Vision Forward Association

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

WELCOME

Vision Forward's services continue and our commitment remains strong despite the unparalleled challenges of the past year. The pandemic has imposed widespread change, altering the way people live their lives and how the world does business, so we continue to learn and move forward, adapting as we go.

From the start of the pandemic, our number one priority has been the health and safety of our clients, members, volunteers and staff while keeping the viability of the organization in focus. Although our physical doors were closed for about ten weeks in the spring of 2020, our virtual doors were always open. Through platforms such as Teams, Zoom, Facebook Live, and webinars, we were able to continue providing direct services virtually to everyone who needed assistance. We can say with confidence that as our “new normal” evolves, it includes better and more innovative ways to provide programs and services to people living with blindness and visual impairment.

You, our supporters, were integral to our ability not only to survive the pandemic, but also to thrive in spite of it. Your partnership ensured that individuals with vision loss were able to access both virtual and in-person services over the past year, helping them persevere through this huge disruption of life. We are tremendously grateful for your commitment to our mission and for your positive impact on the people we serve. We look forward to seeing you again soon.

Stay safe and well.

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HIGHLIGHTS

Virtual Events

More Than Meets the Eye

More Than Meets the Eye, a series of free, virtual sessions, are held regularly to create awareness about the effects of vision loss on everyday life. In just 20 minutes, participants have an opportunity to hear powerful, firsthand stories of how various vision issues have impacted the lives of some of our clients.

Dining in the Dark at Home

Our signature Dining in the Dark event went virtual in 2020! In lieu of restaurant dining, participants were encouraged to choose a meal to order or prepare and eat under blindfold in the comfort of their own homes. Dining in the Dark at Home brought together more than 100 people of all

ages from across the world to experience just a taste of what people with visual impairments face on a daily basis. Five-year- old McKinley and her family were featured, allowing guests an intimate glimpse of the family’s journey from fear to hope.

Vision Connections Conference

The 2020 Vision Connections conference was held as a virtual, interactive webinar with Prevent Blindness Wisconsin. This free conference had 60 virtual attendees who gained information about vision health, low vision, and assistive devices. Vision Connections was made possible by a grant from the Irving L. Chortek Charitable Fund in memory of Robert and Jennie Chortek Donor Restricted Fund of the Jewish Community Foundation along with the Racine Community Foundation.

“Dining in the Dark was a great way to get the word out. I enjoyed the personal stories and . . . doing this online allows many more people to participate in the event. You are increasing the public’s awareness.”

Guest at 2020

Dining in the Dark at Home

“The virtual conference was nice as I no longer live in Milwaukee and would be unable to attend future live events.”

2020 conference attendee

HIGHLIGHTS

Virtual Services

Children’s Program

Establishing telehealth services for young children with vision loss was critically important to providing continuity in their learning and skills acquisition over the past year. Virtual services also gave parents and caregivers an opportunity to learn the direct coaching model and promote carryover to the home of what was learned in the classroom or therapy room. As a result of virtual guidance and parental coaching, two of our Children’s Program participants started walking on their very own through telehealth services!

Support for Seniors

A group of older adults who are all either blind or visually impaired began meeting virtually at the start of the pandemic. Led by our social worker, this group provides seniors with dedicated time to discuss issues, learn strategies and support one another, resulting in people who feel more connected during times of isolation. Meeting virtually allows more people to participate in the group, including a snowbird during winter months!

Music Therapy

Our Music Therapist provided virtual music opportunities for all ages during our pandemic closure. Children and their families were able to engage in a music group through Facebook Live and enjoy some of their favorite songs from the classroom, and adults were able to receive free guitar or ukulele lessons for personal enrichment. Music is a powerful way to stay connected!

Tec Talk Live!

These free events, hosted virtually by our assistive technology experts, provide viewers with live demonstrations of assistive technology products, followed by an open question and answer session. The informal presentations offer an opportunity for guests to get a real experience of assistive technology devices without ever having to leave the comfort of their homes.

“Tec Talk Live! provided demonstrations of the topics discussed at a pace that was easy to follow, with ample verbal description for participants who are visually impaired.”

