2015 ANNUAL REPORT

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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO AND BOARD CHAIR

As we prepared this annual report, we reflected on the many ways Vision Loss Resources improves the quality of life for our participants. It is not just in practical ways – like using tactile bump dots to help participants navigate their kitchen safely, or improving participants’ technology skills to help them communicate with their family and friends, or developing the hands-on skills they need to return to work or school.

It is in the intangible ways that I believe we have the greatest impact.

Living with vision loss can be sometimes frustrating, sometimes overwhelming, but it can also be a journey of finding yourself. One of the reasons our older adult participants as well as our working age Rehabilitation students choose VLR is because our programming allows individuals to share with one another their life experiences and the unique bond that keeps them growing and learning and creating new experiences.

The success for Vision Loss Resources is in seeing a participant participate.

No other organization in the State of Minnesota offers the wide range of services and activities for people – especially seniors – living with vision loss.

One of the most common anecdotes we hear from participants is this: “I do more now than I did before I lost my vision, and it is because of the support and opportunities here at Vision Loss Resources.” You will read in our 2015 annual report about the many ways we are building a community of care for people who are blind or visually impaired.

Thank you, for sharing the last year with us,

Kate Grathwol, Ph.D.  Lisa David
President/CEO  Board Chair
COMMUNITY SERVICES

1,162 clients served
5,931 contacts with clients
586 assessments performed

143 volunteers
8,554 volunteer hours
31 training given to professionals and clients

266 individuals attended community center activities and events
658 community center activities and events

PEER MENTORS AND SUPPORT GROUPS

179 support group sessions held
30 locations where support groups were held
383 people attending support groups

REHABILITATION TEACHING: INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS CLASSES

96 clients attended
16 teaching sessions

DEAFBLIND SERVICES MINNESOTA, LLC

75 Adults receiving services
54 Deafblind children/youth receiving services

10,000 Hours of direct services to adults to help them maintain their independence
8,000 Hours of direct services to children to help them communicate with family, friends and teachers

REHABILITATION CENTER

58 students who took classes at rehabilitation center
40 students who successfully completed the full adjustment to blindness training program
15,994 teaching sessions
In July, VLR was recognized by the Minneapolis Advisory Committee on People with Disabilities for excellence in service and supporting independence, inclusiveness, and accessible environments and services for individuals with disabilities. In his presentation of the award, Ken Rogers, Chair of the committee, proclaimed VLR the “jewel in the city.” The award was presented as part of the City of Minneapolis’ celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

VLR was nominated by Lynda D’Heilly, a student in our Rehabilitation Center. In her nomination D’Heilly, who lost her vision from an acute illness, wrote about the importance of regaining her sense of self and maintaining her independence after losing her vision. Through Vision Loss Resources she found the tools and support of her peers to face those challenges.

We are delighted to reprint the essay D’Heilly submitted:

**2015 HIGHLIGHTS**

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Celebrates 25 Years

Being blind is like being in a box with no windows. And until you find a door, you’re not going to get out. Vision Loss Resources (VLR) built that door for me.

When I came to VLR I had lost my vision. I had a brain tumor and it destroyed the optic nerve in my left eye; surgery to remove the tumor destroyed the optic nerve in my other eye. I was originally told by the doctors that my vision would come back, but the damage to my eyes was permanent, making me blind. When I lost my vision I also lost myself.

I was going through a lot of changes, physically and emotionally, and I didn’t know why. I had lost my identity. I was depressed. I was in a box, and that box was empty, and when I yelled nobody could hear me. Then my husband started looking for people who could help. Thankfully, we found Vision Loss Resources.

My world was transformed when I started rehab at VLR and when I became involved with programs like technology class and woodworking. I can navigate a kitchen once again because the staff at VLR taught me how to use adaptive techniques to prepare food—to do the daily tasks so many people take for granted.

