



Everything You Need to Know About Accessible Cell Phones

Are you looking for a new cell phone? Council Vision Services staff recently compiled a list of accessible cell phones that are available now. Some have touchscreens, others have physical buttons. Some are smartphones while others are more basic. Learn what is available and pick the phone that is right for you.

Google Pixel

Google Pixel is an Android touchscreen phone and uses a screen reader called TalkBack to help navigate the phone. Accessibility settings can be adjusted to provide enlarged text and greater contrast.

Apps include: Be My Eyes, Bard Mobile and Eye-D. Google Pixel makes texting easy because users can text by voice with the Google Assistant.

iPhone

The iPhone is a touchscreen phone that has free voice-enabled Voiceover. Similar to TalkBack on the Google Pixel, Voiceover can be used to play music, make calls, send and read text messages, set timers and more. Free, built-in accessibility settings allow users to magnify text and change color contrast. The iPhone has an excellent selection of apps useful for people with vision loss. The iPhone uses a voice assistant named Siri which can do many of the same things that the Google Assistant can do on the Pixel.

Jitterbug Flip

The Jitterbug Flip phone offers voice dialing and features large high contrasting buttons. It does not have screen reader technology. There are three ways in which someone who is blind can place a call: first they can dial



Karen Perzentka with her
BlindShell phone.

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the number with the keypad. The second method is to call the Personal Operator by dialing zero. The operator can look up phone numbers, connect to any number in the U.S. or Canada and place calls to anyone in the user's contacts. Each call with the operator costs 99 cents. The final method is voice dialing. The user can initiate a call by speaking the name of a contact or by speaking the phone number.

People who purchase the Jitterbug Flip phone must use GreatCall wireless service. GreatCall uses the Verizon network, so coverage is very good. However, rate plans are not very competitive compared to other options. For example, unlimited talk and text is available for \$39.99. However, other wireless providers now offer unlimited talk and text in the twenty-dollar range.

“I highly recommend it. It was so easy to learn and use. Council staff were very helpful in talking to me about my options.”

–Karen Perzentka

BlindShell Phone

A great option for those who want some features that a standard cell phone does not offer, but who do not want a smartphone, is the BlindShell phone. This phone has a physical keyboard and big, well-spaced tactile buttons. The screen reader speaks aloud everything you do so the phone is accessible no matter your level of vision. BlindShell works with your own GSM SIM card, and will need AT&T or T-Mobile for service.

The BlindShell uses voice control and dictation features to make calls, send text messages, tell the time and more. Advanced features include using email, finding out the weather, listening to internet radio, setting alarms, recording voice notes and more.

Karen Perzentka wanted to find an accessible cell phone that was right for her. She tried an iPhone and decided she wanted a phone with a physical keyboard. She met with the Council's Vision Services staff who told her about the options available and she decided to purchase the BlindShell Phone.

“I highly recommend it,” Karen says. “It was so easy to learn and use. Council staff were very helpful in talking to me about my options.”

Want more information about accessible cell phones? Watch a replay of the Council's Accessible Cell Phones webinar by visiting the Council's YouTube channel at youtu.be/LcjeWetL2sc.

If you would like assistance choosing the phone that is best for you, email Amy at AWURF@WCBlind.org or call her at 608-237-8107. ■

Gallery Night Goes Virtual

The Council's Gallery Night was held online Friday, October 2, and the virtual exhibit is up on WCBlind.org from now through mid-November. Visit the virtual gallery to view artwork by a dozen Wisconsin artists who are blind or visually impaired. They range in age and media used. Gallery Night Artists include:

- Julie Chumas: Paint; Eau Claire.
- Deb Clair: Acrylic; Madison.
- Ellen Connor: Photography; Oregon.
- Caden Drier: Smashed glass; Fall Creek.
- Rosemarie Fortney: Alcohol ink/digital media on dibond; Milwaukee.
- Alison Fortney: Photography; Milwaukee.
- Duncan Hamilton: Oil pastel on paper; Verona.
- Isabel Kinerk: Digital illustration; Fontana.
- Jeannie Nylander: Ceramic; La Crosse.
- Eli Santin: Sketches and animated video; Madison.
- Jill Smith: Charcoal on paper; Appleton.
- Nikki Wolf: Photography; Janesville.
- Ken Lonquist: Musician/songwriter; Madison.



Underwater Cave by
Rosemarie Fortney

Visit the Council's Gallery Night page at WCBlind.org/events/gallery-night/ for information on how to access the virtual exhibit. Did you find a piece of art you loved? You can purchase artwork and 20% of your purchase supports the Council. ■

The Council Prepares for a Safe Reopening

To serve the needs of clients and adapt to COVID-19, the Council has developed procedures for a safe reopening.

