



# Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

ANNUAL REPORT 2019



# 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 holds her glasses with monocular attachment. An "I'm Walkin' Here" White Cane Law bus ad. A teen plays tactile checkers. **Center:** Birding by Ear group of 28 people at Pheasant Branch.



# BOARD

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**Photos by:** Hannah Wentze,  
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**This page:** Madison Audubon  
Society



# FROM THE CEO & BOARD CHAIR

# by the numbers

Relationships matter! The Council's vital mission of promoting the dignity and empowerment of people who are blind and visually impaired is powerfully expanded when we collaborate with others. 2019 opened the door to new and continued relationships and collaborations that expand the Council's work.

We may not readily think of those on the margins, including Wisconsin's prison population. This group is twice as likely to be visually impaired than those of us who are not incarcerated. The ADA Compliance Team of the Wisconsin Department of Corrections reached out to us asking for ways to address the safety and dignity for these individuals. We learned from each other to collaborate on innovative ways to serve the inmates. Each team member went back to their respective facilities with new insights and strategies to implement.

Over the past half dozen years, our Dining in the Dark events have grown in popularity; as a unique dining experience and a powerful opportunity for deeper learning about the lives of people with vision loss. We put a new twist on this experience by collaborating with Madison College's Culinary Arts department, working with students to adjust hosting, serving and plating to create greater welcome for diners who are blind or visually impaired.

Social media is an important tool for connecting with diverse audiences. Council staff have worked to foster accessibility for all our followers. Other organizations reached out to us for suggestions

on how to make their social media more accessible. These inquiries led to "Social Media for All of Us," a hands-on workshop for people who manage marketing for business. The training culminates in a "pivot day" for trainees to commit to accessible posts.

In each of these situations and many others, we worked with new groups. Through these connections, our work could expand well beyond where we ever imagined. It is like the power of dropping a pebble into a pool of water. Many ripples move out in concentric circles beyond just the place where the pebble was dropped. The Council is a pebble and collaborating partners are ripples, helping promote the dignity and empowerment of people who are blind and visually impaired throughout Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

Denise Jess  
CEO/Executive Director

Chris Richmond  
Chair



**2,640**  
unique  
customers

(936 in-store)

**most popular:**

large print calendars, 20/20  
bold pens, check writing guides,  
talking keychain clocks



**562**

white canes provided  
free of charge





# VISION SERVICES

## YEAR-ROUND: ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY TRAINING

Throughout the year, the Council provided training on assistive devices such as screen-reading software, magnifiers and cell phones. All Vision Services staff are equipped to provide assistive technology training. Staff went to clients' homes to provide training on Smart Assistants like Google Home and Amazon Echo, accessible cell phones and personal computers. Assistive technology classes were offered online and in-person on topics ranging from accessible games to refreshable braille displays and how to use an iPhone.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Council and the Sharper Vision Store websites are fully accessible. In 2019, the Council's website and the website of the Sharper Vision Store were redesigned for greater screen-reader and magnification accessibility.

Visit [WCBlind.org](http://WCBlind.org) and [WCBlind.org/store](http://WCBlind.org/store).

"Brent and I marked the stove with bump dots and put tape on the spice containers in my cabinet to create large print labels on them. It has helped me identify their contents, since writing on some of the smaller containers can be hard to see. I now feel more independent and confident in the kitchen."

*-Emily Bauer,*

In-Home Vision Rehabilitation Client, Reedsburg



**90**  
low vision  
evaluations

**238**

assistive  
technology  
appointments

**244**

in-home vision  
rehabilitation visits



## A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE: CERTIFIED VISION SERVICES STAFF

Wisconsin has a shortage of qualified vision services professionals and there are only a few certified vision rehabilitation specialists. Brent Perzentka became certified in vision rehabilitation through the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals (ACVREP) in January after completing his Master's degree at Western Michigan University. Brent works with people on adaptive techniques, accessible equipment, and methods clients can use to do activities they enjoyed before vision loss.

Assistive Technology Specialist Jim Denham completed the Assistive Technology Applications Certification Program through California State University, Northridge (CSUN). Jim teaches people how to use assistive technology to access their computers, phones, and tablets.



# EDUCATION



**118**  
educational  
presentations

## MARCH: DINING IN THE DARK

Madison College's culinary arts program hosted a Dining in the Dark for faculty and staff. The Council trained culinary arts and hospitality students on serving and plating techniques. Suggestions included announcing which direction they were serving from before placing the plate on the table and arranging a place setting that can be navigated using tactile clues. This training took place the day before students served a meal to blindfolded participants.

