

Unlimited Possibilities



"It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves."
— William Shakespeare

2015 Annual Report



Wisconsin Council of the
Blind & Visually Impaired

The mission of the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired is to promote the dignity and independence of people in Wisconsin who are blind or visually impaired by providing services, advocating legislation, and educating the general public.

Greetings!

The **Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired** is truly a one-of-a-kind organization. It is the only organization in Wisconsin created by blind and visually impaired people to help meet the needs of the blind and visually impaired people within the state. Through the work of the Council in 2015, we continued to change attitudes about blindness and blind people by providing advocacy, education, and information, not only to other blind and visually impaired persons, but also to the communities-at-large.

2015 marked twenty-five years since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. Although some things, such as accessibility, have changed for the better, the number of disabled versus non-disabled workers continues to grow more and more disproportionate. Disabled persons who are qualified for jobs are often turned away, and those who do find work typically earn less than their non-disabled counterparts. This is one reason why every year the Council awards scholarships to blind and visually impaired students pursuing technical, undergraduate, graduate, and professional degrees. We are filling in the gaps by providing many services and supportive networks to our collaborating partners who also serve people who are blind or visually impaired.

It is our mission to help change the way in which individuals and communities cope with vision loss by providing low vision evaluations, adaptive aids and appliances, instruction, direction, advocacy, support and proving that there are unlimited possibilities for individuals living with vision loss.

We hope you enjoy reading of our successes in this Annual Report. We are proud to share it with you.

With warm regards,



Christopher Richmond

Chris Richmond
2015 Council President



Loretta Himmelsbach

Loretta Himmelsbach
Executive Director

2015 Board of Directors

Executive Committee

Chris Richmond

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Janesville

Rhonda Staats

1st Vice President
La Crosse

Nona Graves

2nd Vice President
West Allis

Steve Johnson

Secretary
La Crosse

Kathleen Brockman

Treasurer
Milwaukee

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Annika Konrad

Madison

Frank Lopez

Sun Prairie

Bruce Parkinson

Two Rivers

Chelsea Reilly

Edgerton

Dan Sippl

Eau Claire

Gary Traynor

Rice Lake

Reaching for the Stars: Outreach Opportunities

In March, the Council was proud to take part in **The Big Share**, the first online giving day held in the Madison area, organized by Community Shares of Wisconsin. Through online donations, the Council raised more than \$3,800 from individuals and cash prizes offered by local businesses. About 67 percent of the donors had not previously donated to the Council and it was the first time WCBVI focused on online giving.

"The Big Share provided an opportunity for the Council to reach out to potential donors through social media," said Lori Werbeckes, Fund Development Director. "We were able to showcase the services we provide to a new audience and therefore expand awareness of the needs faced by blind and visually impaired people in Wisconsin. The results were overwhelmingly positive for the Council."

The Council celebrated another inaugural event with the **Fox Valley Low Vision Fair** on August 28 in Appleton. About 120 participants from 22 communities attended the fair, providing positive feedback. Jean Kalscheur, Education and Vision Services Director, said the low vision fair

provided valuable information concerning local vendors, especially during the break-out sessions.

"The speakers really did well at engaging the audience and providing useful information on library services, transportation, safe community mobility, and self-advocacy," said Kalscheur.

"The listening session gave the Council valuable feedback and helped with our plans going forward."

During the year, the Council hosted several **educational outreach events** throughout the state, along with three webinars. Overall, the Council took part in 150 educational and outreach opportunities and more than 7,000 attended.

"From our founding as a Council, educational outreach has been a cornerstone of who we are," said Executive Director Loretta Himmelsbach. "From helping legislators understand the unique challenges of persons with visual impairment to the general public's understanding of common rules of courtesy, the Council informs people throughout the state of best practices and helpful hints. This is accomplished through technology such as webinars, through health and low vision fairs, low vision forums, and one-on-one visits with clients and family members. Our educational events have some of the best people in the field leading them!"



Low Vision Fair attendees review products during vendor fair.



The first-ever Big Share raises dollars and awareness for the Council.

The Eau Claire Lions Club presents a check to the WCBVI Recreation Committee at their winter bowling event.





