

# •∴ Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

ANNUAL REPORT 2018



# MISSION

Promote the dignity & 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, even in times of disagreement or conflict.

**On the cover:** A woman crosses the street using a white cane. A man's hand holds large print playing cards. A woman sits in front of a keyboard and phone.



## BOARD

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**Photos by** Big Dreamers United



## FROM THE CEO & BOARD CHAIR

*Alone we can do so little;  
together we can do so much.*

Since our founding in 1952, Helen Keller's sentiments powerfully illustrate the commitment to collaboration of the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired to fulfill our mission. Our predecessors worked to unite several groups serving the blind community, knowing that together they formed a stronger voice.

Thank you to our donors and volunteers, who give time, talent and financial generosity to stand with us as we work diligently and passionately to fulfill the Council's mission.

In 2018, the Council continued to nurture our long-standing relationships with Lions Clubs, state agencies, nonprofits and peer-led low vision support groups. We were at health fairs, senior communities and conferences. We continued sharing Council-created toolkits with veterans, families and business owners. We co-hosted "Dining in the Dark" experiences to build awareness and bridges of understanding.

It was also a year to foster new relationships. We:

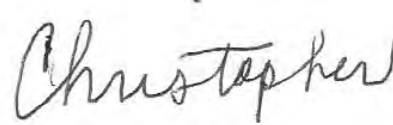
- Discussed the importance of the White Cane Law with drivers education instructors.

- Presented to regional planners about creating accessible communities for all and worked with traffic engineers and elected officials to install accessible pedestrian signals in communities.
- Served on coalitions alongside people with other disabilities, environmental, anti-poverty and aging groups to combine our talent, resources and energies to move forward on voting, transportation and employment access.
- Partnered with Madison Audubon Society to offer the area's first Birding by Ear program.

Among these differing groups, we continually marvel at our commonalities and the potential we bring when we work together.



Denise Jess  
CEO/Executive Director



Chris Richmond  
Chair



## by the numbers



# 423

white canes provided  
free of charge

# 1,392

unique  
customers  
(704 in-store)

# 737

 items carried



# ADVOCACY

## JAN: WI DISABILITY VOTE COALITION

In 2018, the Council joined the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition. This group promotes equitable access to voting for people with disabilities. The coalition provides feedback to the Wisconsin Elections Commission. By partnering with groups in the wider disability community, the Council helps make the voting process better for everyone—not just those with visual impairments. Other members of the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition are Disability Rights Wisconsin and the Board for People with Developmental Disabilities.

## APRIL: LEGISLATIVE DAY

Connection, advocacy and empowerment. Legislative Day attendees expressed the invaluable experiences they had during this year's event at the Wisconsin State Capitol.

"I like Legislative Day because it gives me interaction with my peers and blind people who have different perspectives. It's also great getting face-to-face contact with senators and assemblypersons. It's so important today that we be here and tell them what we need."

*John Foulkes*, Council Board, Fond du Lac

## OCT: WHITE CANE SAFETY DAY

Highlights:

- Governor Scott Walker proclaimed October 15 as White Cane Safety Day in Wisconsin.
- Five citywide proclamations: Janesville, La Crosse, Milwaukee, Stevens Point and West Allis.
- A presentation to hundreds of drivers education instructors.
- A Dept. of Transportation newsletter article and social media post about the importance of the White Cane Law.

## OCT: COALITION FOR MORE RESPONSIBLE TRANSPORTATION

The Coalition consists of 25 organizations working to ensure taxpayer-funded transportation is used responsibly. Having equal and affordable access to transportation, particularly in rural communities and across county lines is vital so all residents can live and thrive. The coalition released a collaborative report examining the effectiveness and equitability of transportation. The Council incorporated the experiences of people with visual impairments.

## ACCESSIBLE PEDESTRIAN SIGNALS

Accessible pedestrian signals (APS) provide an audible indication at the intersection to people who wish to cross the street. With the push of a button, they will hear an announcement that the walk light is on. (It is up to the individual to judge whether it is safe to cross the street, as not all cars obey traffic lights.)

