

Promoting independence and changing lives



Wisconsin Council of the
Blind & Visually Impaired
Expanding visual horizons

2013 Annual Report



On behalf of the Board of Directors, welcome to the 2013 Annual Report from the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired! In the following pages, we will demonstrate how the Council Board and staff carry forward our mission—how we transform the lives and attitudes of individuals and the general public by promoting the dignity and independence of Wisconsin citizens who are visually impaired or blind.

We live our mission of advocacy and service delivery via three core components:

1) working for legislative action and advocacy; 2) changing the perception of what it means to be blind or visually impaired by educating the public and people experiencing significantly changing vision; and 3) transforming lives by providing services that help individuals with low or no vision increase their independence and achieve their full potential.

Note that we are the Wisconsin Council **of** the Blind & Visually Impaired, rather than the Wisconsin Council **for** the Blind & Visually Impaired, which reflects a significant difference in attitude and performance. This means that our 15-member board is comprised of passionate and committed individuals with low or no vision who give back to our own community by making policy and setting direction for all Council activities and services. As board members, we are living the mission of the Council and the difference that we wish to make! We have changed lives for more than 60 years, and we will remain a catalyst for transformation long into the future. ■

Rhonda Staats

Rhonda Staats
2014 Council President



2013 was indeed a productive and busy year! More than 8,500 people were touched by our vision services, our communications, and our programs throughout the state, including Appleton, Dodgeville, Sheboygan, Oshkosh, Madison, and Chippewa Falls. Our radio interviews with helpful information were heard in Richland Center, Eau Claire, Green Bay, and Eagle River. Our webinars had registered participants from two-thirds of Wisconsin counties. Our partnerships continued with two museums: the Madison Children's Museum and the Weiss Earth Science Museum to make them more accessible for people who are blind or visually impaired. Our ongoing relationship with the University of Wisconsin Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences and our new

relationship with the Wisconsin chapter of the American Diabetes Association continue to be important as we work to bring a high quality of life and a sense of independence and dignity to those who are blind or visually impaired. Our ongoing legislative advocacy has a direct impact on residents who have visual impairment. We are very grateful to our generous donors and sponsors who help us each year to inform, educate and support our clients and customers.

I hope you enjoy the individual stories of Wisconsinites with vision loss that we included in this annual report. After all, it is because of the community of individuals who are blind or visually impaired that we are successful! Thank you for helping us have a terrific year! ■

Loretta Himmelsbach

Loretta Himmelsbach
Executive Director

Legislative advocacy and Annika's very happy student experience

Annika Konrad has experienced firsthand the fruits of the Council's legislative advocacy. In 2012, the Council worked collaboratively with legislators on both sides of the aisle, publishers, and numerous supporting organizations for passage of The Instructional Materials Accessibility Act of Wisconsin.

This legislation requires publishers to make textbooks and other educational materials available in alternate formats to college and university students with print-related disabilities, that is, students who cannot access text through traditional formats. Accessible materials for students with disabilities may include braille, large print or audio materials.

Annika is a visually impaired doctoral student at UW-Madison where she is studying composition and rhetoric with the goal of becoming a college writing instructor. "Before passage of this legislation, I had to do a lot of work on my own to get copies of classroom materials. Reading them in the traditional print size caused me a lot of back pain and eye strain." Now, for each of her classes, Annika contacts her instructors to get a list of books she will need. Then, working through the McBurney Disability Resource Center at UW-Madison, she receives them in PDF format. "This legislation makes my life worry free. I don't have to struggle to keep up, and now I feel equal to the other students in my classes."

The Council was pleased to present Annika with a \$1,500 scholarship in 2013 and 2014 to help her achieve her educational goals and professional dreams. Our partnership with her continued when she received a grant from the Center for Humanities' Public Humanities Exchange program to develop a story sharing project for people who have vision loss. Working together with the Council, Annika launched **The Outlook from Here**, an interactive blog on our website that contains honest and inspiring stories from people of all ages in Wisconsin who have faced and overcome barriers because of their disability. In less than two months of its debut, the blog had hundreds of faithful readers.