475

free white canes distributed throughout Wisconsin

635



people received individual support through assistive technology training, in-home vision rehabilitation visits, low vision evaluations, orientation and mobility training

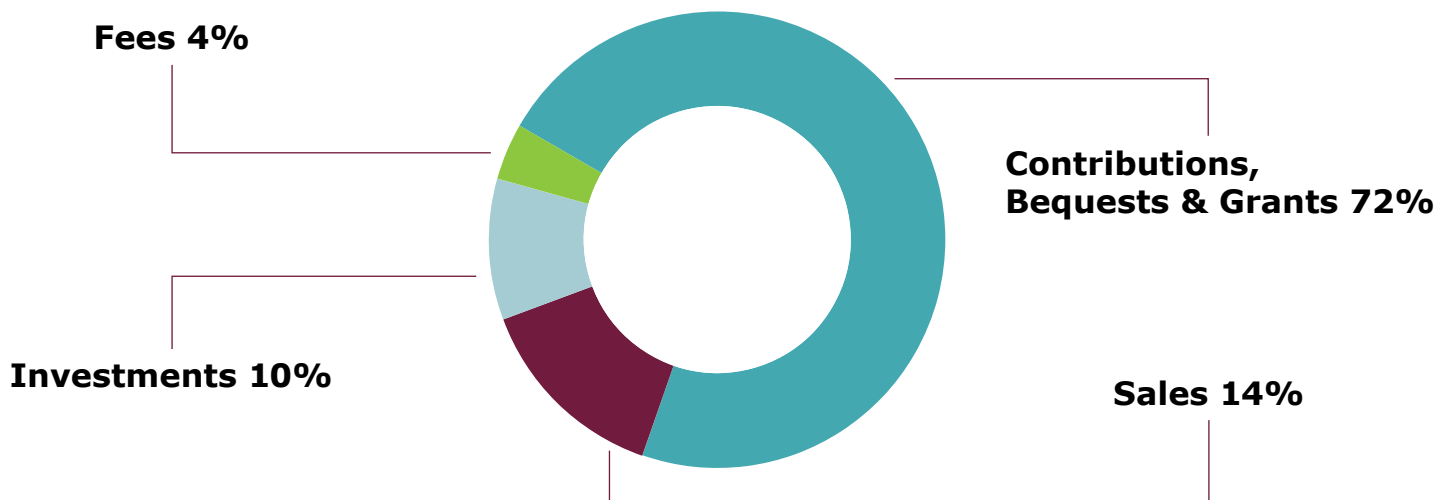


10,720

people served by the Council in 2015

Financial

2015 Total Revenue: \$1,124,047



The accompanying condensed financial data and graphical presentations as of and for the year ended December 31, 2015 were derived from the consolidated statements which were audited by Smith & Gesteland, LLP. The data and graphical presentations

Council Activities in 2015



7,227
people attended
Council-sponsored
seminars, programs
and presentations



22,748
unique visitors to
the Council website



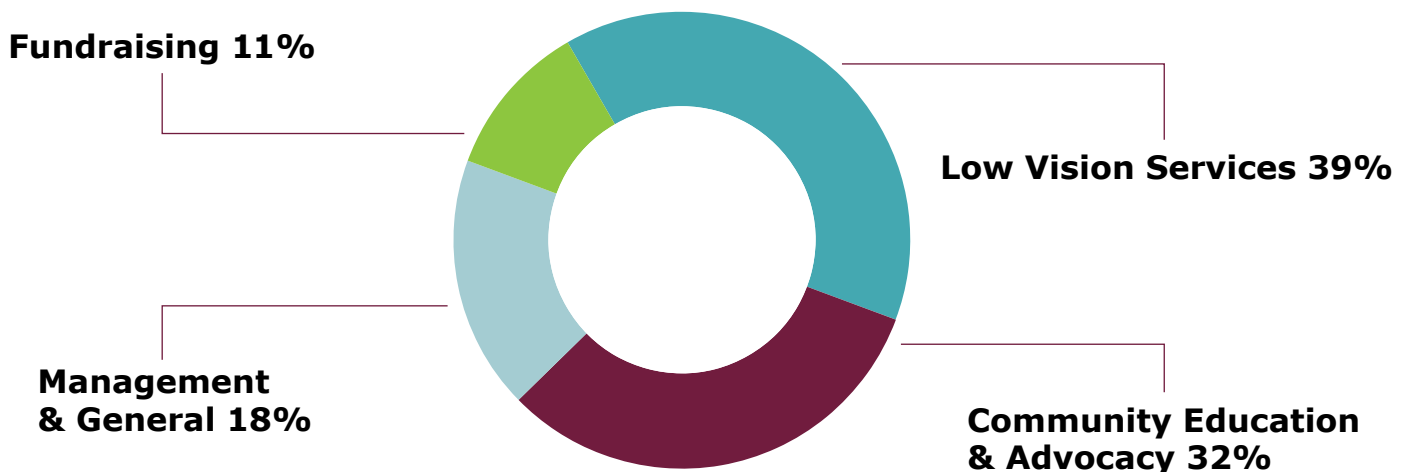
2,383
customers in the
Sharper Vision Store