When I became blind I realized I could no longer use the microwave, and not being able to do something as simple as use a microwave is the worst feeling in the world. But with the Life Skills classes at VLR, I learned how to make adjustments to my environment and to my pattern of thinking, allowing me to remain independent in my own home. VLR also offers support groups and peer counseling and recreational activities, among other things—the list goes on!

What makes VLR extra special is their responsiveness to emerging needs among the blind (and deafblind) community. They are developing a meditation class to instruct students on mindfulness breathing and ways to reduce stress. This responsiveness and openness to new ideas, and the ability to translate ideas into specific activities, is a sure sign of an organization that goes above and beyond normal requirements or expectations—and that’s not to mention the terrific staff.

The staff and volunteers at VLR teach you that anything is possible—that you can do whatever you want. Sure you may have to do it differently, but you can still do it. There is life after blindness, and when you learn how to adapt, that life can be really good. I thought I’d never use the internet again, or read, or enjoy TV. But I can do these things. I can even go bowling! If somebody had come to me a year ago and said, “Let’s go bowling.” I would have said that I can’t and probably never will. Here’s a secret: I’m a better bowler now than I was with normal vision!

I am currently taking orientation and mobility classes at VLR and I’m learning how to navigate the city. My instructors have shown me what to do if I lose my sense of direction. I am learning how to use the public transportation system and how to safely cross the street, and with these skills I will be able to enjoy the city like everyone else. Before VLR, I didn’t walk outside the house by myself. Now, I walk about a mile to get to class. I have the confidence to get out and about and to be a person again.

At VLR I found people like myself; I found a sense of belonging. I am happier now, and my family is happier. This is who I am. And I know in my heart that I could not have gotten to this place without Vision Loss Resources, and that’s what makes them excellent.

— Lynda D’Heilly
National author brings humor and insight to life with vision loss

Nationally-recognized speaker Nicole Kear joined us in April to read from her 2014 memoir, Now I See You. Kear was diagnosed at age 19 with retinitis pigmentosa and inspired guests with insightful anecdotes about her own touching story about facing a life with vision loss head on with spark and creativity.

As a professional writer Kear contributes essays and articles to publications including The New York Times, Psychology Today, Good Housekeeping and Salon. And most recently she began chronicling her continuing adventures in motherhood on her blog, A Mom Amok.

A native and current resident of New York, she admitted that even in a town like New York City where not everyone drives, she, too, found it hard to finally give up her driver’s license. For nearly everyone in the room, that message of hope and resilience resonated.
Community Services
Training and supporting adults with vision loss throughout the 9-county metro area

Our Community Services program fills a crucial gap in services for older adults. The vision rehabilitation and support services we provide are not available through another provider. While older adults have many services to choose from, only VLR’s services are specifically tailored to vision loss and helping older adults to manage the progressive nature of their vision loss.

Our Community Specialists provide programs to enhance the quality of life for clients and educate the community about vision loss. Programs include in-home assessments, life skills classes, support groups, volunteer services, peer mentoring, and the community center, which offers educational, social, and recreational opportunities. During the year, 1,230 individual clients were served with 5,860 total contacts. 650 assessments were performed with 31 trainings to professionals and clients. 173 support group sessions with 383 clients served with total attendance of 1,170. There were 659 activity sessions in the community center with 266 clients served with total attendance of 3,560. 271 volunteers reported 8,741 hours.

Our vibrant Community Center enjoyed a year of activities that included a luncheon at the Woman’s Club of Minneapolis with 100 clients in attendance, the Minnesota State Fair, and fishing – just to name a few. Plus new classes in gardening, technology, and art.

Volunteer Programs
271 volunteers reported 8,741 hours

Partnerships included: Target Corporation, TCF Bank, Hamline University, and North Hennepin Community College

Our volunteers continue to serve our participants with in ways that make a participant’s experience with VLR personal and meaningful. Opportunities for volunteers this past year have included serving as personal shoppers and readers to help senior participants remain independent in their own home.