Roughly 30 students from Madison College prepared and served the meal. Student Kari Walker co-owns Touchdown Tavern in Reedsburg. Kari was inspired to host a Dining in the Dark fundraising dinner at her restaurant in September.

"All of us in the hospitality industry are looking for ways to get better at what we do. At the training, we learned so many things that can apply to making your place inclusive for everyone. Inclusivity and being welcomed are why people come back to a restaurant again and again."

*-Kari Walker,*

Owner of Touchdown Tavern, Student

## YEAR-ROUND: ARCHIVE PROJECT

In 2017, the Council embarked on a project to organize and preserve documents pertinent to its history. The result is a Council Archive, available for staff and board members to use when spreading the Council's message of empowerment throughout Wisconsin.

The archive includes newspaper articles, letters, films, and information about the Council's founding and history. The ability to reflect on our foundation helps us recognize all of the people dedicated to the Council and build on past success as we continue into the future.

"The presentation helped us think about inclusivity in everything we do. Many of the suggestions given were easy for us to implement into our social media plan and start doing right away."

*- "Social Media for All of Us" participant*

## MARCH, JUNE AND NOV. WEBINARS

Webinars allow the Council to provide information to people who are unable to travel to an in-person education event. This helps the Council fulfill our statewide mission to educate people living with vision loss, their family members and those who work in social services. Topics were: "Resources in Wisconsin for People with Vision Impairment," "Glare Control and Sunglasses," and "Portable Video Magnifiers and Smart Assistants."

## JUNE, AUG. AND OCT.: SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ALL OF US

In 2019, the Council developed a workshop designed to teach individuals how to add alt text to their posts and add audio descriptions to videos. Attendees included business owners and marketing professionals at Social Media Breakfast Madison, entrepreneurs at Forward Fest in Madison, and people with disabilities and professionals who work in the disability field at the Self-Determination Conference in the Wisconsin Dells. Nearly 300 people attended the in-person presentations and thousands watched replays online.

## JUNE: BIRDING BY EAR

Classes and field trips were co-hosted by the Council and Madison Audubon Society. Fifty participants learned to identify birds by their songs, whistles, tweets and other sounds.

"Having the mixed participation of people who are sighted and those who are visually impaired was awesome and a great learning experience. It made everyone more aware of others' circumstances and what challenges others may be dealing with that sighted folks often take for granted."

*-Class Participant*

## SEPT. AND OCT.: DOC AND DOT

We presented about vision loss to Department of Corrections staff to bring light to issues faced by inmates who are blind or visually impaired. They are committed to addressing safety issues. We also met with traffic engineers at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation about: Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS), curb cuts, colored pavement and bump-outs to indicate intersections. These adaptations benefit all pedestrians and help drivers make safe decisions.



# ADVOCACY

## APRIL: LEGISLATIVE DAY

The morning session featured talks with agency representatives and the afternoon was devoted to in-office visits with legislative staff. All participants were asked to follow-up with their legislators to summarize key points from the visits. Thirty-six people from around the state attended from La Crosse, Arcadia, Wausau, Fond du Lac, Racine, Kenosha, Milwaukee, Madison and Janesville.

