Wisconsin, the CDC reports that more than 100,000 people have blindness or severe difficulty seeing even with glasses.

99% of adults reported an overall positive experience with adult vision rehabilitation services.
Johnson Beamon: Just a Matter of Time

When Johnson Beamon began having vision issues at age 17—not seeing very clearly, bumping into floor signs at the grocery store, struggling to drive at night—his mother took him to an ophthalmologist. The diagnosis was retinitis pigmentosa (RP), a group of related eye disorders that cause progressive vision loss. And three different doctors all delivered the same news: he had three to six months of vision remaining so he should do and see all the things he wanted before his vision was gone for good.

Johnson was devastated. He fell into a deep state of despair, feeling there was no hope. Without vision, he felt life had nothing to offer.

But when the six-month mark arrived and he still had vision, it gave him pause. He felt a slight glimmer of hope, so he continued to move forward, living as though nothing had changed.

Over the years, Johnson’s eye disease progressed. Although he was able to work and get around, his family and friends recognized that he needed to get help and learn different ways of coping. Johnson’s brother, a U.S. postal worker who delivered Vision Forward’s mail for a time, encouraged Johnson to schedule an appointment for services.

Johnson reluctantly called Vision Forward and got connected with our social worker, Erica Weise, who invited him to participate in a group session. But Johnson never showed up.
Johnson’s story, continued

When Johnson called again a year later, he was finally ready . . . ready to continue preparing himself for the day when his eyesight would be completely gone. He enrolled in all our adult services programs to take advantage of his remaining sight. He learned to navigate safely with a white mobility cane, use technology and other assistive aids, read braille, and access support from others.

Although it took more than 25 years to secure the help he really needed, Johnson is now on the way to achieving his dream of a career in counseling and social work. His goal is to work in the field of vision loss and use his own experience with RP to help others navigate their individual journeys.

Johnson has a message for others experiencing vision loss:

“Just because you have a disability, that does not mean the end of life. It might be the beginning of something brighter. Don’t give up—there’s an abundance of life left to live!”

JOHNSON BEAMON
Vision Forward Client

96% of adults demonstrated progress and/or achievement of their individual goals after receiving services.
Zoe Kaplan is a familiar face around Vision Forward and a very welcome one at that. Since 2016, she’s been volunteering her time to help with projects that enrich our programs and services. She likes doing a variety of tasks, such as preparing mailings, assembling packets, and brailling materials for those who are blind. Sometimes Zoe fills the halls of Vision Forward with the sweet smell of freshly baked cookies, which she generously shares with staff.

But volunteering isn’t Zoe’s first experience with Vision Forward. She initially came to us for services after she lost her vision due to a brain tumor at the age of 15. With the sudden onset of blindness, Zoe’s parents, Dr. Barbara Moser and Dr. Eric Kaplan, began looking for help on how to teach and guide Zoe on adapting to life without vision. They wanted to make sure they taught her the right strategies from the beginning, because Zoe, who also has autism, finds it hard to relearn things in a different way. The staff at Vision Forward had a lot of insight and expertise to share, offering the entire Moser-Kaplan family a game plan on how to move forward.

“Vision Forward was there for us at the most harried time of our life, when no other organization was able to provide us with the help that you did. Vision Forward fulfilled a need that no one else could.”

DR. ERIC KAPLAN
Zoe’s Father
To complement the services she received at her high school, Vision Forward provided Zoe with additional training in braille, adaptive daily living skills, computer usage, and orientation and mobility (wayfinding and white cane travel). Zoe also became a master of household tasks such as washing dishes, folding towels and baking tasty treats.

After graduating from high school, however, a typical nine to five job wasn’t the best fit for Zoe, so she and her family began looking for suitable volunteer opportunities. They inquired at Vision Forward, and we jumped at the chance to have Zoe join our team. Zoe enjoys helping with a variety of different projects and especially likes to engage in teamwork. She employs her sense of perfectionism to ensure that tasks are done thoroughly and without error.

Zoe says she feels a sense of belonging at Vision Forward, and she feels good about completing the jobs she’s given.

Zoe’s parents are impressed at how much independence she has gained through her volunteer experience. They share that Zoe takes on responsibilities at home, such as washing the dishes after every meal. They feel the skills Zoe has learned have brought greater meaning to her life and made every day more enjoyable.

Barbara and Eric have been generous supporters of Vision Forward since experiencing firsthand the difference our services have made in Zoe’s life.

