

Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired

## IMPACT REPORT 2022

A Year of Growth



### A YEAR OF GROWTH





I am pleased to share the Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired 2022 Impact Report with you.

This past year was a "year of growth" as we extended our reach into more homes than ever before. Thanks to the support of our donors and the pressing need in our state, we expanded our in-home services to new geographical locations. This is crucial as it allows our therapists to effectively assess and provide training in the environment where individuals spend most of their time...in their homes. Many of these locations were previously underserved, particularly in rural areas.

Additionally, we secured a federal grant in April 2022, which enabled us to hire a full-time driver and expand our transportation services. Our driver plays a vital role in assisting clients with accessing the agency, family, medical care, goods, and services, as well as social opportunities. Familiarity with our SLSBVI driver and the quality of care she provides instills a sense of safety and security for the passengers.

Lastly, we take pride in the fact that our services to minorities have continued to grow under the guidance of our Board and Minority Advisory Board. This "year of growth" was made possible by the unwavering support of the Board, staff, volunteers, and donors who wholeheartedly believe in our mission. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all those who contributed.

Laura Park-Leach

Joe Brinker

### **OUR MISSION**

The Society enhances independence, empowers individuals, and enriches the lives of people who are visually impaired or blind.

## **SPECIALTY SERVICES**

- Assistive Technology
- Low Vision Medical Exams
- Occupational Therapy
- Orientation and Mobility

- Social Work
- Support Groups
- Transportation



### **ENHANCING COMMUNICATION**



Brenda King uses a CCTV (Ali Lambert-COTA)



Ellen Mantz uses the ORCAM My Eye (with Gina Cusac-COTA)

Enhancing communication through Assistive Technology and Occupational Therapy can literally mean "the world" to those who are blind or visually impaired. Just ask **Brenda King** who has taken advantage of both of the above services, including Orientation and Mobility. As part of The Year of Growth, Society extended in-home Occupational Therapy services to St. Charles county. Brenda received help from Society through Ali Lambert, Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant to safely navigate her kitchen with the help of bump dots on the stove and microwave.

Brenda also had a Closed Circuit TV (CCTV) monitor that had been given to her, but she had never used. Ali set it up and now Brenda can read her mail, news ads, magazines and other print that she previously relied on others for. As Brenda said, "If there was no Society out there, where would I be? It doesn't mean life's over just because you've lost your sight. You just have to travel on a different path."

Ellen Mantz is 93 and loves to read. It was important to she and her family to remain as independent as possible in her home. According to Ellen's daughter, "It was a godsend when Society got certified to provide in-home services in Illinois." Gina Cusac, Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant has worked with Ellen marking appliances with bump dots and placing yellow tape on her rollator which provides contrast.

Ellen also received Assistive Technology training at Society and now uses the Orcam My Eye to read books. The wearable device reads the text to Ellen and she doesn't miss a beat when it comes to reading her favorite novels.

"It doesn't mean life's over because you've lost your sight."

## EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS

In 2022, Society added **Transportation** to its many services through a 5310/New Freedom Enhanced Mobility for Seniors & Adults with Disabilities Program grant, from the East-West Gateway Council of Governments. As a result, our shared-ride transportation expanded service to 5 days per week in St. Louis city and county. Additionally, there was limited transportation in St. Charles and Jefferson Counties.

This allowed Society to hire Rose Lawhorn to be our full-time Transportation Specialist. Using the agency van or car, she transported clients to and from any destination on a first-come, first-serve basis, including trips to Society, medical appointments, shopping, the post office, the bank, and other destinations in the community. Between April 1 and December 31, 2022, Rose transported a total of 196 unique clients on 2,409 trips, for a total mileage of 37,254 miles. The 5310 grant pays for half of the gas and maintenance on the vehicles used for carrying clients.

Wendy Zimet is a client of Society and has Macular Degeneration. She regularly uses our Transportation Services. Wendy said she was thrilled when Society added transportation, because even though she has a close circle of friends, she doesn't want to impose upon them every time she needs to go somewhere. "The loss of independence was very difficult for me to handle. I applaud Society for this! With the Transportation Program, there's a sense of freedom...and it's become somewhat empowering. I don't have to look at this (low vision) as being stuck. It's more about what I CAN do and not what I can't."

The 5310 New Freedom grant is a 3-year grant and is included in the Transportation Improvement Program that East-West Gateway developed for the St. Louis region.

"With the Transportation Program, there's a sense of freedom."