The number of APS varies from city to city, depending on the accessibility-mindedness of city officials and advocacy done by people who are blind or visually impaired living in those regions. In most cases, community officials want to hear from an individual who would be directly impacted by the installation of an APS.

In 2018, three Wisconsin residents who are visually impaired recognized a need for APS's in their communities. Penny Happli of Rib Mountain, Joseph Smet of Fond du Lac, and Denise Jess of Madison, are celebrating the success of their individual 2018 APS installation requests. The Council partnered with these individuals on advocacy guidance.

"Throughout the advocacy process, I learned how important collaboration is to getting things done," says Penny Happli. "I contacted the Council when I wanted advice. This kept the first 'no' I got from being the final 'no'."







## INCREASED REFERRALS FROM EYE CARE PROFESSIONALS

In 2018, Council staff served more people with changing vision thanks to an increase in referrals from eye doctors for our vision rehabilitation services, which include low vision evaluations, in-home rehabilitation visits and assistive technology training. Referrals come through optometrists and ophthalmologists within Dane County, including UW Health, SSM Health Davis Duehr Dean Eye Care and UnityPoint Health Meriter. We empower people by helping them understand how to use existing vision and how to utilize assistive technology and adaptive products.



**88**

low vision evaluations

**231**

assistive technology appointments



**301**

in-home vision rehabilitation visits



# VISION SERVICES

## APRIL: OPEN HOUSE

More than forty people attended the Vision Services Open House, including residents of a local retirement community, eye doctors, DVR counselors and vision rehabilitation professionals. The open house allowed people to learn about Council products and services. William Wheeler attended the open house with his wife, Courtney, who is blind.

"We've always talked about coming here. When my wife found out about the open house, it seemed like the perfect opportunity to see what the Council is all about."

## APRIL: GRAND ROUNDS

It can be 3 to 5 years before someone seeks vision services to learn adaptive techniques. Through a partnership between the Council, Vision Forward in Milwaukee and the UW-Madison Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences, we are working to shorten that time. Vision Services staff and Vision Forward spoke at Grand Rounds, giving a presentation titled, "After The Eye Exam" to increase timely referrals to vision services.



# EDUCATION

## COUNCIL WEBINARS

Throughout the year, Council webinars enable people to learn about products and resources in their own home. 2018 webinars included Birding by Ear, accessible voting, and store products. In June, the Council and Madison Audubon Society partnered on an innovative webinar and outdoor program titled "Birding by Ear". This class gives people with and without visual impairment the opportunity to learn bird sounds and practice birding without seeing the birds.

## FEB: "A WELCOMING MAIN STREET"

Council staff recognized a need to share information with businesses on how to welcome people who are blind or visually impaired. The booklet, "A Welcoming Main Street," was funded by an anonymous grant for distribution in Iowa County. Staff presented to Dodgeville businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, Aging & Disability Resource Center and individuals. Lions Clubs received copies and it is available on [WCBlind.org/media](http://WCBlind.org/media).

## MARCH: MMSD OPEN HOUSE

Madison Metropolitan School District students, families, and staff came to the Council for an open house to try AIRA Glasses, Or-Cam Glasses, and other assistive technology, like ZoomText Fusion software. Voting officials from the Wisconsin State Elections Commission and City Clerk's Office showed students how to use the ExpressVote accessible voting machine. Students prepared food using Sharper Vision Store products and played braille and large print board games.

"My favorite thing was playing Uno with the braille playing cards," says Michael McComb, a student at Badger Rock Middle School who is visually impaired. "It was my first time playing with braille cards and it was fun to be able to play with my brother."

Michael's brother, Tre McComb says, "I didn't know a lot of the adaptive kitchen equipment existed. It's cool that Michael will be able to use things like that to make cooking easier."

