



New Year's Resolutions: An Eye Care Checklist

Three! Two! One! Happy 2019! As you ring in the new year, you may commit to exercising more, finishing a project or taking up a new hobby. But have you considered eye health on your list of priorities? As you set your resolutions, incorporate a few of these suggestions to ensure you take care of your eyes in 2019.

Take regular breaks while doing computer work and other tasks that involve your eyes.

- **Eat five servings of fruits and vegetables every day.** Eating more fruits and vegetables can help prevent eye disease and improve overall health. To keep eyes healthy, eat foods rich in vitamins and minerals, especially colorful fruits and vegetables like dark, leafy greens. For example, spinach is high in vitamins C, K, A, B1, B2, B6, E, calcium and potassium. It is also a great source of dietary fiber, phosphorus, zinc, protein and choline. These nutrients help your body rid itself of toxins and replenish cells. The Sharper Vision Store at the Council has many adaptive products to chop and cook fruits and vegetables, from finger guards to high-contrast cutting boards. Stop by in person or find them online at store.WCBlind.org/kitchen.
- **Take regular breaks while doing computer work** and other tasks that involve your eyes. Use the 20/20/20 guide — every 20 minutes, stop staring at your screen, take a 20 second break, focus your eyes on something at least 20 feet in the distance, and blink your eyes.
- **Wear glasses that have been prescribed to you.** Not only can this decrease headaches, it also allows your eyes to function at their optimal level — preventing strain on the eye muscles.
- **Regularly clean glasses, contacts and contact lens cases (aim for daily).** Dirty glasses cause glare, making it difficult to see. How to clean glasses: rinse under tap water, apply a small drop of lotion-free dishwashing liquid, gently rub both sides of lenses, rinse and dry thoroughly with a lint-free cloth.

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Our staff can work with you on practical strategies that will work best to help with everyday activities as your vision changes.

- **When outdoors, wear sunglasses.** The Sharper Vision Store has a variety of filter colors and styles to choose from. Visit the store at 754 Williamson Street in Madison to try a pair.
- **Use safety eyewear,** especially when chopping wood or playing sports. Safety eyewear is different from shatter-proof lenses; it fits close to and around your head. It prevents objects and fragments from flying in at the sides or at the top.
- **Schedule regular eye exams,** especially if you think your vision might be changing. Have a dilated eye exam as that lets your eye doctor see as much of the retina as possible.

Concerned about changing vision for yourself or a loved one?

Schedule a Low Vision Evaluation at the Council. Our staff can work with you on practical strategies that will work best to help with everyday activities as your vision changes. Contact Amy Wurf, Certified Low Vision Therapist, at **608-237-8107** for more information.

Prioritizing eye health can make for a brighter 2019. What do you plan to do this year to care for your eyes? ■

Meet Two Council Excellence Award Winners: “BJ” Blahnik and Lois Miller

Each year, the Council presents Excellence Awards honoring and recognizing people who have made a difference in the lives of those in the blind and visually impaired community. In an earlier edition of our Friends newsletter, we introduced 2018 Excellence Award winners Danny Cornelius and Julie Hapeman. We round out the introductions with our final two Excellence Award winners, “BJ” Blahnik and Lois Miller. Read how BJ and Lois demonstrate inclusiveness and empowerment through innovative projects and outreach.

Bernard Joseph "BJ" Blahnik, Community Collaboration and Partnerships Award Recipient

BJ, who is blind, learned to sail in 2014. He learned to race and trained through 2015. In September 2015, BJ participated in the Blind Sailing World Championship, winning a bronze medal for USA. By then, BJ was hooked on sailing and wanted to bring the sport to more people. He recognized that not everyone lives near a body of water or feels comfortable enough to try sailing in an actual boat. Enter the Sailing Simulator, created by Sailmaker International, an Italian company. The simulator is a sailboat that can be operated on land. BJ began raising the \$34,000 needed for the Sailing Education Association of Sheboygan (SEAS) to purchase a simulator. A \$15,000 grant came from Lions Club International and another donation was received through Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield.