“You’ve been an ongoing part of our life since Zoe became blind,” adds Barbara, “and you’ve added to the meaning of Zoe’s life.”

Vision Forward is grateful for the generosity of spirit demonstrated by the Moser-Kaplan family as they give back in ways that demonstrate their shared beliefs and values. What a powerful way to positively impact those who are blind and visually impaired!
Vision Forward has been successfully serving individuals who are blind and visually impaired for more than 103 years. The heart of our daily work is realized through the following programs and services:

**Adult Vision Rehabilitation Services**
- Low Vision Clinic
- Technology Training
- Orientation and Mobility
- Activities of Daily Living
- Support

**Children’s Program**
- Functional Vision Assessments
- Vision and Sensory Training
- Special Education
- Music Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Speech-language Therapy

**Youth Program**
- Music Lessons
- Rainbow Day Camp
- Braille Games
- Braille Challenge
- Beep Baseball

**Vision Forward Store**
From high tech products to simple everyday items, the Vision Forward Store offers adaptations through a variety of items to help people with changing vision or no vision live independently and safely.

**Community Outreach**
Presentations and demonstrations to local groups and organizations help create awareness of vision loss and services available for those living with it.

Mary Lindemann, Store Coordinator, works with Venetta Pottinger in the Vision Forward Store.

1,229 unique store customers purchased products that made accomplishing everyday tasks easier.
Statement of Activities YEAR ENDING MARCH 31, 2022

2022 OPERATING REVENUE 2022 EXPENSES

- Philanthropy 58%
- Programs 78%
- Management & General 8%
- Philanthropy 14%

Support Revenue
Contributions & Grants $ 1,422,034

Program Revenue
Vision Rehabilitation Services 487,491
Vision Forward Store 447,365
Paycheck Protection Program 183,443
Special Events 137,006
Other Income 1,927

Total Operating Revenue 2,679,266

Gain on Disposal of Equipment 31,506
Investment Income (Loss) 97,895

Total Revenue $ 2,808,667

Operating Expenses
Vision Rehabilitation Services $ 810,399
Vision Forward Store 560,236
Enrichment 45,646
Children's Program 1,006,786
General Administrative 237,344
Philanthropy 445,449

Total Operating Expenses $ 3,105,860

Change in Net Assets (297,193)
Net Assets - Beginning of the Year 6,985,248
Net Assets - End of the Year $ 6,688,055

21% of children and 48% of adults served came from a household with an annual income of less than $25,000.
Enhancing Lives

More than 4,000 individuals received services that enhanced their lives.

606 adults received over 2,573 hours of direct service.

198 people had contact with our social worker, helping them prepare for their vision loss journey.

Top Five Diagnoses of Vision Forward’s adult clients:
1. Age-related Macular Degeneration
2. Glaucoma
3. Retinitis Pigmentosa
4. Diabetic Retinopathy
5. Stargardt Disease

91% of parents or caregivers will use the skills learned from the program to care and advocate for their child.
Thank you, Volunteers!

We couldn’t accomplish our mission of serving individuals with vision loss without help from our generous volunteers. Thank you to all our volunteers for the tremendous value you add to Vision Forward!

As a wise person once noted:

“Volunteers don’t get paid; not because they’re worthless, but because they’re priceless.”

Last fiscal year, 114 volunteers provided 2,172 hours of time and talent, a contribution valued at $65,051. (Independent Sector)
Thank You!

Donors are the lifeblood of Vision Forward. Through generous gifts, they have transformed thousands of lives, making life-changing services both accessible and affordable for those who are blind or visually impaired. We are tremendously grateful for every individual and organization who chose to make a difference for those we serve.

We are truly honored by your generous and committed partnership!

INDIVIDUALS
Anonymous (21)
Elaine Adams
Eleanore and Dean Alioto
Julie L. Allen
Daniel K. Allison
Karen Anderson
Kathy Anderson
Thomas Anderson
Louise Angel
Esther Arnold
Isabel Bader, PhD
Cory and Jessica Ballard
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Vision Forward Association is truly grateful for each 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 at 414-615-0117.
THANK YOU, DONORS!

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Our Mission: Empower, educate, and enhance the lives of individuals impacted by vision loss through all of life’s transitions.