Tec Talk Live! attendee

YOUR IMPACT

Shalene: Overcoming the Odds

Shalene lost her vision at the young age of 24 due to a condition called pseudotumor cerebri. After coming to terms with this devastating loss and the dramatic changes it imposed on her life, Shalene sought help

from Vision Forward. In a very short time, she learned how to safely cook, clean, use public transportation, navigate the community, and use technology designed for individuals with visual impairments.

When Shalene realized that vision loss did not diminish her capabilities, she enrolled in college. To support her on her journey, our orientation and mobility specialist joined her on campus to help her learn to get around and find all her classes. After she graduated and secured employment, our assistive technology specialist went to her workplace to assist her in learning to use a screen reader and voice recorder, and to help educate her co-workers on how to best support her.

Today, Shalene is the proud mom of four-year-old Madison who has autism. In her position as a Peer Support Specialist, Shalene is using her education and experience to make a difference for others in the community. Shalene’s resolve and tenacity have helped her move beyond her vision loss, enabling her to accomplish anything she desires. She is truly an inspiration!

“Vision Forward has been a very great asset in my life.”

SHALENE

78% of all clients served were adults

70% of adults were age 60 and above

YOUR IMPACT

Ephraim: Seven Years of Spunk!

As Ephraim makes his way into the building and down the hall, he greets friends and teachers along his route, offering a cheery hello. He is a very welcome member of the classroom, as his playfulness and keen sense of humor make the day fun for everyone.

As sprightly as he is today, Ephraim’s early days were not so carefree because he was born with a hole in his heart, limited vision and other developmental challenges. In time, with the aid of heart surgery, prescription glasses, and a variety of therapy services—music, occupational, physical and speech-language—Ephraim began to meet his milestones. And he hasn’t stopped impressing people since!

Ephraim’s sweet and social nature makes him a joy to have around. He likes to talk and sing and play with his friends, just like most kids his age. He also enjoys doing art projects, especially painting with lots of color! Ephraim is preparing to attend a new school this fall, and we are so proud of all he has accomplished. He may have had a slow start in life, but Ephraim has developed the spunk and tenacity to be successful wherever he goes.

83 children and youth were served through

5,599 hours of direct service

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Bill: Good Will Ambassador

Long-time Vision Forward donor Bill Radonski is an ideal friend. He’s someone who does not wait to be asked, but rather calls to inquire about needs and how he can help. And he has helped a lot.

Bill’s 58-year involvement with the Lions Club is what initially connected him with Vision Forward’s mission of serving people who are blind and

visually impaired. Over the years, he has supported Vision Forward not only as a donor, but also as a volunteer. Bill has prepared food for Christmas parties, played Santa Claus, orchestrated cookouts, and helped satisfy wish lists through his local Lions Club and his own personal
giving . . . all things he says he enjoys doing.

He takes great pride in his support of Vision Forward. “I trust you all like I trust my family,” he says.

The greatest joy in Bill’s life is his family. He and his late wife Arlene raised six children, and he now has ten grandchildren. He says having a cohesive, hardworking family— and food! —are his life’s passion. For the last 27 years of his career he ran a catering business, frequently providing meals for Vision Forward events. Through a wave of laughter he states, “Family and food . . . that’s my life . . . and it’s fun!”

Bill’s signature hat, a special gift his wife had made in Montana for his 60th birthday, makes him easy to recognize around the community. And like his hat, Bill’s heart is big as well, overflowing with kindness and generosity whenever there is a need.

In his typical gracious way, Bill approaches every day with gratitude. He shares that waking up each morning feels like a miracle and that he could scream with delight that he has another day. Now that is appreciation!

I trust you all like I trust my family.”

BILL

During a pandemic year, our volunteers were still able to give 548

hours of services valued at $15,634\*

\*Independent Sector

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Kris: Paying it Forward

Kris is a positive, upbeat volunteer who takes on any task she is given

with a smile. She can often be found in our volunteer office conducting quarterly phone surveys that help determine the effectiveness of our services. When Kris calls clients to inquire about services received or products purchased, she very naturally connects with them, putting them at ease to share honest responses and feedback. Her affable nature is truly an asset!

