



Vision Forward

Association

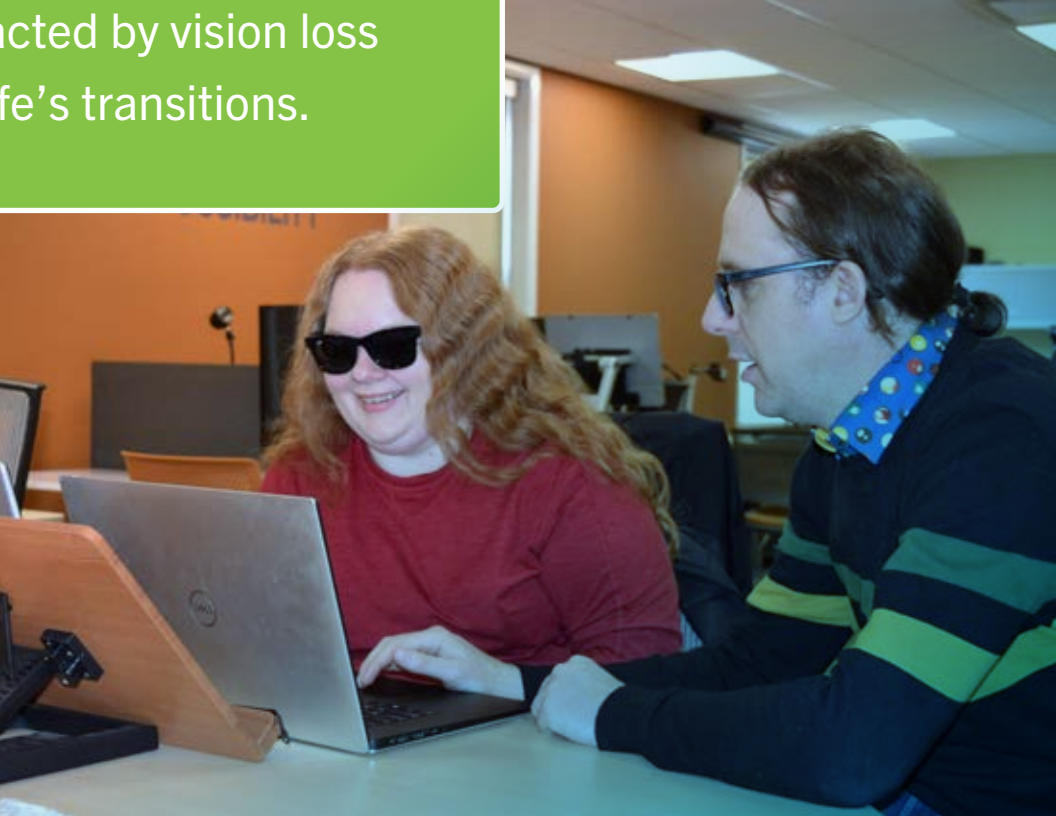
Annual Impact Report

April 1, 2024 - March 31, 2025



OUR MISSION

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



Message from the CEO

As we reflect on the past year, I am proud to share how Vision Forward has continued to grow and evolve in service of our mission. At a time when the need for our services continues to rise, we have not only expanded our reach but also strengthened the foundation that supports our work—ensuring we are well-positioned to meet future challenges and opportunities.

We've remained deeply committed to innovation, continuously evaluating and enhancing our programs to stay at the forefront of service delivery. At the same time, our focus on individualized support remains unwavering. Every person who walks through our doors brings unique goals and strengths, and it is our privilege to join them in their journey toward greater independence and confidence.

This year, we experienced record support from our corporate partners—an incredible testament to the power of collaboration and shared purpose. These partnerships,

If you have any questions or would like to come for a tour, please contact me at jborchardt@vision-forward.org or 414-615-0121.

alongside those we hold with community organizations and service providers, are vital to creating comprehensive and innovative programming. We're excited to continue building new partnerships that expand our impact and strengthen our ability to better serve the community together. Through careful and strategic financial stewardship, Vision Forward has remained strong even amid economic uncertainty and funding challenges. This stability has allowed us to grow thoughtfully while staying true to our values and long-term vision.

Most importantly, I want to thank you—our donors, advocates, and champions. Your generosity and belief in our mission make all of this possible. You are truly the backbone of our success.