2,883
volunteer and legislative
advocacy hours donated by
friends and supporters

Statement

2015 Total Expenses: \$1,188,688




should be read in conjunction with the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired's consolidated financial statements and the auditor's report. Complete copies of these statements are available upon request.

Out of this World: Service and Operations



Low Vision Therapist Amy Wurf joined WCBVI in January.

In January 2015, the Council hired **Amy Wurf** as its new **Low Vision Therapist** and opened the **Low Vision Clinic** at the WCBVI office in Madison. Wurf brings almost 20 years of experience to the Council, with the majority of her experience in

helping veterans with low vision at VA hospitals in Chicago and Madison. 

As word started to spread that Wurf could offer low vision evaluations at the Council office, she began meeting more and more clients each month. In total, Wurf performed 72 low vision evaluations last year.

"Doctors have become more familiar with us because their patients have really helped get the word out; that's why our numbers keep going up," Wurf said. "We're also able to retain clients because people hear such good things about the Council."

The Low Vision Clinic is located adjacent to the Sharper Vision Store, which provides many of her clients with visual aids.

"A lot of people don't even know we have the store right here," Wurf said. "I've been trying to let people know that we are more than just an agency. We have so many things that can help. People come in and are just blown away by the store."

Education and Vision Services Director Jean Kalscheur said the addition of LED lighting in late 2015 at the store and the Low Vision Clinic have provided many benefits, including making evaluations easier.

2015 was a benchmark year for the **Vision Services Team** as it met with exactly **500 clients**. Wurf, Kalscheur and Vision Rehabilitation Teacher Virginia DeBlaey, traveled to homes across southern Wisconsin serving clients with

rehabilitation needs, and the opening of the Low Vision Clinic allowed clients to have an evaluation at the Council office. The addition of Wurf helped the team increase its number of clients by 42% from last year.

"The Vision Services Team continues to provide individual instruction using specialized products from our Sharper Vision Store as well as techniques for performing tasks around the house, such as cooking and cleaning," DeBlaey said. "We also introduce many of our clients to accessible technology like voice-over on IOS devices and other screen-reading software for Windows computers."

At the Sharper Vision Store, **the implementation of Clover**, a new credit card machine, has made documenting purchases more accessible for visually impaired staff members. Clover features a talking touch screen for all of its functions and works well with the store's QuickBooks accounting software.

"With the automated voice, it's really slick to use," said Assistant Store Manager Tim Davis. "It's pretty neat. With the old one we had, it was a 10-step process, but this is much simpler to use, giving us more independence."

Overall, the store enjoyed another strong year, bringing in **2,383 customers** and setting a record with **\$159,560 in total sales**. 

Store Manager Brent Perzentka added several innovative products for demonstration like the Amazon Echo and the Victor Stream Reader. The Amazon Echo is a wireless speaker and voice command device. The Victor Stream Reader is a portable handheld media player that can store files for books, magazines, music and other media. While the Store does not keep these items in stock, Perzentka helps interested customers find where they can purchase them, if interested.

Above and Beyond: Your Legacy

Nearly 65 years ago, a group of people from various organizations and backgrounds — all with vision loss — had the passion and foresight to work together in creating the Wisconsin Council of the Blind. An evolving and growing organization goes through changes, which for us included the addition of vision services and education. These founders combined their talents and resources to establish the Legacy Circle of today's Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired.