Although born blind, subsequent surgical procedures have made some improvement to Kris’s vision, allowing her to better see colors and detect people’s faces. But blindness has never hindered Kris. She had a

successful career as a medical transcriptionist for 42 years, and then retired from her call center work in 2017.

Kris demonstrates genuine respect and professionalism with our clients and customers, listening and responding from the vantage point of someone living with blindness. She has a true pay-it-forward approach to life, volunteering as a way to give back and help make the world a better place. Her kindness and compassion even led her to make check-in calls to Vision Forward members during the height of the pandemic just to see how they were doing!

We are truly grateful for Kris’s kind heart and selfless spirit.

“It’s my turn to give back. I’m proud of who I am and how I turned out, and

I couldn’t have done it without the people that helped me.”

KRIS

Vision Forward volunteer

More than volunteers submitted over 100 video and audio book recordings for children with vision loss during the pandemic

Vision Forward has been successfully serving individuals who are blind and visually impaired for more than 100 years. The heart of our daily work is realized through the following programs and services:

Vision Rehabilitation Services

For Adults

• Low Vision Clinic

• Technology Training

• Orientation and Mobility

• Activities of Daily Living

• Support

For Children

• Special Education

• Vision and Sensory Training

• Music Therapy

• Occupational Therapy

• Physical Therapy

• Speech-language Therapy

• Functional Vision Assessments

• Youth Program

Community Outreach

Vision Forward Store

All programs and services are provided regardless of an individual’s or family’s ability to pay

All treatment plans are created to address the unique needs of each person seeking assistance

Our transportation services travel an 80-mile radius, bringing clients to and from services safely

STATEMENT

Statement of Activities YEAR ENDING MARCH 31, 2021

Total Assets: $7,238,120

Total Liabilities: $252,872

Net Assets: $6,985,248

Revenue

Contributions = 53%

Programs & Services = 16%

Other = 31%

Expenses

Programs & Services = 83%

General & Administration = 17%

46% of children and 50% of adults served came from a household with an annual income of less than $25,000

Despite pandemic, we served more 4,000 individuals.

1,809 hours of direct service provided to adult clients, helping them learn to live successfully with vision loss

112 zip codes served, including four of the eight highest poverty zip codes in Wisconsin

46,677 views of our 52 informational videos that were released

on our YouTube channel

2.5 times more Vision Forward clients have age-related macular degeneration (AMD) than any other diagnosis

THANK YOU, DONORS!

Thank You!

The generosity of our donors over the past year was significant to our ability to continue providing direct services, both virtual and

in-person, despite the ongoing pandemic.

Your commitment to our mission makes a positive and life-changing impact!

IN-KIND DONATIONS OF COVID-19 SUPPLIES

Vision Forward received in-kind donations of bleach, child and adult face masks, children’s toys, face shields, floor markers for social distancing, gloves, hand sanitizer, infrared thermometers and sanitizing products to help us ensure the safety of our building space, clients and staff during the pandemic.

Thank you to the following organizations for generously donating one or more of these critical supplies:

Beyond Vision

Concordia University

Ronald McDonald House Charities

United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

Vision Forward Association is truly grateful for each gift in support of 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.

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Barbara A Tally

16th Place LLC

Fatoumata Bakayoko

Bridgette Battle

Cynthia Bergeron

Amy Brecher

Heather Gehrke

Jacqulyn Gerard

Laura Glapinski

Ellen D. Harper

Amanda Jamerson

Roxsand King

Jayme Montgomery

Rob Musiel

Keith and Laura Robinson

Lynn Rofritz Tally

Jennifer Tally

Nena Tally

Susan Tannenbaum

Jennifer Fry

JoAnn, David, Sarah and Juliana Galst

David Hankin

Jill Tarnoff

Sylvia Uler

Jane Hosni

Christian Visser

Rose Visser

Zemira and Thelma

Susan A. Lobo

Adam Zepp

Christine Zepp

Josephine Zepp

BEQUESTS

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

Estate of Mary Frances Bullamore

Emil Hunkel Memorial Trust

Mary Houtkamp Trust

Lorraine A. Kelly Revocable Trust

Nancy Lee Tapper Revocable Trust

\*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.

Vision Forward Association

912 N. Hawley Road Milwaukee, WI 53213

(414) 615-0100

vision-forward.org