Jacci Borchardt
CEO, Vision Forward Association



"I was diagnosed with a condition called Stargardt Disease, which is a genetic condition that affects central vision. It's been incredibly fulfilling to take a mission that means so much to me personally and to be able to turn that around and affect the lives of other people in our community."

Jacci Borchardt, CEO



Quoted from February 23, 2025 interview on Ellenbecker Investment Group's Milwaukee Philanthropic Community radio segment.



“Be open. Ask for help when you need it. It takes time and effort, but investing in your independence is worth it.” – COLLEEN ZIEFLE

YOUR IMPACT

Embracing Change, Building Confidence, and Finding Community

When Colleen Ziefle was diagnosed in her early 50s with early onset macular degeneration, she wasn't surprised—it ran in her family. But knowing something might happen and actually living through it were two very different things. Gradually, her central vision faded, leaving her to rely mostly on her peripheral sight. On top of that, she began experiencing visual hallucinations—a common but unsettling side effect of the condition.

At that time Colleen was working full-time as a mortgage underwriter. Thankfully, her employer was supportive and helped her set up tools to accommodate her vision in a home office. She connected with Vision Forward's optometrist, Dr. Heather Hinson, who helped her better understand her diagnosis and what was possible. She also began working with Lauren Nelson, an occupational therapist, and Luke Scriven, assistive technology specialist. Together, they introduced her to accessible technology solutions like using a verbal navigator in Microsoft Word and taught her how to maximize efficiency through keyboard shortcuts and screen readers.

Now retired, Colleen remains actively connected with Vision Forward. She watches Tech Connect, Vision Forward's bi-weekly YouTube production for those interested in learning more about technology for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

She also participates in a monthly support group, and it was the group that encouraged her to start using a white cane—not just for navigation, but so that others would recognize she has a visual impairment. “If you just look at me, you wouldn't know,” she explains. “The cane helps tell people something I shouldn't always have to explain.” In her group, she also learned that movie theaters had headphones for people with visual impairments that would allow her to hear a description of each scene, often picking up more details than her sighted husband.

In addition to her newfound tech skills and support network, Colleen has also embraced her creative side. She joined a knitting class at Vision Forward, where she learned how to adapt the craft to her visual needs—proving that vision loss doesn't have to limit the things you enjoy doing.



Milwaukee Eye Care remains a strong partner in our mission, regularly referring patients for low vision services and supporting key initiatives. In 2024, they sponsored both our Dining in the Dark fundraiser and our quarterly Saturday educational sessions.

In December 2024, Vision Forward client Colleen Ziefle attended one such session – Surviving the Holidays – a product demonstration event to explore tools that make daily life easier. We're grateful for Milwaukee Eye Care's growing support in helping us better serve people living with vision loss.



YOUR IMPACT

Making Incredible Gains: Eugene Kiehnau

“During those early periods of time where we recently got the diagnosis, it was very emotional for us as parents trying to process what that would mean for his future. It’s hard to say in words how much Vision Forward has helped, just having someone who understands what we’re going through.”

– ALEX, EUGENE’S MOM

When Eugene was just two months old, his mom, Alex, noticed something unusual — his eyes moved rapidly back and forth. While his family could tell he sensed light, they weren’t sure what he could see. Concerned, they took him to a pediatric eye specialist, who diagnosed Eugene with Optic Nerve Hypoplasia and Septo Optic Dysplasia — conditions that can significantly impact vision and development.

For first-time parents, the experience was overwhelming. Some medical staff emphasized worst-case scenarios, painting a scary picture of what the future might hold. At that time, Eugene wasn’t using his vision much at all. As a result, his early development was slower than expected, especially his motor skills.

Their pediatrician recommended Vision Forward Association, and Alex and her family enrolled Eugene in early intervention services when he was just five months old. It was a pivotal moment.

Through Vision Forward's Birth to 3 Program, the family was connected with Colleen Kickbush, a Vision Forward Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI). From the very beginning, Colleen helped them understand how to support Eugene's vision. In a darkened room, they saw him begin to track a lighted toy — one of the first signs that he was starting to use his vision with purpose.

Colleen introduced activities that supported both Eugene's visual development and his motor skills. These included focusing on faces, tracking toys with light, and combining visual cues with physical therapy. Small, consistent efforts began to yield big results.