Rose Lawhorn, Transportation Specialist and client Annette Nowakowski with her guide dog, Giselle



**Wendy Zimet, Transportation Client** 



Paul Ashby, Jefferson County client



Frank Brooks, St. Charles County client with his wife, Annette

### **ENRICHING THE PATH TO INDEPENDENCE**

Sometimes a simple bump dot can make all the difference in a person's life who is struggling with low vision. That's what **Jefferson County client**, **Paul Ashby and St. Charles County client Frank Brooks** both said after receiving OT services from Society. They are just two of several clients who have benefitted from our expansion of in-home training services. Society successfully expanded its services into Jefferson County in the spring of 2022 and in St. Charles in the fall of 2022.

**Paul Ashby** lives in Festus and has Macular Degeneration. He completely lost vision in one eye, but still has some vision in the other. After visiting Society for evaluation, he received Occupational Therapy services in his home with Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant, Michelle Harrell.

"Michelle has set me up with lighting, a magnifier, and bump dots everywhere, and has just made things safer and more accessible for me. It got to the point where I could no longer be home alone while my wife was gone. It's amazing how the simplest things can help. She strategically placed those bump dots so I can plug in things. I can safely turn on the stove and she also marked the dials, so I don't turn the heat up too high. I can even keep up with laundry because she marked the dials on the washer."

**Frank Brooks** lives in St. Peters and has both Macular Degeneration and Glaucoma. He loves to cook and is now safely doing so again. He even has an apron that says, "Big Chef."

"The home visits have helped me adjust to my vision loss. All showed me the way to do many things I could not do anymore. Helping me in areas of safety, cooking, and self-sufficiency." More than anything, he is cooking again. "I hardly cooked anymore. I learned techniques on how to measure—even though I can't see—to use vegetables that are already cut." His first meal was a Mediterranean Stew in a small crock pot.

"With those orange bump dots and my sense of touch, I can do things I could not see to do. I can use many appliances again. Just three little bump dots enables me to heat my food!"

"It got to the point where I could no longer be home alone..." PA
"Just three little bump dots enables me to heat my food..." FB

## **CLIENT SUCCESS**

Our new OT home visits and the Transportation program made a profound impact in our clients' lives in 2022. Their success is measured in the realization of meeting personal goals.

**Number of Clients Served** 

1,122

**Transportation** 

100%

**Assistive Technology** 

99%

**Orientation and Mobility** 

99%

**Low Vision Clinic** 

98%

Occupational Therapy

94%

Social Work

92%





## **2022 VISIONARY GALA**

In 2019, when the Visionary Gala was held, no one had a clue what awaited the world in 2020. With the COVID-19 Pandemic, a gala was not possible that year, and in 2021, we held an all-virtual gala. But what a joy it was on **April 23, 2022** to hold our first in-person **Visionary Gala** in three years and to see smiling faces from donors, clients, and staff.

The beautiful Palladium St. Louis hosted the event. Entertainment was provided by local jazz singer, Erin Bode. Jasmine Huda of Fox Channel 2 was the emcee for the event.

Dr. John Galanis and Mr. Christopher Roberts were recognized for securing a major donation in 2022 to support Society's mission.

Society awarded the Community Light Award to Dr. Monica Perlmutter, OTD, OTR/L, SCLV, Associate Professor of Occupational Therapy and Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at Washington University and the lead Occupational Therapist for the aging and low vision services in the Community Practice Program.

Society was also honored to present the James Butler Award to The Retina Institute. Consisting of 11 Doctors of Optometry, The Retina Institute has a passion for helping those with low vision and are dedicated to the treatment of the retina. The James Butler Award is named after one of Society's founders and is presented to an individual for long meritorious service to Society.

A special award was presented to Brenda Wendling, MSW, LCSW, Director of Adult Services at Society for her 24 years of exceptional service. Brenda would go on to retire in January 2023 and is greatly missed.

Overall, it was a fabulous night and Society raised nearly \$100,000! A sincere thank you to our gala sponsors, especially Lighthouse for the Blind-St. Louis and Alice Conway and to ALL who support St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Gala co-chairs: Gerald and Estella Brooks and Alice Conway.

Gala committee: Midge Crider, Bonnie Daneker, Rodney Kerner, Pat and Mike

McKinnis, Michael Railey, Ann Shapiro, Bradley Smith, Lori Tesser, Laura Park-Leach,
and Megan Connelly.



Monica has been a referral source for Society since 2006, and in 2015, she facilitated a six-week program for our clients called "Living Life with Vision Loss." This self-management course was offered yearly at Society for several years and multiple clients have benefitted from the program.