Moving forward legislatively, our efforts will be directed toward the passage of an Omnibus Bill. The issues covered include: updating and clarifying legislation on service animals to prevailing ADA standards, improving enforcement and promotion of the White Cane Law, attaching penalties regarding the discrimination in housing access to people who use service animals, wayfinding and pedestrian safety to include accessible large print/braille signage and audio traffic signals, and requesting a legislative council study whose goal would be to strengthen and improve legislation mandating meaningful and effective vocational services and adjustment training programs for Wisconsin adults experiencing blindness or severe vision loss. ■



Vision services help Ros live her best life



Ros Zeltins of Portage, Wisconsin always loved music. As a member of her high school's marching band, she was asked by the band director why she kept moving in a different direction from the rest of the group when they were in formation. Little did she know that several years later, she would be diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa, commonly called "RP"—an eye condition that causes loss of peripheral vision.

"The thought of losing my independence, little by little, was so daunting at first! I knew that eventually, I would have to give up driving, too. I was confronted with a great deal of loss." Thanks to the support of her husband and "wonderful friends," Ros was able to continue her job as pharmacy director at Divine Savior Hospital in Portage. Later, to simplify her life and accommodate her vision loss, she found a pharmacy job at her local drugstore where she worked for 23 years. When she retired, Ros was "determined to embrace my vision loss and learn how to live my best life."

Discovering the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired was "like opening the door to new independence and possibilities." Ros received a mobility cane that helps her travel more safely and easily. She met with our Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist to learn how to use her cane effectively and negotiate steps and high-traffic areas. "The confidence I received from this training was so affirming and life changing," Ros remarked.

In our Sharper Vision Store, she found raised dots to identify things in her home, lined paper, 20/20 pens, and a reversible cutting board. "I chop and my husband cooks!" A lighted magnifier and Gig Light help her read menus and music, "...so I don't have to give up one of my favorite pastimes." Ros and her husband John are grateful to the Council for introducing them to new adaptive products and for helping her feel that she is very capable and able to do more things than she ever imagined.

Ros is amazed at how much technology has advanced for individuals with vision loss. She loves her e-reader, and she has attended several of the Council's free webinars to learn about new resources, assistive products and adaptive strategies. "I loved the reference list the speaker provided during the webinar on best websites for people with vision loss. I've shared it with lots of my friends."

Ros and John were inspired to give their first gift in 2002 because they saw how vision loss can be frightening, and they want as many people as possible to seek and receive help. "We feel that our gifts are used in ways that benefit people with vision loss." ■

Education enhances independence and quality of life

People who have low vision due to an eye disease like macular degeneration or who have changes in eyesight due to “aging eyes” can find reading their favorite newspapers, books and magazines and accessing information more difficult. The introduction of the new tablets and e-readers, like the iPad, Kindle and Nook, with their accessibility features, are making it easier for people with vision loss to continue their love of reading.

In 2013, the Council presented the “Bloomin’ Literature” program to library patrons at the Goodman Public Library in Madison, Appleton Public Library, Dodgeville Public Library, and Spring Green Public Library. Programs were also presented to librarians, senior apartment managers and activity professionals about e-reader accessibility and alternatives to reading books, including the Talking Books program. These were for professionals in southwest Wisconsin, the Appleton area, the Mead Public Library in Sheboygan, and the Winnefox Library System in the Oshkosh area.

Mary Kay Krause attended the e-reader presentation for adults with vision loss that we offered at the Thompson Community Center in Appleton, the town in which she lives. She was delighted to learn about new technology that allows her to access some of the things she enjoys reading but was finding more difficult because she has Age-related Macular Degeneration in both eyes. This training, along with a white cane from the Council and adaptive products from our Sharper Vision Store, has enhanced her feelings of confidence and independence.

Diana Sandberg of the Appleton Public Library reflected on the “Bloomin’ Literature” program and its impact:

“When we partnered with Council staff to demonstrate e-reader and tablet accessibility features, participants with low vision were very excited to learn how to use them to read again. Attending librarians learned about the many services and devices provided by the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired—knowledge that we took back to our libraries to share with other staff and library users. The program really demonstrated how eager people are to read and how many ways we have to help them.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one-third of adults ages 65 and older fall each year in the United States. People with vision loss are almost twice as likely to experience multiple falls as those with normal vision. In 2013, the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired partnered with the Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA) to offer 25 falls prevention presentations as part of WIHA’s “Stepping