Kathy Brockman, Council board member and supporter, explained why it was important for her to become a Legacy Circle member. "I think of any legacy as providing something for the future. In this case, our funds will help continue the Council's great work of serving people who are blind or visually impaired around the state," says Kathy.

The importance of the Legacy Circle lives on today. Over the past sixty plus years, hundreds of people have made planned gifts to the Council, which enable us to serve future generations of people with vision loss.

If you plan to remember the Council with a planned gift in your estate, please contact Lori Werbeckes at (608)237-8114 or email at lwerbeckes@wcblind.org.



Kathy Brockman

Legacy Circle Members

Helen Bewick
Kathleen Brockman
Ray Cubberly
Anonymous
Steve Johnson
Ester Lovelace
Stan Nelson
Arnold & Alice Tucker
Scott & Beverly Verhage
Chris & Theresa Zenchenko

We gratefully received bequests from:

Ruth Birge
Marion & Albert Deppeler
Gertrude Gebhardt
Louis Haas Family Trust
Emil Hunkel
Claremont Jackson
William Moll
Thomas Sinicki



Arnold & Alice Tucker

We received gifts in memory of:

Elliouse Beatty
Jerome Beere
Stella Stone Berven
Frances Boles
George Brandt
Elaine Brown
Dr. F. D. Buttner
Bob Byrd
Marion Chappelle
Omer Creydt
Elizabeth Russell Davis
Milton Delforge
Mina Ehly
Donald Engen
Elvere Evans
Patricia Feller
Eleanor Garbelman
Lorean Gifford
Robert Goetzke
Phyllis Gorski
Adeline Goyke
Donna Grams
Florence Gruennert
Ruth Guttromson
Lloyd Harmon
Bonnie Hodge
Eugene Houtman
Craig Hudziak
Betty Kane
Darrell Kangas
Marcella Kennedy
Nancy Kerr
Edna Knitt
Lois Kruse
Russ La Francis
Agnes & Elmer Meyer
Dale O'Connell
Lucille Olson
Alice Orchall
Lester Peter
Arthur Quasius, Jr.
Mary Jane Reese
Joshua Robinson
Mary Louise Schampers

Continued on next page

Otto Schlagefer
Rita Schmitz
Sandra Schmitz
Bobbie Schuler
Ralph Schweppe
Edward Spletter
Frances Stancar
Don Stegeman
Michael Stolper
Agnes Stuefen
James Sumrall
Lorraine Thorpe
Robert Tully
Grace Verhagen
Irmgard Visgin
Rose Marie Ward
Marilyn William
Hiram Wurf
Richard Zacker
Jean Zahn
Lois Zahn

**We received gifts
in honor of:**

Christina Alger
Albert Anderson
Mike Bollig
Frances Broughton
David Buchholz
John Corneille
R. Crabb
Jay & Dean Fenhaus
Marshall Flax
Renee Kuester-
Sebranek
Eleanor Lukosaitis
Jackie Mathes
Carolyn Neerhof
Karen & Richard
Perzentka
Charlene Powers
Chelsea Reilly

Mike Morris
Renee Overland-
Morris
Jackie Rocha
Ann Salazar
Amanda Schmeling
Gayle Sebald
Tryyn Smith
Gregory & Leslie
Stilson
Donald Strasser

**Grant Funding and
Sponsorships were
received from:**

Alliant Energy
Foundation
Associated Bank
Department of
Veterans Affairs
Clear Vision Midwest

Gary Goyke and
Associates
Greater Milwaukee
Foundation:
• Carl & Alma S.
Greilach Fund
• Catherine & Walter
Lindsay Foundation
• William R. & Lois J.
Phillips Fund
Madison Gas &
Electric Foundation,
Inc.
Mattingly Low
Vision, Inc.
National Guardian
Life Insurance Co.
Anonymous
ThedaCare
The Vogel Foundation

THANK YOU to the organizations and individuals who generously supported the Council's work. To view a list of all 2015 donors, visit our website at www.wcblind.org. Your financial gifts have changed lives throughout Wisconsin!



**Wisconsin Council of the
Blind & Visually Impaired**

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Sharper Vision Store (608) 237-8100**

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