The simulator was used for the first time this summer at Lions Camp in Rosholt, Wisconsin.



BJ accepts an award from Council board member Sharon Knauf.



A sailing team with blind members makes its way through the Sheboygan harbor on a bright, windy day.

"We held sailing lessons last year, and only 20 people out of the 150 campers wanted to try it," BJ says. "This year, because we brought the simulator, 60 of 150 campers tried it out. That is worth every moment of every hour I put into fundraising to bring one here."

To learn more about the sailing simulator and sailing for people with visual impairments, visit seasheboygan.org.

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A place to discuss your changing vision, to learn about adaptive techniques and to get to know others who are having similar experiences and challenges are the benefits of low vision support groups. The Council is proud to honor Lois Miller with a Public Service Award for the extensive work she has done to lead a low vision support group. Read on to learn more about Lois' life and inspirational work.

Lois Miller, Public Service Award Recipient



Lois Miller, standing outside in a blue short-sleeved dress.

Lois has worked for Richland County since 1980. She served as Senior Center Manager for two years, then worked for the Commission on Aging part-time until 1986. In that year, Lois started leading the low vision support group, which was developed by the Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) of Richland County. Lois invited speakers and vendors to attend meetings and coordinated several events. She planned and executed educational events monthly. She led the group until she retired in 2017. Throughout her work, Lois did a lot of outreach, travelling to the local nursing homes to share her knowledge.

"So many people talk about limits. For Lois, there are no limits," says Roxanne Klubertanz, Richland Center Office Manager at ADRC of Eagle Country. "I was able to get to know Lois as an intern, as her co-worker, and later as her supervisor. I learned about so many resources through her and it has been a great journey of learning. Everybody knew to call the ADRC and talk to Lois. We are so pleased to see her honored with this award for all the work she has done."

"I have worked for the county for almost 38 years and it was such an unexpected surprise to be acknowledged for the work I have done," says Lois. "It was special to receive the award right as I was retiring; I am very grateful."

Do you know of someone who has empowered the lives of people who are blind or visually impaired? Nominate them for a Council Excellence Award. Nominations open in early February and the nomination form can be found at **WCBlind.org**. ■

Living Our Value of Inclusivity in Advocacy through Coalition Work

In every facet of our work, the Council seeks to act according to the values of integrity, inclusivity, and uncompromising respect. One way the Council fosters the value of inclusivity in legislative and advocacy work is to join with other organizations in coalitions. The Council is a member of three coalitions: The Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition, the Dignity at Work Coalition, and the Coalition for More Responsible Transportation in Wisconsin. The Council is represented by Denise Jess, CEO/ Executive Director. The work of each aligns with the Council's legislative priorities.

According to consultant firm Coalitions Work, a coalition is a group of diverse organizations and constituencies who work together to reach a common goal or goals. Unlike networks, whose members act independently, coalitions bring organizations together to act jointly. They are temporary alliances; they come and go, based on need and fulfillment of mission. The duration of a coalition may be just a few months or several years. Members draw on assets from their organizations, as well as seek new resources. Coalitions create decision-making and leadership structures that enable their members to speak with a united voice and engage in shared planning and action.

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Several benefits of joining a coalition include: bringing the perspective of each organization to the shared work; having a joint purpose to do advocacy with one voice; and forming connections with fellow members to do work outside the coalition's scope. A challenge of coalition work is keeping common ground among all members and staying focused on goals.

The Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition (disabilityvote.org) promotes equitability and access to voting for people with disabilities. The Council serves on Disability Vote because we serve a segment of that population; this coalition work is directly related to the Council's legislative priority of Civil Rights/ADA. According to estimates by the City of Milwaukee, more than 340,000 people in Wisconsin with disabilities are eligible to vote. Since

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2008, voter turnout by people with disabilities has increased by 15 percent, due in part to the efforts of Disability Vote.

The benefits of the Council being a member include forming relationships with other members to do non-coalition related work; being involved in a shared mission with other disability groups; and intersecting with the general disability population to accomplish more together.