One piece of advice Alex will never forget was simple but powerful:

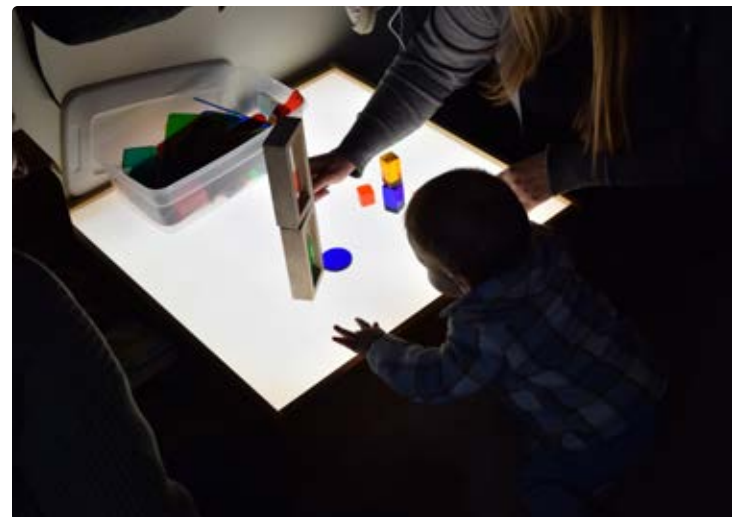
“Treat him like a normal baby.”

This meant trusting that Eugene would learn and grow in his own way — using not just vision, but also his other senses. It gave Alex confidence to let Eugene try new things, instead of assuming he needed help with everything.

Now, just over a year later, Eugene is thriving. He now sees Tina Mekeel, Vision Forward Teacher of the Visually Impaired, in Waukesha County and continues to meet milestones his family once wondered whether he'd reach.

Alex beams with pride as she shares one of her favorite memories: the time Eugene crawled across the room, picked up a toy, and brought it back to show her — grinning with joy. It was a shared point of pride for both of them. For Alex, these milestones are not taken for granted. She knows that, because of Eugene's diagnosis, each achievement is not just a step forward — it's a triumph.

Today, Eugene is a bright, social little boy whose personality shines. Thanks to early intervention, dedicated teachers, and the support of Vision Forward, his future looks full of possibilities.



YOUR IMPACT



429 referrals were made from eye care professionals for children and adults this past year.

This growing number of referrals plays a vital role in connecting individuals with vision loss to the support, services, and tools available to help them overcome challenges. These referrals reflect the ongoing trust and partnership we share with eye care providers in ensuring access to vision rehabilitation services.



241 comprehensive eye exams were provided in 2024-2025, up from 179 in the first year.

In 2023, Vision Forward launched routine eye care services, increasing the availability of comprehensive eye care for our community, including individuals who may have limited access due to Medicaid coverage and often have to wait months to get an appointment elsewhere.



4,934 people in 2024-2025 were connected through Vision Forward's 168 outreach presentations.

Outreach was expanded by connecting with organizations like new Lions Club partners, Milwaukee's United Community Center, the Hispanic Health Resource Center, the Harambee Health Fair, and Sixteenth Street Clinic.

Dining IN THE Dark

Vision Forward's signature fundraising event at the Wisconsin Club helped raise an all-time high of more than \$221,000 to support Vision Forward's mission.



Presenting Partner

ibvi (Industries for the Blind and Visually Impaired)

Luminary Partners

Beyond Vision

Hiller Ford

Retina & Vitreous Consultants of Wisconsin

Visionary Partners

Associated Bank

Brett and Kathy

Bostrack

HR Sherpaz

Medical College of Wisconsin Eye Institute

Mitchell and Cathy Marks

Milwaukee Eye Care

Newmark

Peck Foundation, Milwaukee LTD

PNC

Rick and Lisa Roszkowski

Cindy and Roger Schaus

David and Paula Strelitz

SunLife / DentaQuest

Leader Partners

Creative Business Interiors

M.E. Dey & Co.

O'Leary & Anick

Guide Partners

CTaccess

CureMD

EY (Ernst & Young)

R&R Insurance

Vision Forward youth participated in **Beep Baseball** on March 8, 2025, with siblings, parents and other family members. Beeping baseballs and beeping bases meant everyone could take part.