What to Know if You Plan to Visit the Council:

Since Wisconsin has a mask mandate in place, all staff and visitors who enter the building must wear a face covering. Exceptions will be made for those for whom it is medically unsafe to wear a face covering and alternative procedures will be put in place. The Council will provide face coverings for visitors who do not bring their own. Here are other important items to note:



- To have an in-person visit with vision services or the Sharper Vision Store, appointments must be scheduled in advance.
- Appointments include the recipient of products or services and one caregiver.
- Staff will maintain at least 6 feet of distance.
- Staff will wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to lessen exposure risks.
- All visitors will be health screened before allowed inside the building.
- Visitors and people with appointments are asked to wait in their vehicle or outside of the door until told they can enter the building.
- If the visitor has used public transit and arrives early or needs to wait for pickup at the end of the visit, they can wait on one of the chairs in the lobby.
- Visitors who use the restroom are asked to clean surfaces as they exit.
- Curbside product pickup is available.

To make an appointment, contact Amy at AWurf@WCBlind.org or call her at 608-237-8107 with any questions. ■

Announcing the 2020 Council Scholarship Winners



The Council is pleased to award eight students who are blind or visually impaired each with a \$2,000 scholarship for the 2020-2021 academic year. The winners are as follows:

- **Brandon Klas:** Cedarburg, sophomore at UW-Whitewater: Business.
- **Elena Santin:** Madison, sophomore at Lawrence University: Music.
- **George Tuttle:** Drummond, freshman at Carroll University: Undecided.
- **Grace Caine:** Lowell, freshman at UW-Whitewater: Instrumental music education.
- **Joseph Tuttle:** Drummond, freshman at Purdue University: Agricultural education.
- **Kaitlyn Hippe:** Milwaukee, freshman at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan: Education.
- **Mia Zutter:** Sun Prairie, senior at The College of Saint Scholastica in Duluth, Minnesota: Psychology.
- **Saree Behm:** Janesville, freshman at UW-Whitewater: Early childhood education.

In addition to academic achievement, candidates were evaluated by their community involvement, examples of perseverance and thoroughness/grammatical accuracy in essay responses. The Council congratulates each of these young people and wishes them the best in their studies. ■

Letter from the CEO/Executive Director



Denise Jess

“Unprecedented” and “uncertain” have been used repeatedly to describe our current times. For people living with vision loss these times pose both unique challenges and opportunities. Now, more than ever, the value of the Council’s mission and importance of our work are apparent.

For people new to vision loss, working closely with a vision services professional makes a critical difference between dependence, independence and the ability to live life to its fullest. Blindness and low vision skills are often best learned side-by-

side and often hand-over-hand. Given the Stay at Home order in Wisconsin and now social distancing, the Council’s professional staff has been nimble and creative in finding ways to stay connected with people throughout the state, including starting a statewide virtual low vision support group.

Since late March, the Sharper Vision Store has kept fulfilling orders, so that people continue to receive the vital adaptive products needed for living safely and fully.

A kind listening ear from Council staff has helped reduce some of the loneliness and isolation that many of us have felt during this time.

Access technology has enabled people who are blind and visually impaired to work remotely, connect socially and have new experiences that may have been unachievable before due to transportation or physical accessibility. The Council plays a vital role in teaching access technology skills and advocating and educating for increased accessibility.

These times also highlight the important advocacy concerns of people with vision loss for safe and available transportation options, accessible voting to be able to fully participate in this cornerstone of our democracy and

to have our needs reflected in healthcare, employment and education. Throughout the pandemic, the Council has strengthened our partner relationships and visibility to enhance our advocacy efforts with policy makers and to encourage involvement of the blind and visually impaired community in self-advocacy.

I am so proud of the diligence and creativity of Council staff and board to meet the challenges of these times. I also have incredible gratitude to the volunteers, donors and funders who continue to understand the Council's role in moving forward to promote the dignity and empowerment of people who are blind and visually impaired.

Thank you for your countless hours of time and talent and for your generous gifts to our White Cane Fund, White Cane Monthly Giving Circle and other gifts. We look forward to two other giving opportunities in 2020; our \$68 for the Council's 68th anniversary campaign and end-of-year gifts as we close out this unbelievable year. Together we will continue to collaborate to build a more inclusive world for people who are blind or visually impaired.

Warm Regards,



Denise Jess
CEO/Executive Director
Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

Giving Tuesday, a world-wide day of charitable giving, is December 1st! Consider making a gift to the Council at WCBlind.org/Donate.

Advocacy Update: The Council Releases State Budget Priorities

Next year, the biennial Wisconsin state budget will be developed. State agencies are submitting their budgets to Gov. Evers and his budget will be published in early 2021. The Council has developed a list of budget priorities, which are used in conversations with legislators and elected officials when advocating for the rights of people who are blind or visually impaired. Here are a few examples of the Council's priorities for the coming year:

- **Civil Rights and ADA Compliance:** Promote accessible voting at the polls and create an ADA-compliant accessible absentee ballot.
- **Education:** Promote loan availability and loan forgiveness programs, facilitated by the Higher Education Aids Board, for teachers of the visually impaired and orientation and mobility specialists.
- **Employment:** Increase coordination between the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of Transportation to ensure workers with disabilities don't lose their jobs once DVR transportation services end.
- **Health and Long-Term Care:** Increase funding for the Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired (OBVI) so they can hire and retain qualified staff, improve service and serve more clients.
- **Transportation:** Provide \$200,000 to the Department of Transportation to administer a grant program designed to help municipalities install accessible pedestrian signals.