“We have so many issues in common,” says Denise. “It is important to create a more united voice around disability issues that impact us all.”

The Dignity at Work Coalition (dignityatworkcoalition.org) advocates for living wages, fair labor laws, and decrease of employer discrimination. The work of this group is correlated with the Council’s Employment legislative priority. The Council belongs to Dignity at Work because the blind and visually impaired community faces large numbers of unemployment and underemployment. According to Census data gathered by the American Community Survey, people among all disabilities have a 60 percent national unemployment rate. People who are blind and visually impaired have a 70 percent unemployment rate, and a 22 percent underemployment rate.

The current focus of Dignity at Work is planning a legislative briefing in Spring 2019, which will cover access to transportation as it relates to obtaining and keeping employment, access to and quality of childcare, and providing fair wages to all workers. Member organizations are varied, from organizations who focus on women’s rights, to organizations advocating for fair and equitable employment practices, to religious organizations.

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— Denise Jess

The Coalition for More Responsible Transportation in Wisconsin ([facebook.com/CMRTWI](https://www.facebook.com/CMRTWI)), is made up of 25 local and statewide organizations working to ensure that tax-payer funded transportation is responsible and not wasteful. The Council is a member because having equal and affordable access to transportation, particularly in rural communities and across county lines, is vital to living and thriving. According to the Wisconsin Transportation Survey by the Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Groups, 72 percent of respondents had trouble finding transportation at least 30 percent of the time. Forty-five percent of respondents can’t get where

they need to go 50 percent of the time, while 15 percent of the respondents can't get where they need to go 70 percent of the time. More than 40 percent of respondents did not have access to public transportation, which is an issue, since people who are blind or visually impaired cannot drive.

The work of this group is directly related to our Transportation legislative priority. The Council is the only disability group represented on this coalition. Other members include the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources (GWAAR), various environmental and land use groups, as well as groups that focus on poverty reduction.

In October 2018, the coalition released a collaborative report examining the effectiveness and equitability of transportation in nine cities, towns, and major metropolitan regions across Wisconsin. The Council incorporated the experiences of people with visual impairments, and will be referencing the report in our advocacy work. Find the Arrive Together Transportation Access and Equity in Wisconsin report at sierraclub.org/Wisconsin.

Every invitation, and the roles played on coalitions we participate in, are evaluated to be sure the cause and level of involvement aligns with the Council's mission, values and legislative priorities.

"We all see transportation as a unifying theme," says Denise. "We are working to establish accessible mass transportation in and between communities, and diverse micro transit options. These aspects, in addition to good surface roads, are essential for communities to thrive."

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Taking action and getting involved is easy. Pick one of these ways to start:

- Watch for the 2019 Legislative Priorities, to be released by the Council this spring.
- Sign up for the Council's monthly legislative updates by visiting WCBlind.org.
- Follow the coalitions mentioned in this article on Facebook to stay up to date on news and action alerts.
- Participate in coalition work by completing surveys or providing comments about your lived experience. ■

A Note from Denise



Denise Jess

It seems fitting to start off a new year with thanks to the Council's generous donors. With the support of over a thousand individuals and businesses, the Council has empowered hundreds of people with vision impairment through services, education and advocacy.

We are especially grateful to those of you who contribute each year. Your gifts are the pillar of support on which our vision services and educational programs rely.

In appreciation of donors who have contributed \$20,000 or more, the board established a donor recognition club. Council Visionaries have, over their lifetime, made gifts to the Council amounting to \$20,000 or more. All of these people or organizations made their gifts over the course of many years. Some included the Council in their will. Regardless of how or when the gifts were made, the Council is grateful for their generous spirit and enthusiasm for empowering people with vision loss.

Another group of loyal donors make monthly gifts to the Council. Members of the White Cane Circle demonstrate their support and commitment for the Council's mission by giving each month in a way that is convenient for them.

We are grateful for every donor. Each gift directly helps someone with vision loss adapt to the changes and challenges they face every day. Thank you for sharing our passion to empower people along their journey!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Denise". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D".

