



Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



MISSION

Promote the dignity and empowerment of people in Wisconsin who are blind and visually impaired by providing services, advocating legislation and educating the general public.

VALUES

Inclusivity

Actively seek and welcome diverse people, experiences and perspectives.

Integrity

Steward the Council's precious human, financial and capital resources.

Uncompromising Respect

Uphold the dignity and worth of all individuals and groups in how we treat each other in times of agreement and conflict.

On the cover: Coleus, a photograph by Ellen Connor of Oregon, Wisconsin, features several plants with lime green leaf edges and maroon leaf interiors.

This piece was displayed as part of the Council's 2020 fall Gallery Night, which featured the work of 14 visually impaired artists from across Wisconsin.



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A Message From the CEO & Board Chair

2020 was quite the year! Like so many of our nonprofit friends, the Council had to put the brakes on our plans for the year, canceling events, limiting our services, transitioning to a remote workforce. However, the needs of people living with vision loss remained and in many cases the pandemic increased the urgency of those needs. Transportation options shut down or decreased service, leaving people with few options to get to medical appointments or do necessary errands. Visits from family, friends or service providers decreased or stopped, often leaving people feeling isolated and without the needed support. The challenges seemed daunting, especially in an ever-changing COVID-19 landscape.

How would the Council respond? When faced with what seemed to be impossible challenges, we hunkered in to take on the necessary things:

- Assuring that all staff could work successfully from home and maintain employment.
- Figuring out how to get adaptive devices like magnifiers into the hands of clients and customers.
- Triaging requests for support over the phone and through email.

Every day, every week, every month we took the next steps forward to serve our mission of advocacy, education and vision services. Along the way we found innovative ways to do things that taught us a great deal about what is possible:

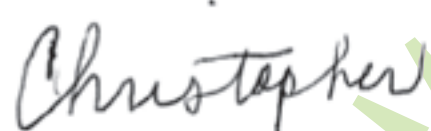
online advocacy work, remote computerized instruction, virtual events that inspire. Many of these innovations will continue as we move past the pandemic, because they've increased access for people with vision loss throughout the state.

Helen Keller reminds us that, "Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much." In 2020 the Council board and staff, our donors and volunteers, our advocacy and community partners worked together to transform immense challenges into greater opportunities to fulfill our mission of promoting the dignity and empowerment of people in Wisconsin living with vision loss.

In the pages that follow, we share highlights of these innovations and collaborations. Please enjoy these stories and accept our heartfelt gratitude for all of your support.

Sincerely,


Denise Jess
CEO/Executive Director


Chris Richmond
Chair



Vision Services

The Vision Services program helped hundreds of people adapt to and cope with changing vision in 2020. The volume of calls from people who are visually impaired or blind greatly increased, and at the same time, the Vision Services team continued to offer its services in new ways and even add new programs.

"I don't know what I would do without it now," Jane Keggi says of one of these new offerings. "The Low Vision Support Group started as a way for people from around the state to meet online during a year when you couldn't get together with others in-person. Every month I continue to look forward to connecting with people in this support group."

Support is something she worried would be hard to find when everything shut down. But the Appleton woman, who has macular degeneration, joined the new Low Vision Support Group right away and is grateful for all it has given to her.

"I'm impressed and encouraged by those I've met in the group," Keggi says. "I've also learned about accessible tools and adapting what I have to get my everyday things done."

The Council's Sharper Vision Store served more customers than usual. Clients or customers accessed the store online to shop at their



convenience. Staff took orders by phone and through one-on-one appointments to meet the needs and goals of visitors.

"I can't even tell you how happy I am to have the resources the Council offers."

Jane Keggi
Vision Services Client

Individual attention worked well for vision rehabilitation. The team continued to assist people over the phone, by computer and used creativity to get together in-person safely whether on a porch or in an isolated meeting space.

Access technology classes offered online grew in the number of participants from around the state being able to access Zoom to take part.

Throughout the year, one thing remained constant for the Vision Services team: The importance of continuing to provide needed services.

"I can't even tell you how happy I am to have the resources the Council offers," Keggi says.

Education

Education is opportunity. It's a value held in high regard at the Council. Continuing to offer educational programs and services in 2020 became crucially important.

The education team had experience hosting online events, having held webinars in years past as part of a statewide mission to reach more people. This expanded options for people with vision loss, their family members and those who work in social services but couldn't travel for those specific sessions.

"This got me back into something I really love, and it also gave me back something I thought I was going to lose along with my sight."

Ellen Connor
Virtual Class Participant

With almost every seminar and event online this year, participation in the Council's webinars grew. Even the popular Birding by Ear classes held in partnership with Madison Audubon Society were a huge success online.



"The virtual Birding by Ear classes have been a precious gem during the months of a pandemic," Ellen Connor says. The Oregon resident is visually impaired. Her partner Jon is sighted and remains her birding companion after they participated in these classes together.