Monica accepts the award from Visionary Gala Co-chair, Gerald Brooks

Dr. Monica Perlmutter smiles for the camera

The Community Light Award presented to Monica Perlmutter, OTD, OTR/L, SCLV



The doctors from The Retina Institute

Dr. Nicholas Engelbrecht accepts the award on behalf of TRI

The Retina Institute has been referring clients to Society for many years! We are grateful for this longstanding collaboration.

The James Butler Award presented to The Retina Institute



Dr. John Galanis and Mr. Christopher Roberts were recognized for securing a major donation in 2022 to support Society's mission. With a desire to recognize the long-lasting impact this donation will have on client services, the honorees will have a room in the agency named after them – the Galanis Roberts Vision Training Room located in the Drews Low Vision Clinic.

Dr. John Galanis, MD, FACS and Mr. Christopher Roberts, Esquire receive special recognition.



A special award was presented to Brenda Wendling, Director of Adult Services at Society, for her 24 years of exceptional service. Brenda would retire in January 2023 and is greatly missed.

Brenda with daughters,
Anna and Laura,
and husband Dan.



Brenda Wendling, MSW, LCSW received special recognition for her service



Visionary Gala Committee Co-chairs: Estella and Gerald Brooks, and Alice Conway



Kevin and Dr. Erin Sullivan, Yasmin Huda, and husband, Peter LeBlanc, Jr.



Mr. and Mrs. Eric Warnhoff, CEO, Lighthouse for the Blind



Dr. Paul Tesser and Lori Tesser







### **NEW FACES**



**Mary Morgan-Corbitt** 

Society welcomed Mary Morgan-Corbitt in January as our new Volunteer Coordinator. Mary is responsible for recruiting and coordinating current volunteers and networking in the community to promote the Society's programs. Her background and experience as Chapter President of Foundation Fighting Blindness and six years as a Ministry Leader with a local church made her the perfect candidate for the Volunteer Coordinator position.

She has Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP), a rare eye disease that affects the retina. Mary was a Special Education teacher for many years and finally had to give up teaching, but she never gave up her heart for serving people with special needs.



**Rose Lawhorn** 

Through the East-West Gateway Council of Governments, Society was awarded a 5310/New Freedom Enhanced Mobility for Seniors & Adults with Disabilities Program grant.

The Agency hired Rose Lawhorn to be our fulltime Transportation Specialist. Rose has prior experience working for the Division of Family Support and ABC Checker Cab Co.

Using the agency van or car, she transports clients to and from any destination on a first-come, first-serve basis. The transportation program serves clients in St. Louis city and county and includes limited transportation in St. Charles and Jefferson counties. Rose loves working with people and loves to drive!



We welcomed a new medical receptionist, Rachel Marin who joined us in December of 2022. Rachel, who goes by the nickname, Rae is originally from Texas and speaks fluent Spanish, which means we now have two bilingual members on staff. She moved to St. Louis because of her husband's work and as she said, "Let me tell you, the weather takes some getting used to!" Rae studied Business Management at the University of Phoenix. At ReadyOne Industries in Ft. Worth, she supervised and trained AbilityOne individuals. Having worked with individuals of many abilities and disabilities, including the visually impaired, Rae was excited to apply for the position at Society. Rae keeps Society looking festive for all

seasons.

Rae Marin

PAGE 17

## **NEW FACES**



**Mariko Lighthart** 

Society welcomed Mariko Lighthart, our new Occupational Therapist in August. Mariko (pronounced Ma-de-ko) said you can just call her M! She was born and raised in St. Louis, but after marrying, moved a few times and landed in Evansville, Indiana. While there, she began volunteering at a hospital and as she said, "I found myself drawn to the rehab department and watching the Occupational Therapists in action. I decided that was the career I wanted to pursue."

"M" received her Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy at the University of Southern Indiana. She practiced in Indiana and Kentucky for a number of years, but as her parents began to age, she moved back to St. Louis and worked in home health care in various settings including pediatrics, adults and geriatrics.

Now, Society is fortunate enough to have Mariko providing Occupational Therapy services for us on a part-time basis. Welcome Ms. M!



Mary Hulsey-Lupp

Mary Hulsey-Lupp started with Society in mid-September as the new, part-time Accountant. Mary has been an accomplished accountant over 40 years.

"Working with numbers is what drew me to accounting," she said. "But I also enjoy the story behind the numbers. The explanations of why organizations thrive and succeed."