Volunteers also share their time in the Community Center as activity helpers and in the Rehab Center helping students learn new skills like woodshop. Popular outings for participants with the help of volunteers as sighted guide: Guthrie Theater; the Science Museum, volunteering at Feed My Starving Children, Twins games, and the very popular “lunch bunch” and dinner outings.

Important volunteer-led programs at VLR include our phone pals, peer mentors and support groups. Peer mentors and peer co-facilitators of our support groups help our older adult participants to overcome feelings of isolation, depression, and anxiety that often accompany vision loss.
Rehabilitation Center

Individualized training for workforce-aged adults

Our Rehabilitation Center provides comprehensive training for greater independence at home, work and school including orientation and mobility training, rehabilitation services, teaching, and assertiveness training for the visually impaired. In 2015, 58 students attended classes, 15,994 teaching sessions and 40 students successfully completed the adjustment to blindness training program. The Rehabilitation Center also put many students’ skills to the test in a variety of community events such as a winter outdoor adventure trip and trips to Twins games and the Mall of America.

DeafBlind Services MN

DeafBlind Services Minnesota, LLC, provides support services and independent living training to deafblind adults, and intervener services to deafblind children. In 2015, 75 deafblind adults were served with over 10,000 hours of direct services to help deafblind adults to maintain their independence. 54 deafblind children/youth were served with over 8,000 hours of direct services to learn communication strategies and integrate into their community. We began a new initiative: pro-tactile training to professionals and the deafblind community. Pro-tactile is a method that enhances communication so deafblind individuals can be aware of environmental information when speaking with other people.

CONTRACT PRODUCTION SERVICES

Vision Loss Resources operates for-profit business enterprise Contract Production Services (CPS) providing high-quality, fast-turn packaging, assembly, and manufacturing services. CPS invests 100 percent of its profits into Vision Loss Resources and the community it serves.

As an early champion of the social enterprise business model, VLR recognized a demand in the marketplace and the potential to translate for-profit best practices into a social good. Earned revenue from CPS contributes to a stable and diversified funding stream that enables VLR to advance its mission, expand its impact, and create innovative new programming. This positions VLR among the most highly-regarded, top-performing not-for-profit organizations in the Twin Cities.

Director of Manufacturing, Linda Guzman said that Contract Production Services has built relationships with companies throughout the Twin Cities and the Midwest, including General Mills, Hormel, Best Buy, Caribou Coffee, Kohl’s, and others. Most clients have been with CPS for more than 20 years, and CPS maintains a preferred supplier designation with 3M. “Our commitment to quality and lean manufacturing strategy makes us an appealing option for businesses to contract locally and, in so doing, to support the blind, deafblind, and visually impaired community and their families and caregivers,” said Guzman. “In other words, CPS allows companies to outsource for a cause.”
# Community Services

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**ASSETS**

- **CURRENT ASSETS**
  - Inventories: 1,963,755 (2015), 1,523,651 (2014)

- **PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT**
  - Property and equipment: 6,051,838 (2015), 5,989,856 (2014)

- **TOTAL ASSETS**
  - $12,167,912 (2015), $12,422,116 (2014)

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**LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS**

- **CURRENT LIABILITIES**
  - Accounts payable: $605,875 (2015), 664,754 (2014)

- **NET ASSETS**
  - Permanently restricted: 190,029 (2015), 190,029 (2014)

- **TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS**
  - $12,167,912 (2015), $12,422,116 (2014)

*(The accompanying notes are an integral part of these financial statements.)*
Revenues, Gains and Other Support

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unrestricted</th>
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Net Assets Released from Restrictions

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3,792</td>
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<td>Total Revenues, Gains and Other Support</td>
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<td>13,115,865</td>
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Expenses

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CHANGE IN NET ASSETS BEFORE INCOME TAXES

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UNRELATED BUSINESS INCOME TAXES (RECOVERY)

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CHANGE IN NET ASSETS

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NET ASSETS, BEGINNING OF YEAR

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NET ASSETS, END OF YEAR

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(The accompanying notes are an integral part of these financial statements.)