



Your 2020 Advocacy Checklist

Advocacy is more than something to do at Legislative Day or when a community issue arises. It is important to bring awareness to issues people who are blind or visually impaired face, and work continuously to make communities more inclusive. Here is a checklist of some tasks you can tackle in 2020 to keep advocacy top-of-mind throughout the year.



The Wisconsin State Capitol.

✓ **Register to vote.** Voting is a right many people take for granted. It is important to express your voice when you have the opportunity to do so. Registering well in advance of election days ensures you are able to vote, especially if you've moved in the past year.

✓ **Vote in upcoming elections.** Mark your calendar with the dates of the 2020 elections, which are all on Tuesdays:

February 18, 2020: Wisconsin Supreme Court primary.

April 7, 2020: Presidential primary and Wisconsin Supreme Court general election.

August 11, 2020: Primary.

November 3, 2020: General election.

✓ **Fill out the census.** The census determines federal funding for things like transportation, Medicaid and other programs. It also sets the number of representatives in the House.

✓ **Have a conversation** with a local elected official about a change that would make your community more welcoming for everyone. Think about

ways to make your community safer for pedestrians or more accessible to people who rely on public transportation.

✓ **Join a coalition** or task force advocating for an issue you care strongly about, such as employment or healthcare. You may be the only one in the group with lived experience as a person who is blind or visually impaired, or the experience of someone who has family members or friends who are in this demographic. You can bring the perspective of blindness and visual impairment to help this group make their work more inclusive for everyone.

It is a good idea to pick one item off this list and make a plan to get started on it right away. If you plan to register to vote, for example, you could begin by visiting **myvote.wi.gov** to find out if you need to register.

Advocacy is taking one action, one step, at a time. Make 2020 the year that you make a difference in the lives of people in your community, and impact those who are blind or visually impaired for the better. Thank you for all you do. ■

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Thank You to Council Donors and Volunteers

We wish to thank all volunteers and donors for their support of the Council in 2019.

Many volunteers made a difference through gardening on Council grounds, audio recording *Courier* and *On Sight* newsletters, and assisting at events such as Birding by Ear, Gallery Night and Low Vision Fair. Volunteers helped create and maintain the Council archives, repair braille writers, and serve in many other ways.

Financial gifts from donors made educational programs possible, such as the 2019 Low Vision Fair, Council webinars, and Council representation at health and senior fairs. Low vision evaluations, in-home rehabilitation visits, and free white canes were all made available because of your gifts. Visit **WCBlind.org/donate** to see a list of donors in 2019.

Thank you for sharing your time, talents and treasure with the Council.

What is Planned Giving?

Many things in life are planned. Making financial plans for how your money will be used after you pass away is known as planned giving.

What is Planned Giving? A planned gift is a contribution arranged in the present and allocated for a future date. Commonly donated through a will or trust, planned gifts are most often granted once the donor has passed away.

A planned giving program ensures that services to people who are blind and visually impaired will continue long into the future. The Council has been the recipient of many generous bequests over the years, including a recent gift from Jean DeRuyter. Jean confided in her attorney, David Andrews, that she was having age-related vision changes. When asked to recommend organizations that help make the community a better place for all, David recounted part of his life story.

Both of David's parents were blind. His mother, Josephine, served on the Council board in the 1980s and 90s. She loved her work with the Council and her children saw how much she enjoyed the work.

When Jean was working on her estate plan and was considering organizations to receive her gift, David suggested the Council and other non-profit groups serving people who are blind or visually impaired in Wisconsin. Jean chose the Council.

The Council's 68-year history spans generations, from before the time Josephine served on the board to this bequest gift inspired by her son. Your bequest gift will also benefit people living with vision loss well into the future, ensuring services and resources will be available.

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Join the Legacy Circle by including the Council in your will or by designating the Council as a beneficiary of your life insurance policy, IRA, annuity or other retirement plan. There are many options that allow you to provide for your heirs while still ensuring a gift to the Council. Talk with your financial planner or attorney and start planning today.