The satisfaction she gets from being an Accountant comes from being part of a team that can make decisions based on accounting information which leads to the success of the organization.

"I'm glad to be part of the team at the Society because I can see that the focus is on helping people. I know I don't have direct contact with our clients in my position, but I already feel like part of the team."

### **NEW FACES**



**COTAS** 



**Gina Cusac** 

Michelle Harrell

Society welcomed Michelle Harrell, Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant in January. She will service Jefferson County residents on a PRN basis. Through a grant from the Jefferson Foundation, we hired Michelle to increase direct service to residents living with vision loss. The grant was awarded to Society to pilot a mobile low vision program in Jefferson County through a combination of telehealth and in-home care.

Michelle will work with low vision optometrists who recognize that people with low vision need specialized training to remain independent. She will make in-home visits to establish care for those who have never had the opportunity to be evaluated. Through telehealth, she will work collaboratively with a Society Occupational Therapist to set up the Plan of Care. Michelle will then provide the recommended services in the comfort of the clients' own homes.

"The most rewarding thing I have experienced is to see clients who thought their world was shutting down because of their vision loss and then to blossom as they receive services," Michelle stated. "They realize they can continue to do the things they love to do, but in a different way."

Society also welcome a second Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant in the form o Gina Cusac. As SLSBVI continued to expand its OT service, we crossed another river, this time heading east. Illinois was our next target. Society gets many low vision requests for help from Madison and St. Clair counties. Thanks to funding by the Lutheran Foundation, we forged ahead to help those who are unable to get to Society for services. Gina joined Society on a part-time basis to serve as a COTA to Illinoisans. Just as Michelle lives in Jefferson County and Ali lives in St. Charles county, Gina lives in Illinois and can serve those clients on a PRN basis. Gina has 28 years of experience as a COTA, working in pediatrics, geriatrics, and early intervention, but this is her first foray into low vision.

"This is new territory for me, but I'm really looking forward to helping people get their life back. I'm looking forward to one-on-one interaction and building that trust." Gina is pretty impressed with Society. "The one thing that stands out to me is the hope we bring to people with low vision. Hope means a lot."

## **TECHNOLOGY DAY**

Society hosted its first Tech Day in May 2022 to rave reviews.



Registration in the lobby



MindsEye discusses their technology



Braille reader demo up close



MindsEye was one of the Vendors



Chris Rose from NanoPac demos a Braille reader

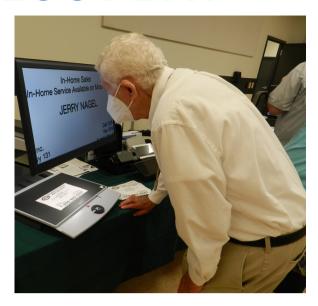


Society's Dr. Jennifer Lauer demos a CCTV

## **TECHNOLOGY DAY**



**Checking out more NanoPac items** 



Jerry Nagel brought large screen CCTVs



Many questions were answered



ORCAM rep shows how the wearable device works



Large screen displays help with vision loss.



The Sight Solutions Shop was open too

## **WIKE FOR SIGHT**

Society hosted its inaugural Wike for Sight in October 2022



Reverb, Wash U.'s a cappella non-profit group performed



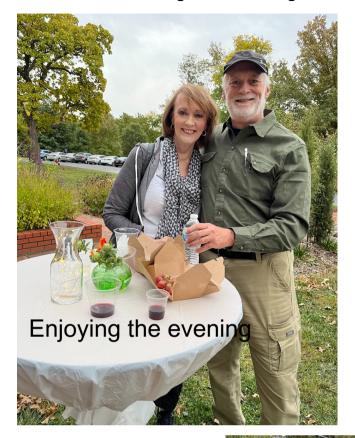




PAGE 22

## **WIKE FOR SIGHT**

A little walking...a little hiking...and a little wine tasting on a beautiful fall evening.







## **WIKE FOR SIGHT**

The Hearth Room in Webster Groves was where the event was held on October 14.





Mike Ward, a long time supporter of Society





A good time was had by all!

## LEADERS WHO PURSUE EXCELLENCE





Pat and Mike at the Inaugural Wike for Sight 2022

Mike and Pat McKinnis

The Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired depends upon the generous support of community members who believe in our mission and our clients. We believe the leaders in our community help change the world.

Two people who broke the mold on pursuing excellence are Mike and Pat McKinnis, longtime supporters of the St. Louis Society for the Blind. They have deep roots in the community. Pat received her master's in education from Webster University and has taught primary grades and developed an art program at The Miriam School. Mike has had a distinguished career at Bryan Cave Law Firm. When they are not volunteering in the community, Mike and Pat enjoy spending time with their three children and four grandchildren.