Denise Jess
CEO/Executive Director

Board Updates: Meet our New Members

2019 brings new additions to the Council's Board of Directors. We are eager to welcome new board members Rebecca Arrowood and Patty Slaby.

Rebecca Arrowood; Greenville, Wisconsin

Rebecca Arrowood, age 30, is a new addition to the board, though she is no stranger to the Council. Rebecca is a former scholarship recipient, and received five scholarships from the Council in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2013 and 2015. She has a counseling background, and is a clinical interviewer for IFB Solutions.

"I hope to provide a different perspective on issues, since everyone has their own experience," says Rebecca. "I am good at organization, connecting with people, and leadership skills; I look forward to sharing those skills."

Being on the board also gives Rebecca a sense of the impact she could bring to the blind and visually impaired community. She not only wants to influence the lives of those like herself who have visual impairments, but also provide education and awareness to the sighted community about the capabilities and successes of people in Wisconsin who are blind or visually impaired.

"It is lovely that she wants to give back from a place of gratitude," says Denise Jess, Council CEO/Executive Director. "I am appreciative of having another young working professional on the board and the perspective she can bring. The Fox Valley area [where Rebecca is from] is a population-dense community and we at the Council think it is important to have representation from that area."

In her free time, Rebecca enjoys running, traveling, playing the guitar, and spending time with friends and family.



Rebecca Arrowood wearing a grey sweater and bright-colored scarf, standing in front of a painting.

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Patty Slaby with her service dog in front of a welcome to Alaska sign.

Patty Slaby; Arcadia, Wisconsin

Patty Slaby, age 65, served on the Council board back in the early 2000s. She worked as a teacher of the visually impaired (TVI) for 32 years, retiring in 2011. She found out about the Council when she started teaching in Wisconsin in 1992.

"I want to continue to advocate for Wisconsin residents who are blind or visually impaired," says Patty. "I want to represent the rural areas of Wisconsin, and support the scholarship program."

Patty is looking forward to contributing new ideas to the scholarship committee since she served on the American Council of the Blind (ACB) national scholarship committee for more than 25 years. She served as chair of that committee for 11 years, and says that gave her a lot of experience to draw from.

"I am appreciative of her many years spent working with people who are blind and visually impaired as a TVI," says Denise. "Patty not only brings her lived experience; she brings the experience of working with diverse people. I also really appreciate her leadership with the ACB scholarship program. I am pleased she is coming from a rural part of the state and can speak to issues and concerns people living in rural communities face."

In her spare time, Patty loves to read, travel, bake, and hike with her dogs.

Additional Board Updates:

During the application process, current board members seeking re-appointment went through an interview process, along with the new board members. All four positions have been renewed:

- Deen Amusa
- Sharon Knauf
- Dan Sippl
- Rhonda Staats

Board member Chelsea Dallin will be taking a year off from the board, but will remain on the Scholarships and Awards committees. ■

2019 Council Events

Put the following events on your calendar and check **WCBlind.org/events** for more information.

Dining in the Dark

Tuesday, February 5, 2019, 6:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Vignette Dining Club, Fitchburg

Vignette Dining Club offers a delicious multi-course meal that challenges participants to rethink the importance of vision in the food experience. Guests wear blindfolds while dining.

Call 608-237-8114 for reservations.

Cost: \$50 per person with proceeds donated to the Council. Invite your friends and family.

The Big Share

Tuesday, March 5, 2019

The Big Share is an online day of giving hosted by Community Shares of Wisconsin (CSW) for nearly 70 local nonprofits, including the Council, dedicated to building an equitable and just community and protecting our environment. CSW and its members 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. Visit **thebigshare.org** to learn more.

Legislative Day

Tuesday, April 9, 2019

Capitol building, Madison

The day will be spent increasing awareness of issues that affect the BVI community. This involves information sessions with legislators and staff at the Capitol building. Legislative Day provides an excellent opportunity to open lines of communication between constituents, the Council and the legislature. If you are interested in attending, email Adam at **agrassnickle@WCBlind.org** or call **608-237-8120**.



Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

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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**.