For Mikyla Mobley, the open house served as a networking opportunity and a way to learn about funding for college. Mikyla learned of our scholarship program while at the open house and was awarded a \$2,000 scholarship from the Council in 2018.

## AUG: LOW VISION FAIR

The annual Low Vision Fair was held in Manitowoc. The event opens the door for people to discover the rich resources in their community. Charles attended a Low Vision Fair for the first time in 2018. "I started losing my vision ten months ago, and had no idea of all the resources available," he says. "At the fair, I was able to purchase magnifiers, get information about services that can help me, and talk to people who understand what it is like to lose vision. I can no longer drive, so I appreciated that Council staff came to Manitowoc so I didn't have to figure out how to get to Madison. I feel a lot more empowered as I go through this big change in my life."

## OCT: GALLERY NIGHT

The Council's participation in Gallery Night each year invites community members into the Council's office. The event featured five artists who are blind or visually impaired to show their art. An artist talk provided the opportunity for artists to discuss their creative spark and meet attendees. Gallery Night is a community-wide event in Madison with more than 70 other venues across the city.

Educational  
presentations to  
**2,655** people



## OCT: MACULAR DEGENERATION SYMPOSIUM

The Council partnered with UW Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences and UW Health for the Macular Degeneration Symposium. Over 420 people attended to learn about the latest research and treatments for macular degeneration. The event took place at the Alliant Energy Center in Madison.

- 96% of attendees plan to come in 2020
- 96% of attendees will discuss what they learned with family and friends
- 86% feel better about their (or a loved one's) macular degeneration

After attending the Symposium, Bob Brooks reached out to schedule a low vision evaluation at the Council.

"(Amy) gave me many ideas of how I can accomplish tasks as my AMD progresses. I feel more prepared now that I went to the Symposium and visited the Council."

# DONORS

*These Friends of the Council  
contributed \$500 or more in 2018*

Carol Adams  
Anonymous  
Priscilla and Anthony Beadell  
Shirley Carlson  
Richard and Tracy Clark  
Gerald and Betty Fuller  
Nona Graves and Dennis Ameden  
Greenville Lioness Club  
Loretta Himmelsbach  
Rosemary Himmelsbach  
Jean Kalschur  
Peter Kaufman  
Candice Koehn  
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Catherine Tesar  
Audrey Uber  
Unity of Madison  
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Foundation-William M. & Michele A.  
Holcomb Family Fund  
Lori and Mark Werbeckes  
Margaret Williams  
Barbra Winter  
Mary Wrzesinski  
Terri Young, MD

*Sponsor, Matching, and Foundation  
gifts from these organizations  
advanced our mission*

Adaptive Technology Resources  
Amazon Smile Foundation  
Associated Bank  
Benevity Community Impact Fund  
Charlie's on Main  
Clear Vision Midwest  
Enhanced Vision  
Fox Communities Credit Union  
Howard Frankenthal Family Foundation  
GingeRootz Asian Grille  
Greater Milwaukee Foundation  
-Carl & Alma S. Greilach Fund  
-William R. & Lois J. Phillips Fund  
Illinois Tool Works  
Industries for the Blind & Visually  
Impaired  
Anonymous  
Kaytee Wild Bird Marketing Dept  
Herb Kohl Philanthropies  
Liberty Mutual Foundation  
Madison Gas & Electric Foundation  
Mattingly Low Vision  
Oakwood Lutheran Senior Ministries

PayPal Giving Fund  
Racine Community Foundation  
-John and Gladys Franco Fund for the  
Visually Impaired  
Anonymous  
Sub-Zero Wolf Foundation  
Thrivent Financial  
Vanda Pharmaceuticals  
Vignette Dining Club  
The Vogel Foundation  
WEA Trust  
White Cane Day Celebration  
Xcel Energy Foundation