## JULY: DISABILITY VOTER WEEK

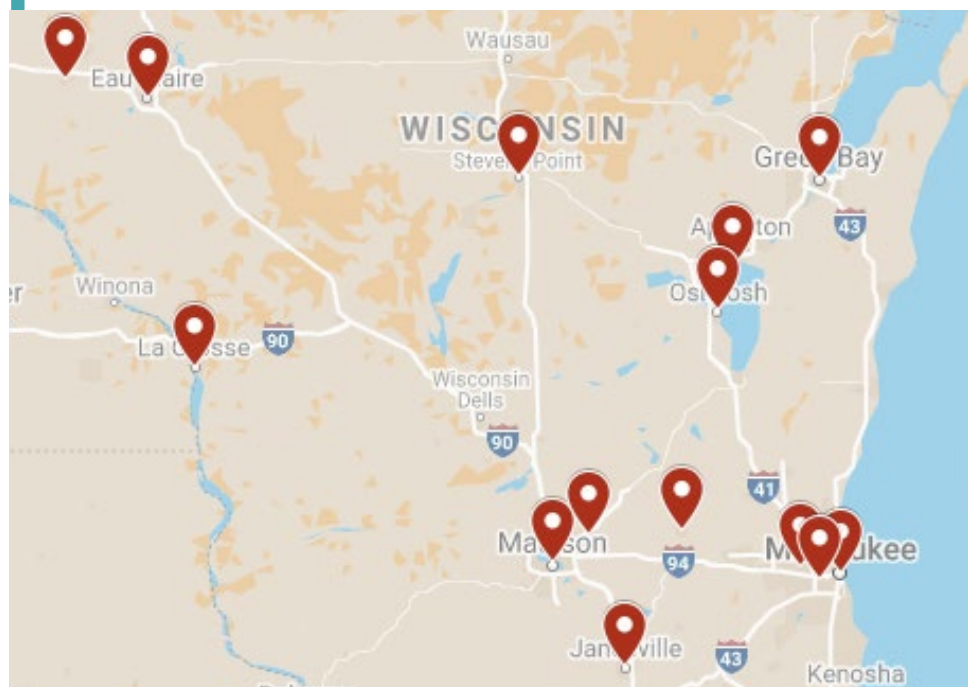
The Council helped organize the National Disability Voter Registration Week event in Madison at the Dane County Farmers' Market. Partners included: League of Women Voters, The Voter ID Coalition, City of Madison Clerk's Office, Wisconsin Elections Commission and Access to Independence. We registered voters and ran a mock election so voters could try using the accessible voting equipment. The Wisconsin Elections Commission interviewed visitors on proposed changes to the voter registration form. About 70 visitors stopped by to register and participate in the mock election.

## OCT: WHITE CANE SAFETY DAY

In October, Governor Evers issued a statewide White Cane Safety Day Proclamation. Fifteen municipalities also recognized the day, with Council board members and staff attending city council meetings. Two press conferences were held in Madison and La Crosse.

Bus advertisements ran in La Crosse and Eau Claire area for four weeks. Each message linked the White Cane Law to broader pedestrian safety to engage a wider audience.

White Cane Safety Day Proclamation Cities



## STRIVING FOR INCLUSIVITY THROUGH COALITION WORK

The Council fosters the value of inclusivity in legislative and advocacy efforts by joining with other organizations in coalitions whose work aligns with our legislative priorities. The Council is a member of: The Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition, the Dignity at Work Coalition, and the Coalition for More Responsible Transportation in Wisconsin. By working with others, the Council ensures the spread of its messages and shares the workload so that faster progress can be made toward a more inclusive future for voters, workers and anyone who needs to travel. We:

- Staffed Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition's table during the Disability Pride Festival in Madison in July.
- Wrote an opinion piece with Sierra Club for the *La Crosse Tribune* about the need for affordable and accessible transportation for people who are blind or visually impaired, since transportation is the linchpin that gets people to their jobs.
- Contributed stories for the "Arrive Together: Transportation Access and Equity in Wisconsin" report. Throughout 2019, City of Madison officials used data from the report when discussing future transportation planning.





# DONORS

These Friends of the Council contributed \$500 or more

Carol Adams  
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 Priscilla and Anthony Beadell  
 Shirley Carlson  
 Richard & Tracy Clark  
 DeForest Lions Club  
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 Nona Graves & Dennis Ameden  
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 Denise Jess  
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 Rajnish Kapur family  
 Candice Koehn  
 Jean Loichinger  
 Constance Malak  
 Betty Rackow  
 Chris Richmond  
 Patty Slaby



**1,406** volunteer hours  
 valued at **\$35,755** 

Margaret Sommers  
 Rhonda Staats  
 Karen Steffen  
 Eunice Wagner  
 Lori & Mark Werbeckes  
 Donald Whitman  
 Franklin Wilson  
 John & Roslyn Zeltins  
 Wayne & Beulah Zoutendam

## Gratitude

The Gratitude Work Group focuses on thanking donors throughout the year. Members of the work group contact supporters who give through The Big Share, workplace giving, online auction, and those who contribute to the White Cane Fund and Year-End Appeal. The message is sincere and heartfelt. The Council could not provide the services we offer without the support of our generous donors.

If you receive a call from a Gratitude Work Group volunteer, feel free to ask them more about the Council or share your own experience. We love to get to know our donors!

All donor names are listed at **WCBlind.org**.