The McKinnis' have played a significant role in the Society's success for many years. Pat said, "We first became acquainted with the Society when Mike's dad and my mom experienced Macular Degeneration. The Society was very helpful to us, particularly with various devices to assist with our parent's vision".

In 2013, Mike joined the Board of Directors and has served as a member in various roles on the Executive Committee including as Chair, and on the Advisory Board. In 2022, he served as Assistant Treasurer. Both Mike and Pat have served on the Visionary Gala Committee multiple times and were the Co-Chairs in 2021.

Mike and Pat believe the Society is "truly a wonderful resource in all it does for the visually impaired in St. Louis and the surrounding areas. Its people are caring, well-trained and professional. The programs for the visually impaired are the best." Mike and Pat are some of the best humans we know, and Society is grateful they are in our corner and continue to support our efforts year in and year out.

#### Leadership 2022

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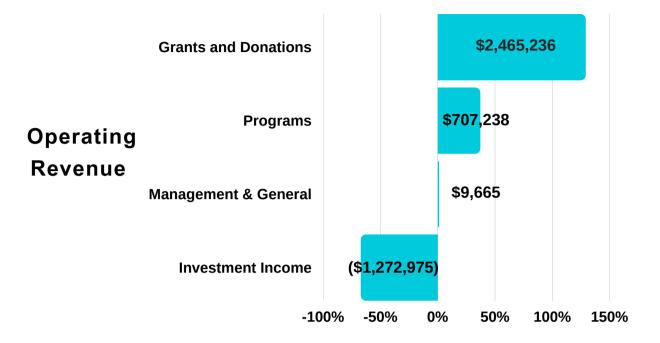
Laura Park-Leach

#### Staff

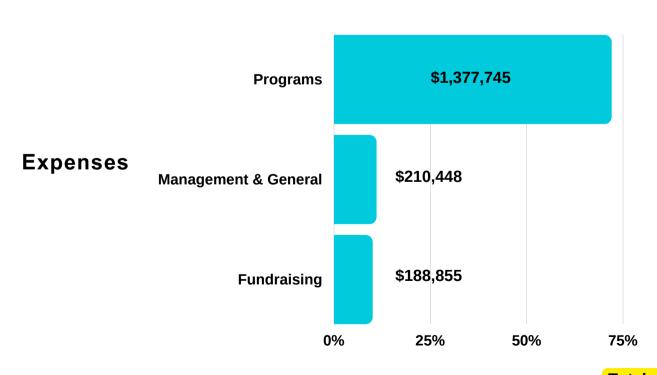
Jim Arcipowski Kate Boland, OD John Boyd, III Jessica Broodryk, OD Mary Caldwell Barbara Clover Megan Connelly Mary Morgan-Corbitt Gina Cusac Kate Gettinger, OD LaMonte' Hamilton, II Michelle Harrell Angela Kalinowski Ali Lambert Jennifer Lauer, OTD Rose Lawhorn Mariko Lighthart Mary Hulsey-Lupp Rachel Marin Susan Meissel Danielle Nahm **Tammy Pearl** Judy Redlich Gina Diel-Russell Veronica Steibel Brenda Wendling

Kathryn Smith-Marketing Intern Miriam Stillman, OT Intern

## **SOCIETY FINANCIALS**



Total: \$1,909,164



Total: \$1,777,048

## DONOR RECOGNIFION

Thank you for building a world where people with vision loss are empowered and can live independently. Every single gift matters to us, and most importantly to our clients. We are honored to recognize those who have made contributions at all giving levels. We do our best to ensure the donor list is accurate. To make a donation or alert us to a correction, please contact: Megan Connelly, Director of Development at 314-968-9000.

#### Helen Keller Society Breakthrough (\$25,000 and above)

Clarkson Evecare Settlement Fund Klein Family Charitable Remainder Trust **Margaret Butler Trust** J.P. Morgan Mrs. Stephen Waltman Winnifred Lesandrini Trust

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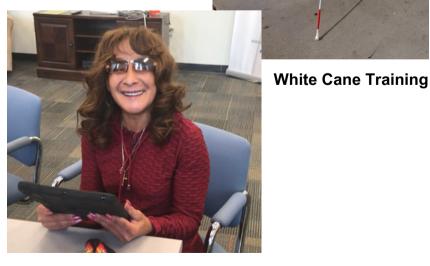


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