Find the full text of the Council's budget priorities, including specific budget asks, at [WCBlind.org/Advocacy](https://wcblind.org/advocacy). The specific information and data points in these documents can be helpful as you meet with your elected officials and community leaders. ■

Remembering Kathy Brockman

It is with very heavy hearts that Council board and staff share the passing of long-time board member, Kathy Brockman, on July 26, 2020.

Kathy first joined the Council board in 1985. She most recently served as treasurer and chairperson on the Finance Committee. She also served on the awards and fund development committees, and as a member of the gratitude work group.

"Kathy was a talented and accomplished woman," says Chris Richmond, Council board chair. "What I'll remember most is the humbleness of spirit with which she approached everything. She never seemed to want to be in the spotlight and considered it a privilege just to be asked to serve."

Kathy will be remembered for her selflessness, dedication and a willingness to do whatever she could to make a difference. She loved attending her blind bowling league and watching the Brewers play.

Her husband, Pat, said she was able to enjoy a last game of her beloved Brewers and passed without pain. He wants everyone to know how much Kathy loved serving on the board and how adamantly she believed in the Council's mission.

We offer sincerest condolences to Kathy's family and friends, and we are grateful for all the ways in which Kathy served people across Wisconsin who are blind or visually impaired.

Read Kathy's obituary by visiting <http://bit.ly/KathyBrockman>. ■



Kathy Brockman (right) with Excellence Award winner Nona Graves (left) in 2019.

The Council is celebrating 68 years!

Much has changed since 1952 when the Council was established to advocate for the rights of people who are blind or visually impaired. We continue working with legislators today and see progress in voter rights and transportation equity.

Vision services and education became pillars of Council programs in the early 1990s, adding in-home rehabilitation, orientation and mobility, low vision evaluations and assistive technology training.

Education in the form of statewide webinars, school presentations, low vision fairs, falls prevention training, and a biennial Macular Degeneration Symposium reach hundreds of people throughout Wisconsin.

When faced with the pandemic, the Council stayed in contact with clients through online training, phone calls and virtual appointments. We continue to send adaptive products and are welcoming customers back into the Sharper Vision Store for in-person visits by appointment.

Client and customer support in a safe environment are the Council's first priorities. Please consider supporting these programs with a \$68 donation in honor of our 68th anniversary. A convenient monthly gift of \$6.80 will provide two free white canes per year.

Thank you for recognizing the value and variety of services the Council provides. With your help, people in Wisconsin who are living with vision loss can stay connected while staying safe.

Your gift can be mailed in the enclosed envelope or made online at **[WCBlind.org/Donate](https://wcblind.org/Donate)**. Thank you! ■

Client and customer support in a safe environment are the Council's first priorities. Please consider supporting these programs with a \$68 donation in honor of our 68th anniversary.

Upcoming Events

Mark these upcoming events on your calendar. For more Council events, visit [WCBlind.org/Events](https://www.wcblind.org/Events).



Tuesday, November 3

7:00 a.m.

General Election

Statewide

Have you made your voting plan yet? Visit [MyVote.wi.gov](https://www.MyVote.wi.gov) to find your polling place, explore what will be on the ballot, request an absentee ballot, and register to vote. If you encounter a challenge while voting or need information about transportation to the polls, contact the Disability Rights Wisconsin Voter Hotline at **844-347-8683**.



Tuesday, November 10

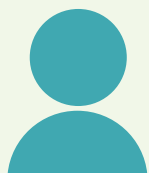
10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Council Webinar: Managing Diabetes in a Busy Life

Online via Zoom

There is no cost to attend.

Learn strategies and adaptive techniques for managing diabetes in this informative Council webinar. For more information, contact Jean at JKalscheur@WCBlind.org or at **608-237-8106**. To register, visit the Council's Event page at [WCBlind.org/Events](https://www.WCBlind.org/Events) and complete the form.



Thursday, December 3

4:00-6:00 p.m.

Learn about Retinal Diseases; Online Event

The Council and the McPherson Eye Research Institute present an evening about the research, treatment and care for retinal diseases. Learn more at [WCBlind.org/Events](https://www.WCBlind.org/Events).



Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

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Provide the Council with Your Email Address

The Council sends out four monthly e-newsletters: Events, Legislative Update, On Sight and News You Can Use. Each has important information to help you live your best life with vision loss. Email Ray at **RCubberly@WCBlind.org** or call **608-237-8109** to provide your email address.

Council Courier is available in large print, braille and CD. To request an alternative format or update your mailing address, contact Ray using the information above. An electronic and audio version of Courier is available at **WCBlind.org/Media**.

Contact Us

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