Contact Lori at **608-237-8114** or **lwerbeckes@WCBlind.org** to talk about giving options. ■

Announcing 2020 Council Board Updates

2020 brings changes to the Council board of directors. The Council welcomes Chip Kaufman to the board in January. The Middleton, Wisconsin, resident brings extensive sales and fundraising experience, as well as a strong desire to give back and inspire others.

When Chip was diagnosed with cone rod dystrophy about ten years ago, he initially felt that he had nowhere to turn. He did not know anyone else living with low vision, and he had no idea how to cope with the social and emotional isolation he was experiencing. He discovered a low vision support group thanks to a conversation with former employee, Marshall Flax.



Chip Kaufman and his family.

"I look forward to getting to know my fellow board members and working together to promote the Council's mission," Chip says.

"That support group introduced me to others living with similar conditions," he says. "This taught me that I was not alone, and that it was possible to lead a very fulfilling life. I want to make the journey easier for everyone transitioning to blindness, and I cannot think of a better place to start than the place that welcomed me in when I needed it most."

Chip volunteers for the Madison Scouts, Santas Without Chimneys and for the schools where his two sons are enrolled. Along with his wife Christy, Chip leads a team and promotes the UW McPherson Eye Research Institute Cycle for Sight. They have been among the top three fundraisers for the last seven years. Chip is also in the interview process to become a big brother for Big Brothers and Big Sisters (BBBS).

"Initially, BBBS denied my application because I do not have a driver's license," Chip says. "Once I educated them on the hindrance this imposes for people who are legally blind, they agreed not only to admit me, but to revisit the driver's license requirement across their nationwide program."

Chip is an avid traveler and athlete, having recently hiked Machu Picchu and completed a guided century and half marathon.

"I look forward to getting to know my fellow board members and working together to promote the Council's mission," Chip says.

Other board changes include the election of Rebecca Arrowood as first vice president and John Foulks as second vice president. Other officers include: Rhonda Staats as secretary and Kathleen Brockman as treasurer.

Kelsey Tiradani departed the board at the end of 2019. She is caring for her second baby and returned to work as a teacher of the visually impaired in the Madison Metropolitan School District.

"My favorite part of being on the Council Board was serving on the Scholarship Committee," says Kelsey. "Reviewing applications and especially reading the applicant's essay questions provided the committee with demonstrations of courage, determination, and optimism."

Thank you, Kelsey, for all you brought to the board and the Council. We appreciate you, and wish you the best in future endeavors.



Kelsey Tiradani

Thank You and Farewell to Adam Grassnickle

In mid-January, Adam Grassnickle left his Program Assistant position at the Council to pursue his career goal of teaching high school history. He began student teaching in January.



"While we are sad to see Adam go, we are very excited for this next stage in his professional career," says Denise Jess, Council CEO/Executive Director. "I believe he will be an excellent asset in the community and a great role model for students with disabilities."

Adam hopes to share his passion for history and embody the Council's values in his lessons.

"My experience at the Council has shaped how I think about teaching," he says. "I want every one of my students to be empowered in my classroom." ■

Adam Grassnickle

Upcoming 2020 Events

Mark your calendar with the following events and check **WCBlind.org/events** for more details.



The Big Share

Tuesday, March 3, 2020

Online: **thebigshare.org**

The Big Share is an online day of giving hosted by Community Shares of Wisconsin (CSW) for nearly 70 local nonprofits dedicated to building an equitable and just community and protecting our environment. CSW and its members, including the Council, envision a future where all voices are heard, where we all have clean water and air, where all neighbors have access to family-supporting jobs, and all communities in Wisconsin are safe and thriving. The Big Share is a fun, easy and flexible way to donate to and learn more about organizations making a difference in our community.



Council Webinar: Accessible Cell Phones

Tuesday, March 17, 2020, 10:00 a.m.

Online via Zoom

Learn more about accessible cell phone options with vision services staff in this Council webinar.



Apply for a Scholarship from the Council

Application Deadline: Friday, April 3, 2020



Nominate Someone for a Council Excellence Award

Nomination Deadline: Friday, April 10, 2020

Scholarship and Excellence Awards Luncheon: Saturday, May 16, 2020, in Madison.