# Make Materials Accessible to People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired



## Send Materials in Advance:

Email agendas, PowerPoint presentations and any documents to participants in advance. This provides the opportunity for a participant who is visually impaired to transfer the text to an accessible format.

## Provide Documents in Microsoft Word:



Microsoft Word is screen-reader and magnifier accessible, and therefore widely used by people who are blind or visually impaired. Ask about color contrast and font size preferences. Users can make any needed accessibility adjustments themselves.

## Include Alt Text:

Describe photos or graphics in a document, social media post, or web page. When writing alt text follow these guidelines:

- Context (what are they doing?)
- Concise
- Decrease redundancy (don't repeat in title, caption, alt text)



## Use Camel Case in Hashtags:



When a screen-reader encounters hashtags, it reads the entire string as one word. To provide clarity, use Camel Case (making the first letter of each new word capitalized). #InclusiveActivity provides separation between the words so a person using screen reading software can understand the hashtag.

## Add Audio Descriptions to Your Videos:

Describe what is happening as it's relevant to the plot. Do this early so you have room for the narration, dialogue and audio descriptions.

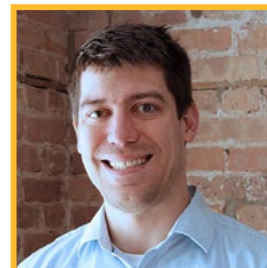
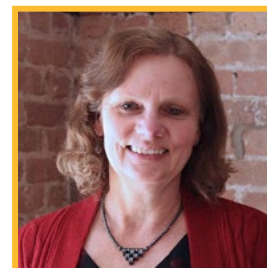
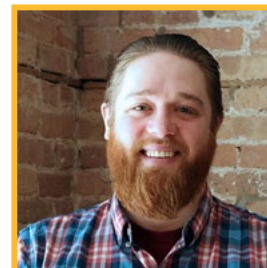
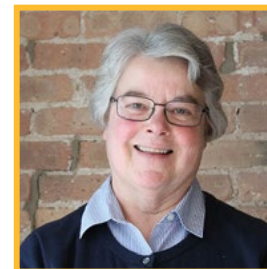
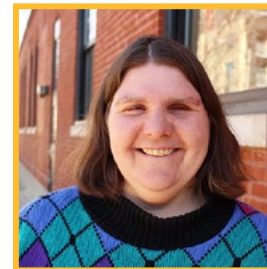
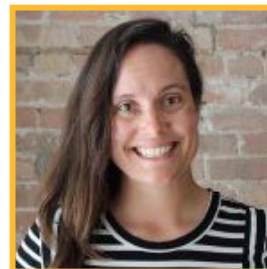
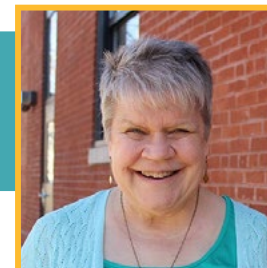
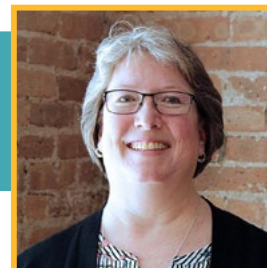


**Sources:** American Council of the Blind, Microsoft

**Want more copies of this to share with coworkers and friends?** Contact [info@WCBlind.org](mailto:info@WCBlind.org) or call 608-255-1166.

## Staff photo (from top left):

Amy Wurf, Brent Perzentka, Denise Jess, Hannah Wente, Heather Buggs, Jean Kalscheur, Jim Denham, Judith Rasmussen, Katherine Corbett, Kathleen Callen, Kris Johannsen, Lori Werbeckes, Mitch Brey, Ray Cubberly, Sue Cowan.



# financials

## 2019 TOTAL REVENUE

|                         |                    |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Sales                   | \$204,672          |
| Low Vision Fees         | \$46,215           |
| Rent & Misc.            | \$17,962           |
| Contributions & Grants  | \$333,678          |
| Bequests                | \$309,025          |
| Investments             | \$1,485,081        |
| Support from Endowments | --                 |
| <b>Total Revenue</b>    | <b>\$2,396,633</b> |

## 2019 TOTAL EXPENSES

|                       |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Low Vision Services   | \$568,898          |
| Community Education   | \$264,651          |
| Fund Development      | \$150,008          |
| Management & General  | \$345,980          |
| <b>Total Expenses</b> | <b>\$1,329,537</b> |





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

**754 Williamson Street  
Madison, WI 53703  
WCBlind.org**