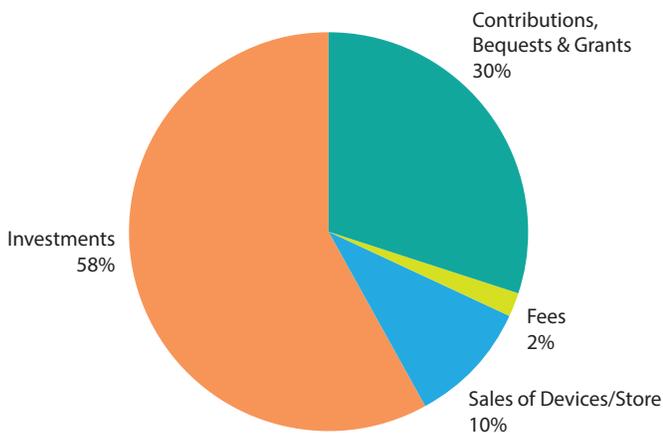
On” program. Council vision rehabilitation teacher Jean Kalscheur and low vision therapist Marshall Flax provided practical tips to reduce the risk of falls for people who are blind or visually impaired. They discussed lighting, furniture arrangement to get around safely, and glare reduction that can remove some of the barriers to safety and independence.

Betsy Abramson, Deputy Director of the Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging, remarked on the value of Council presentations:

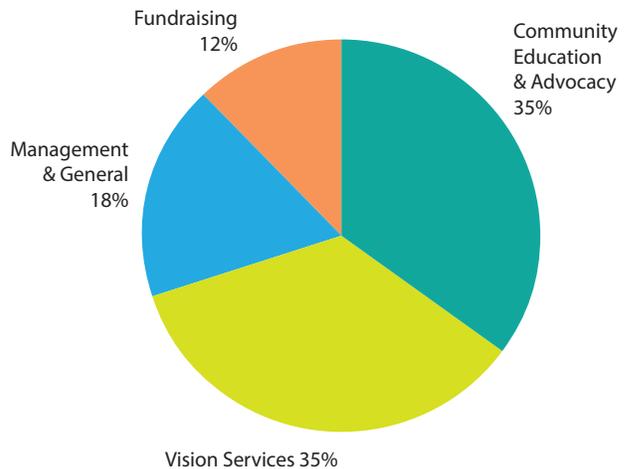
“The Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging is incredibly grateful to the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired for their tremendous contributions to our education efforts in healthy aging. Both Jean Kalscheur and Marshall Flax are wonderful resources in providing expertise related to the vision segments in our ‘Stepping On’ falls prevention community workshops. Plus, Jean will be giving a highly-anticipated workshop on causes, consequences and resources for older adults with vision loss at our annual Healthy Aging Summit.” ■

Financial Summary

2013 Revenue: \$1,624,327



2013 Expenses: \$1,172,880



The accompanying condensed financial data and graphical presentations as of and for the year ended December 31, 2013 were derived from the consolidated statements that were audited by Smith & Gesteland, LLP. The data and graphical presentations should be read in conjunction with the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired’s consolidated financial statements and the auditor’s report. Complete copies of these statements are available upon request.

Growing Our Legacy Circle

Estate gifts to the Council make it possible for us to carry out our mission, thanks to generous individuals who have seen the impact a legacy gift can make for years into the future.

Your gifts to the White Cane Appeal change the way a person with vision loss lives **today**. A gift from your estate will make a promise to **future** generations that the Council's services, training, education and advocacy will be there for them!

We invite you to 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 your favorite charity.

More information can be found on our website at www.wcblind.org or by calling Lori at 608-237-8114. ■



Welcome and “thank you” to those who recently joined the Legacy Circle:

Helen Bewick
Kathleen Brockman
Steven Johnson
Chris and Theresa Zenchenko

We appreciate bequests received from:

Marion Deppeler
Victoria Fries
Ann Bardeen Henschel
Emil Hunkel
Jaya Iyer
Claremont Jackson
Rose S. Kroll
Frances M. Matte
Arnold Van Bogart
Linda Voeks
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We received gifts in memory of:

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Marion Wunsch

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Wisconsin Humanities Council

Thank you to the many individuals, service organizations and businesses who supported the work of the Council in 2013. All donors are listed on our website at www.wcblind.org.



**Wisconsin Council of the
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Expanding visual horizons

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Stay connected!

If you would like to learn about the Council's special events, volunteer opportunities, vision education programs, and updates on vision research, we invite you to subscribe to "On Sight," our monthly electronic newsletter. To receive this communication, please send an email to info@wcblind.org or call 800-783-5213. You can also follow us on Facebook and find many resources at www.wcblind.org.