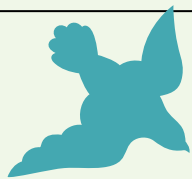


Legislative Day

April 2020

State Capitol, Madison

Legislative Day is spent increasing awareness of issues that affect the blind and visually impaired community. The day provides an excellent opportunity to build and strengthen relationships between constituents, the Council and the legislature. Learn more at **WCBlind.org/events/legislative-day**.



Birding by Ear

June 2020

Locations TBA, Madison

Just as unique as their coloration and shape, bird sounds come in tweets, songs, and rustles. Identifying birds by sound is an activity and skill anyone can enjoy. This event is co-organized by the Madison Audubon Society.



Disability Pride Festival

Saturday, August 1, 2020, from 12:00-5:00 p.m.

Tenney Park, Madison

The Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired will host a table at this city-wide event to promote pride and empowerment among people who are blind or visually impaired. All are welcome.



Low Vision Fair

Friday, August 7, 2020

Green Bay Area

Compare and try adaptive products, learn new techniques at informational breakout sessions and meet Council Vision Services staff and vendors. Network and share experiences with other people experiencing vision loss. The event is free. No registration is required.



Council Webinar: Accessible Reading Options

Tuesday, August 18, 2020, 10 a.m.

Online via Zoom

Join Vision Services staff as they demonstrate accessible reading options, from magnifiers to talking books.



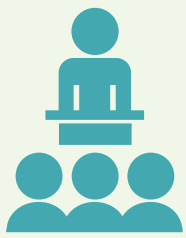
Gallery Night

Friday, October 2, 2020

The Council Office, Madison

Celebrate creativity in the BVI community. Artists exhibiting at this event are blind or visually impaired. Developed in partnership with the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMoCA).

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Saving Sight Symposium

Thursday, October 15, 2020

Alliant Energy Center, Madison

The AMD/Saving Sight Symposium serves as a one-stop resource to learn the latest research, treatment options, and information about adaptive products and vision rehabilitation services. The Council is once again partnering with UW Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences and UW Health to bring this informative event to Wisconsin.



White Cane Safety Day

Thursday, October 15, 2020



Council Webinar: Self-Management of Diabetes

Tuesday, November 10, 2020, 10 a.m.

Online via Zoom

Learn strategies and adaptive techniques for managing diabetes in this informative Council webinar.

Awards and Scholarship Applications

Consider applying for the Council's 2020 Scholarship Program. The program is open to students who are blind or visually impaired and are enrolled in post-secondary education. Application instructions are available at WCBlind.org and all materials are due to the Council by Friday, April 3, 2020.

Do you know of an individual or organization improving the lives of people who are blind or visually impaired in Wisconsin? Give them the recognition they deserve and nominate them for a Council Excellence Award. Applications are now open and the nomination form is available at WCBlind.org. All Council Excellence Award nomination forms are due by Friday, April 10, 2020. See the Council's website for more details.

If you have questions about either program, contact the Council at **608-255-1166**.

Everything You Want to Know About the In-Home Vision Rehabilitation Visit

Take a deep dive into one of the Council's vision services, the in-home rehabilitation visit. Brent Perzentka, Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, and Jean Kalscheur, Education Program Specialist, answer common questions. Find out what to expect if you want to schedule an in-home vision rehabilitation visit for yourself or bring it to the attention of someone you care about.

Q: What are the differences between having an in-home visit versus an appointment at the Council? Why might an in-home visit be advantageous?

Brent: With an in-home visit, Vision Services staff come to your home, so you do not have to arrange transportation to the Council office. I find in-home visits helpful when suggesting adaptations. When I see the way a person has their home set up, it is easier for me to give ideas and put some of those ideas in place, if the person is interested. People are often more relaxed and comfortable in their homes.

Q: What is the service area you cover?

Brent: I cover Grant, Iowa, Richland, Lafayette and Sauk counties. Those are contracted through the Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired (OBVI).

Jean: I cover Dane County.

Q: What is the cost of in-home visits and how are costs covered?

Brent: There is no cost for in-home vision rehabilitation visits. Funding for visits in the counties I serve is provided through financial donations to the Council and through federal grant money and general state funding to the Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired (OBVI).