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Racine Community Foundation, Inc.
John and Gladys Franco Fund for the Visually Impaired
Mary V. Wackerhagen Field of Interest Fund
Renaissance Charitable Foundation
The Robert A. Brandt Macular Degeneration Fund
The ROS Foundation
Saint John’s Communities Foundation
Francie Luke Silverman Foundation
Stackner Family Foundation
Streich Family Foundation
E. C. Styberg Foundation
Olive I. and Eunice J. Toussaint Foundation
U.S. Bank
We Energies Foundation
Weyco Group Charitable Trust
Wispact Foundation

TRIBUTE GIFTS

Generous family and friends have honored the following people:

IN HONOR OF

Berit Aaker Pietsch
Kari Pietsch-Wangard and Stewart Wangard
Cory Ballard
Darlene Williams
Borchard Family
Randall and Elaine Hoth
Brett Bostrack
Michele Blackwell
Jim Burns
Keiran Enright
Janette Huber
Barbara Maxwell
Dr. James Thommes
Barbara Calland
Richard Calland

IN MEMORY OF

Amy Brecher
Pat Leyda Bishop
Carol K. Fishman
Beverly Good
Michael Green
Nancy Kellman
Dana Mueller
Rosalie Rellin
Shirley Stone
Nadine and Bonita Zuckerman

The Krautkramer Family
Michele and Rodney Butalla
Leon Isaac Lipton
Mitchell and Cathy Marks
Joel Malacrida
Patrick and Bridget Coffey
Natalie and Johnny Malacrida
Mitchell J. Marks
Sid Grinker
Restoration, Inc.

The Krautkramer Family
Michele and Rodney Butalla

IN MEMORY OF

Andrew S. Johnson
Andrew J. Johnson
Michael S. Johnson

BEQUESTS

The following individuals provided support beyond their lifetimes for people who are blind and visually impaired:

Cedric H. Jaggard
Carol Schwartz
Nancy Lee Tapper

Virginia Butenhoff
Jenny Butenhoff
Jeff Nowak

Kyle Day
Diane Mellor
and Gary Day

John Derr
Kelcy and Scott Boettcher

Elizabeth Frieske
Linda and Neal Bardele
Mary Desing
Mary Rose Froschmayer
Judith Kampe
Barbara Odin
Diana Odin

Shirley Hayes
Sue and Earl Zubke

Kurt Hiller
Jay and Karin Hiller

Patricia Keating
Albert J. Anderson
Carol Grassl

Ralph and Kathryn Haller
Lorrie Keating-Heinemann
Robert Surprenant

Roger Kreutzer
Jennifer Lambert

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Julie L. Allen
Margaret and John Larsen
Dylan and Noah McGraw
Georgia B. Battermann

Mary Lou Meurer
Kenneth Meurer
and Shirley Verstegen

Tony Pitzo
Mary and Gordy Lindemann

Ione Schwenker
Joseph J. Schwenker
Joseph Seidita
William F. Thien
Martin J. Streicher
William and Cynthia Streicher

Adam Zepp
Christine Zepp
Josephine Zepp
Vision Forward is dedicated to assisting individuals of all ages who are blind or visually impaired so they may learn to function independently in all types of environments. We will continue working to ensure that people have the information they need to make important decisions about how to live successfully with vision loss and how to gain the services and support they need to fully participate in life.

To accomplish this we will engage in the following efforts:

**Access.**
We will continue to work with people who need our services, regardless of their financial resources.

**Technology.**
We will continue to offer demonstrations and training on cutting-edge assistive technology designed to help individuals with all levels of vision loss accomplish the tasks of everyday life. Assistive technology can make a significant difference in success at school, at work and in life.

**Community Awareness.**
We will disseminate information about the services we have available to those living with vision loss and network with local eyecare specialists and community organizations to spread the word. We will also continue providing outreach presentations to the community in an effort to educate and inform the public about vision issues and the services available to those living with vision loss.

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**How You Can Help**

**Make a referral**
Refer someone living with vision loss to Vision Forward.

**Come for a tour**
Visit our facility and see firsthand how Vision Forward positively impacts the lives of individuals with vision loss.

**Give a gift**
Support Vision Forward’s life-changing work by making a donation. To put your contribution to work today, make a secure, online gift at vision-forward.org/donate.

**Follow us on social media**

@VisionForwardWI
@VisionForwardAssociation

**Volunteer**
Join us to volunteer through meaningful, rewarding projects that support our clients, staff and the entire Vision Forward community.
Thank you from Zander and everyone at Vision Forward!