*Legacy Circle*

Robert and Carolyn Arndt  
Helen Bewick  
Kathleen Brockman  
Ray Cubberly  
Anonymous  
Loretta Himmelsbach  
Anonymous  
Steven Johnson  
Marjean Kuschel  
Ester Lovelace  
Stan Nelson  
Anonymous  
Arnold & Alice Tucker  
Scott & Beverly Verhage  
Chris & Theresa Zenchenko

*We gratefully received bequests from:*

Frederick Amerell

Hubert and Joyce Anderson  
Marcella Culp  
Emil Hunkel  
Claremont Jackman  
Gloria Ristow  
Mayme and Virgil Solberg  
Annette Stoddard Freeman  
Kenneth A. Wilke

*White Cane Circle*

Dennis Ameden  
Deen Amusa  
Steve and Susan Baudo  
Kathy Brockman  
Katherine Corbett  
Sue Cowan  
Claire Dick  
James and Karen Fletcher  
Patricia Gibson  
Rosemary Goodrich  
Nona Graves  
Thomas Houtevelde  
Denise Jess  
Scott and Brenda Johnson  
Rajnish Kapur family  
Jean Loichinger  
Constance Malak  
Betty Rackow  
Chris Richmond  
Patty Slaby  
Margaret Sommers  
Rhonda Staats  
Karen Steffen  
Eunice Wagner



 **1,433**  
volunteer hours

Lori and Mark Werbeckes  
Donald Whitman  
Franklin Wilson  
John and Roslyn Zeltins  
Wayne and Beulah Zoutendam

## White Cane Circle

The Council is supported by nearly a thousand donors who give generously throughout the year. All donor names are listed at [WCBlind.org](http://WCBlind.org).

The Fund Development Committee voted to establish a recognition club for donors who contribute every month. Named the White Cane Circle, this group of individuals provides a reliable source of income throughout the year.

Bill and Betty are two generous monthly donors. Betty writes, "I want to take this opportunity to commend the Council for all that you do in the store and other places for a job well done! My husband and I are truly grateful. We plan to keep giving to the Council!"





# How to Act & Talk When You Encounter Someone with Vision Loss

## financials

**Ask First:** "Would you like some help?" If yes, ask, "What is the best way I can help you right now?" If no, accept the person does not need help.

**Do not pet or distract a service dog.**  Distracting them makes them less effective and can put their owners in danger.


 **Speak normally.** There is no need to increase the volume of your voice or change the tone of your voice.


**Say "Hi!"**  People with low vision may not recognize your voice. Introduce yourself when you walk into a room.

**Do not speak on someone's behalf.** Despite good intentions, speaking on behalf of anyone who is capable of speaking for themselves can be frustrating.

**Use person-first language.** Blindness is a physical attribute, not a personality trait. *person*

**Request copies** of this etiquette guide by contacting [info@WCBlind.org](mailto:info@WCBlind.org).

**Keep people involved.**  Sighted people rely on visual cues when interacting with others. Allow people to be an equal participant in social settings by describing what happened visually.

 **Provide clear and concise information.** Use Right and Left instead of Here and There.

**Staff photo (front to back):**  
Denise Jess, Ray Cubberly, Heather Buggs, Judith Rasmussen, Lori Werbeckes, Jean Kalscheur, Hannah Wentte, Adam Grassnickle, Katherine Corbett, Amy Wurf, Kris Johannsen, Sue Cowan, Mitch Brey, Jim Denham, Brent Perzentka.



2018 TOTAL REVENUE	
Sales	\$178,981
Low Vision Fees	\$43,610
Rent & Misc.	\$21,839
Contributions & Grants	\$291,240
Bequests	\$830,807
Investments	(\$243,688)
Support from Endowments	\$109,476
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$1,122,789</b>

2018 TOTAL EXPENSES	
Low Vision Services	\$570,524
Community Education	\$373,767
Fund Development	\$135,558
Management & General	\$152,416
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,232,265</b>

**Sources:** Perkins School for the Blind, Industries for the Blind & Visually Impaired.





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

**754 Williamson Street  
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[WCBlind.org](http://WCBlind.org)**