"This got me back into something I really love, and it also gave me back something I thought I was going to lose along with my sight," Connor says.

The opportunity to continue learning was also a focus of the annual academic scholarships program. The ceremony honoring the recipients who all live with vision loss turned into a more personal virtual celebration in 2020.

"The intimate nature of the program made me feel like I was talking directly to each of the students," Council CEO/Executive Director Denise Jess says.

Opportunity for education grew throughout the year, and the Council was able to step-up and reach people of all ages in all corners of the state.

"Thank you for your creativity and knowledge shared in these classes," Connor says. "Also thank you to the classmates we met and who shared their knowledge, impressions, and good humor with everyone to make this education opportunity so rich."

Birding by Ear participants (pre-pandemic) meet to listen to birds at the Pheasant Branch Conservancy in Middleton.

Working together brings better results.

The Council had opportunities to collaborate with other coalitions, commissions and communities to advocate for life-changing legislative priorities. Issues focusing on services, education and voting rights for people who are visually impaired and blind were made more important during the year.

“The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented barriers for many voters with disabilities to cast their ballot,” Disability Rights Wisconsin’s Director of External Advocacy Barbara Beckert says.

Voting disparities during a pandemic combined with a Presidential election year brought the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition, the Accessible Voting Advisory Committee and the Council together to raise awareness and education around the state’s lack of an Americans with Disabilities (ADA) compliant absentee ballot.

Council CEO/Executive Director Denise Jess was invited to be part of a task force to ensure accessibility in the voting process. The Governor’s Executive Order 73 stating people with disabilities must be given equal access to voting during elections is a direct result of the work by the task force.

“The Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired was a valued partner and leader in



the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition’s work to ensure that our elections throughout the pandemic were accessible and inclusive of voters with disabilities,” Beckert says.

Another legislative priority is the lack of affordable, accessible transportation. The Council advocated for a group to focus specifically on bridging gaps between agencies providing services who rely on alternate transportation options. The Wisconsin Non-Driver Advisory Committee started meeting in 2020 and is using awareness and education to influence and problem-solve to create change.

“The Council and CEO/Executive Director Denise Jess advocated tirelessly for transportation needs for people who are blind and visually impaired, and for all Wisconsin residents who can’t drive or choose not to,” Wisconsin Department of Transportation Division of Budget and Strategic Initiatives Administrator Aileen Switzer says. “As part of the Wisconsin Non-Driver Advisory Committee, Denise has gone beyond merely stating the challenges. She’s rolled up her sleeves and worked to find solutions, bringing stakeholders together from many different groups. It’s a privilege to work alongside Denise and look forward to continuing our productive partnership.”

In the end, working together makes things better for everyone. The Council’s advocacy efforts will help get people where they need to go, be able to vote absentee privately and independently, and in the end, live the best life possible.

Thank you to our generous donors. Find a complete list on our website at WCBlind.org.

Friends of the Council gave \$500 or more in 2020:

- Carol Adams
- Anonymous
- Thomas Beach
- Priscilla & Anthony Beadell
- Claire Box
- Sandy Briski
- Chris Doering
- Gary Esse
- Gerald & Betty Fuller
- Nona Graves & Dennis Ameden
- Green Lake Lions Club
- Greenville Lioness Club
- William & Michelle Holcomb
- Robert Holloway
- Hortonville Lions Club
- Kay Hutchison
- Denise Jess & Jani Koester
- Chip & Christy Kaufman
- Peter Kaufman
- Kester-Angle Family Fund
- Joan & Ronald Klebs
- Candice Koehn
- John & Terry Ladwig

- Marvin Levy
- Barbara Lockwood
- Lomira Lions Club
- Nicholas & Lauren Manusos
- Neshkoro Lions Club
- John & Kathy O'Connor
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- Gloria Turgeson
- Audrey Uber
- Lori & Mark Werbeckes
- Donald Whitman
- Margaret Williams
- Barbra Winter
- Terri Young, MD
- John & Roslyn Zeltins

Foundation, Sponsor and Matching gifts supported our mission:

- Anonymous
- Alliant Energy Foundation
- AmazonSmile Foundation
- American Family Mutual Insurance

- Associated Bank
- CUNA Mutual Group
- FM Global Foundation
- Howard Frankenthal Family Foundation
- Greater Milwaukee Foundation
 - Carl & Alma S. Greilach Fund
 - William R. & Lois J. Phillips Fund
- Industries for the Blind & Visually Impaired
- Infosec
- Liberty Mutual Foundation
- Madison Gas & Electric Foundation
- NeuGen
- Anonymous
- PayPal Giving Fund
- Racine Community Foundation
 - John & Gladys Franco Fund for the Visually Impaired
- Sargento
- Sub-Zero Wolf Foundation
- SVA Certified Public Accountants
- Thrivent Financial
- The Vogel Foundation
- Waukesha County Community Foundation
 - William & Michele Holcomb Family Fund