The event was hosted by the Milwaukee Baseball Club at their Community Center, located near Miller Park Way and Mitchell Street. Because of the Club's partnership with the Milwaukee Brewers, the Racing Sausages showed up to play ball and cheer on the participants.



Thank you to the Marks family!



To recognize individuals who have included Vision Forward in their estate plans, the **Adam Zepp Legacy Society** was created, named after Vision Forward's founder. Among society members are **Mitchell and Cathy Marks**. Mitchell shares, "Vision loss or impairment does not discriminate. It can affect anyone, at any age. We've seen it in our family and among friends. I've experienced it myself."

Mitchell and Cathy are active in the community and enjoy being involved with family. Their family was part of Vision Forward's featured night at the Milwaukee Milkmen baseball game in August 2024, with their daughter Michaela singing the National Anthem.



Youth Leads by Example

Inspired by a close friend with a visual impairment, 12-year-old **Dominic Segura** chose to support Vision Forward as part of his Black Belt Project in Tae Kwon Do. He raised more than \$500 to donate to Vision Forward, including funding a PenFriend labeling and identification device for Vision Forward's demo toolkit. In addition, Dominic collected "wish list" items supporting both adult and children's services including craft supplies, adaptive cooking tools, scented Play-Doh, and more.

Thank you to the Foundations who support Vision Forward's mission!

Albert J. and Flora H. Ellinger Foundation
AO Smith Foundation, Inc.
Bader Philanthropies, Inc.
Brewers Community Foundation, Inc.
City of Wauwatosa Department of
Community Development
Davidson and Harley Fund
Dr. Harry J. Heeb Foundation
E.C. Styberg Foundation
Elizabeth Elser Doolittle Charitable Trusts
Emil Ewald Family Foundation, Inc.
Evan and Marion Helfaer Foundation
Gardner Foundation
George F. Moss Foundation
Glen Stacey Memorial Fund
Greater Milwaukee Foundation
 Carl and Alma S. Greilach Fund
 Charles and Mary Maglio Family Fund
 Ebert Family Fund
 Elvita E. Clementi Fund
 Sunrise Foundation Fund
Jerome J. and Dorothy H. Holz
Family Foundation

Jewish Community Foundation
 Bomzer Family Donor Advised Fund of
 the Jewish Community Foundation of the
 Milwaukee Jewish Federation
 Irving L. Chortek Charitable Fund in
 Memory of Robert and Jennie Chortek
 Donor Restricted Fund
Krause Family Foundation
Ladish Company Foundation
Lavelle Fund for the Blind
Margaret Wiegand Trust
Marjorie L. Christiansen Foundation
Melitta S. and Joan M. Pick Charitable Trust
Nicholas Family Foundation Trust
Otto Bremer Trust
Patrick and Anna M. Cudahy Fund
Paula Hunkel FBO Emil Hunkel
Memorial Trust
Peck Foundation, Milwaukee LTD
PPC Foundation
Racine Community Foundation, Inc.
 John and Gladys Franco Fund for the
 Visually Impaired
Ralph Evinrude Foundation

Saint John's Communities Foundation
SFC, Inc.
Stackner Family Foundation
Streich Family Foundation
The Catholic Community Foundation
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Foundation,
Inc.
Waukesha County
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We Energies
Foundation



IMPACT SNAPSHOT

225
adults received training on assistive technology.

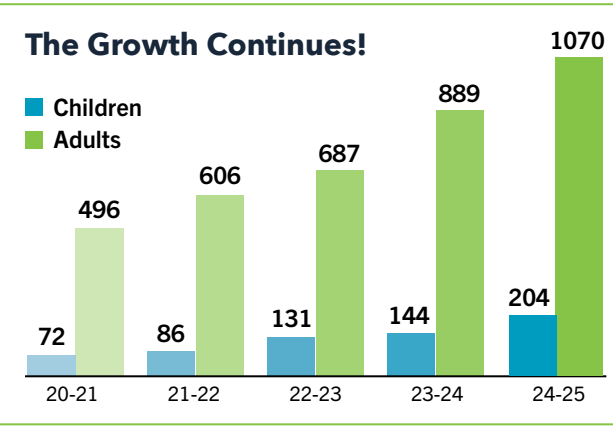


20%
of Vision Forward donors increased their giving this year, resulting in nearly \$86,000 of additional revenue.