Q: How do referrals happen?

Jean: People can self-refer. Referrals also come through local Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC), in-home care providers, word of mouth through friends or family members, county health fairs, and eye doctors.

Q: What are the major issues or problems you help solve?

Jean: Most people are interested in reading, knowing the difference

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between junk mail and bills, learning how to call in and renew a medication prescription, and reading sections of the newspaper such as obituaries or ads.

Brent: Other issues Vision Services can help with are making sure a person can easily dial their telephone and learning adaptive technology like iPads or computers. Home assistants like the Amazon Echo and Google Home are also popular. Marking appliances with bump dots and other labels, and looking at lighting in the home and finding ways to improve upon it are problems Vision Services staff help solve. Adaptive kitchen skills and finding alternative techniques to do favorite hobbies are explored in an in-home visit.

Q: What types of devices and equipment do you bring for the visit?

Brent: It is helpful to know ahead of time if there is something of particular interest to a client. I bring magnifiers, a talking book player and some bump dots. It is often on the second visit, after I have learned of the client's needs and interests, that I bring more specific adaptive products.

Q: If you are bringing new products, will you be trying to sell them to me? Are you salespeople?

Jean: I always say to people once I am there that my goal is not to sell them anything. I want to make them aware of what is available and what might be helpful to them. They are under no obligation to purchase something just because I am showing it to them.

Q: How is an in-home visit from you different from working with an Orientation and Mobility instructor, an Occupational Therapist or eye doctor?

Jean: When you work with Vision Services staff, you are equal deciders in terms of what you want or do not want. What we do is more detective exploration and asking questions. We build ongoing relationships with our clients so we can assist people as their needs and vision changes over time.

Q: I already saw the eye doctor, why do you need to come to my house?

Brent: A lot of times, the eye doctor will say, "There is nothing more I can do for you". We come in after and say, "Okay, this is the vision you have. We want to help you continue to do the things you like to do." We address the needs our clients have as people.

Q: What training and certification do you have?

Brent: I have a Master's degree in Vision Rehabilitation from Western Michigan University, and am certified in vision rehabilitation through the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals (ACVREP).

Jean: I am a certified occupational therapist and have taken a number of courses through Western Michigan University and the Hadley Institute to learn the ins and outs of vision rehabilitation and nonvisual training specifics.

Q: I do not live in a house or apartment. Where can appointments take place?

Brent: Vision Services staff go to senior independent living centers, assisted living, rehabilitation facilities, nursing homes, and hospice. Vision Services can also come to your workplace, and can meet you at a public library or coffee shop if you so wish.

Q: Is there a limit to the number of visits I can have?

Jean: As long as people are meeting the goals we have agreed to work toward, there is no set limit to how many times we can see people.

Q: What details do I have to share with you when I call for more information?

Jean: Your name, address and purpose for requesting the information are all that is needed. There are other demographic questions that I ask on the first visit. I do not ask those over the phone.

Q: What if I need services provided by another Council staff member, such as adaptive technology training or a low vision evaluation?

Brent: Vision Services cross-refers, so you can be assured you will get the services you need.

During an in-home vision rehabilitation visit, you are in the position to decide what you do and do not want. Vision Services staff are here to help you do things you enjoy doing, albeit maybe in a different way.

If you are interested in learning more about in-home vision rehabilitation visits, call **608-237-8107** or email **info@WCBlind.org**. ■



Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

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Announcing the New Sharper Vision Store Catalog

Take a look inside the new Sharper Vision Store Catalog to learn more about Council products and services. Low vision evaluations, in-home rehabilitation visits, and assistive technology training services are highlighted. Discover a variety of adaptive products from games, to magnifiers, to kitchen and home goods. Call **800-783-5213** or stop by the Council office at 754 Williamson Street in Madison to get your new catalog. The Council is open Monday–Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.



Stay Connected

Stay up to date on events, legislation, news and technology related to blindness or vision loss by subscribing to one of the weekly Council emails. Council Courier is available in large print, braille and CD. To request an alternative format, email Mitch at **mbrey@WCBlind.org** or call **608-237-8119**.