We gratefully received bequests from:

- Jean DeRuyter
- David Hough
- Emil Hunkel
- Claremont Jackman
- Nancy Tapper

Legacy Circle members have named WCBVI in their estate plan:

- Robert and Carolyn Arndt
- Helen Bewick
- Kathleen Brockman
- Raymond Cubberly
- Anonymous
- Neil & Peggy Ford
- Rachel & Daniel Golla
- Loretta Himmelsbach
- Anonymous
- Steven Johnson
- Marjean Kuschel
- Ester Lovelace
- Stan Nelson
- Anonymous
- Arnold & Alice Tucker
- Scott & Beverly Verhage
- Chris & Theresa Zenchenko

White Cane Circle members make monthly gifts:

- Martha Abrams
- Deen Amusa
- Mike and Susan Archer
- Steve & Susan Baudo
- Katherine Corbett
- Sue Cowan
- Claire Dick
- James & Karen Fletcher
- Susan Gentry
- Patricia Gibson
- Rosemary Goodrich
- Nona Graves & Dennis Ameden
- Denise Jess
- Scott & Brenda Johnson
- Rajnish Kapur family
- Candice Koehn
- Fred Loichinger
- Constance Malak
- Andrea Peterson
- Chris Richmond
- Patty Slaby
- Margaret Sommers
- Rhonda Staats
- Karen Steffen
- James Tormey



Volunteer Denise Williamson tends the Council's garden spaces.

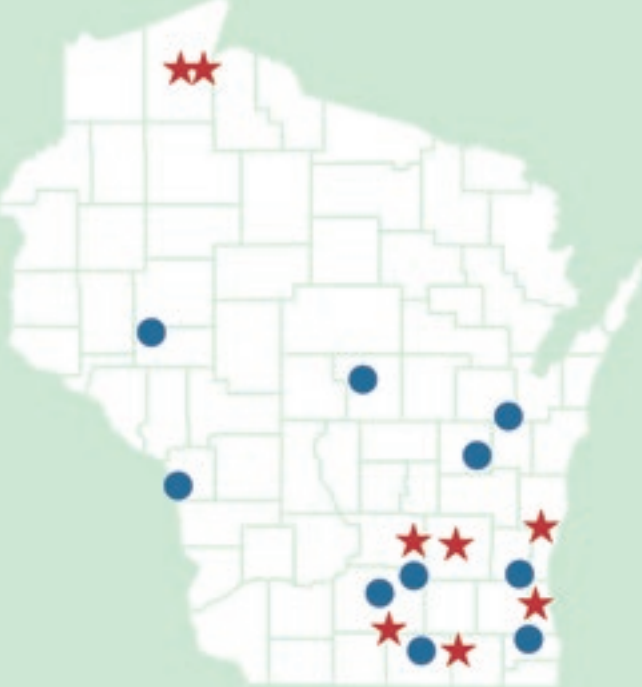
- Eunice Wagner
- Lori & Mark Werbeckes
- Donald Whitman
- Franklin Wilson
- John & Roslyn Zeltins

271 first time donors

16% of gifts were made in memory or in honor of a loved one

74% of gifts were under \$100

We provided:



8 scholarships of **\$2,000** each were awarded to students from

- ★ Cedarburg
- ★ Madison
- ★ Drummond (2)
- ★ Lowell
- ★ Milwaukee
- ★ Sun Prairie
- ★ Janesville

White canes to clients/customers in **45** WI counties. (**423** total)

White Cane Safety Day Proclamations happened in:

- Eau Claire
- Janesville
- Kaukauna
- La Crosse
- Madison
- Mequon

- Oshkosh
- State of Wisconsin
- Stevens Point
- Sun Prairie
- West Allis

Store customers came from **63** WI counties (**1280** total)

Vision Services:

- **246** vision rehabilitation visits
- **200+** phone consultations
- **172** access technology appointments provided to people from 11 WI counties
- **67** low vision rehabilitation visits



Education:

- **42** education programs reached **329** people



Volunteers contributed **785.6** hours



2020 TOTAL REVENUE	
Sales	\$40,944
Vision Services Revenue	\$15,535
Rent & Miscellaneous	\$15,617
Contributions & Grants	\$318,801
Bequests	\$394,353
Investments	\$1,303,077
Paycheck Protection Program	\$169,585
Support from Endowments	-0-
Total Revenue	\$2,257,912

2020 TOTAL EXPENSES	
Low Vision Services	\$440,781
Community Education	\$285,086
Fund Development	\$152,921
Management & General	\$264,424
Total Expenses	\$1,143,212

Staff
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**·∴ Wisconsin Council of the
Blind & Visually Impaired**

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WCBlind.org**