60%
of the children we served were children of color, compared to 57% the previous year.



135
new donors contributed almost \$65,000 to Vision Forward's mission.

400
door-to-door round trip rides for clients were provided by our specially trained drivers.

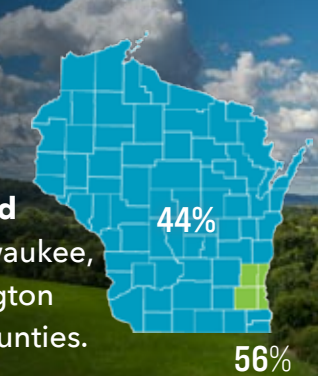


33
new optometrists and ophthalmologists made referrals to our low vision program.



2,000
hours of skilled therapy (PT, OT, SLP, and Music) were provided in our children's program this year.

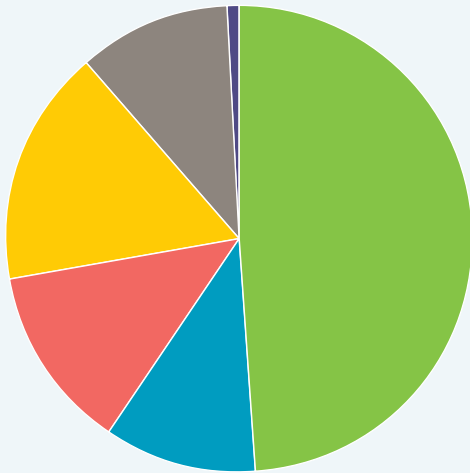
44%
of children served lived outside Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington and Waukesha counties.



Financial Overview

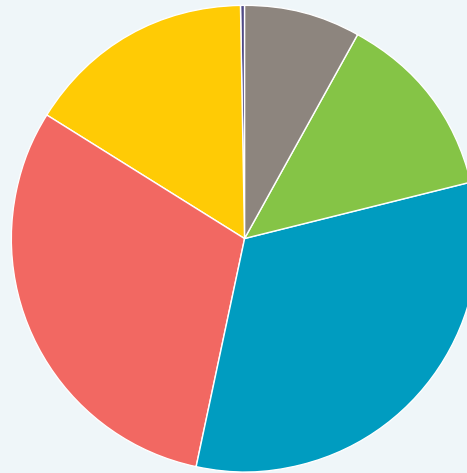
April 1, 2024 - March 31, 2025

Revenue



■ Philanthropy	\$ 1,690,662
■ Adult Programs	367,240
■ Children & Youth Programs	431,285
■ Vision Forward Store	565,668
■ Investment Return, Net	370,603
■ Other Income	20,865
Total Revenue	\$ 3,446,323

Expenses



■ Administration	\$ 301,668
■ Fundraising & Special Events	491,943
■ Adult Programs	1,201,962
■ Children & Youth Programs	1,137,378
■ Vision Forward Store	589,444
■ Other Expenses	2,887
Total Expenses	\$ 3,725,282



Board of Directors



As President of Vision Forward’s Board of Directors, I thank you for reviewing our Annual Impact Report. We are proud of what we have accomplished, and we are grateful to our many volunteers, stakeholders, businesses and donors for their goodwill and support.

I discovered Vision Forward quite by accident. I had just been diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa and told nothing could be done to restore the vision I had lost or to halt the disease’s ongoing degradation. It was a dark moment.

But as my wife drove me home from the hospital, we happened to notice a sign for Vision Forward. I called, went in, and found hope.

Here at Vision Forward – with the guidance of a case worker, a low-vision optometrist, and an assistive technology specialist – I learned the skills and techniques that enabled me to continue my career and to live my life with independence and vitality.

There is no other agency in Wisconsin that provides the comprehensive services that Vision Forward provides. Our ever-growing reach extends to under-served communities across the state, and our ever-growing list of clients includes blind and visually impaired individuals in all of life’s stages, from infants just discovering the world to seniors wishing to maintain their independence.

On their behalf and on behalf of the entire Board of Directors, I thank you.



Crocker Stephenson
Board President

2024-25 Board of Directors

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*TERM ENDED 12/31/2024



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