

Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

2010 Annual Report

Providing powerful tools for independence and promoting better living

**Message from the President and Executive Director** 

2010 was a year of organizational change. It was an odyssey, filled with a few twists and turns, some of which were long and others that were just brief moments of time. In this Annual Report, we want to share with you our accomplishments and impact as a statewide organization committed to promoting the dignity and independence of the people in Wisconsin who are blind and visually impaired.

Whenever leadership changes, there are questions about how things are going to be altered or adjusted. We greeted new Council members, Jenny Massey and Tom Jeray. Their enthusiasm and input have enriched our Council meetings. We thank them for their willingness to serve in this important volunteer capacity. Our Executive Director changed in 2010. We welcomed Loretta Himmelsbach who brought a depth of nonprofit experience with her to the Council. Her strong leadership and knowledge, energy and warmth, have added to our overall presence and the strengthening of our infrastructure. Barbara Weiss' creative and organizational skills made her the right choice as our new Administrative Assistant. Calvin Tucker joined the *docuScan* staff, preparing paper copy for digital scanning. Each individual brings a skill set that enhances the work, and ultimately, the mission of the Council.

The following pages in this Annual Report describe the many programmatic services we provide, both on our own and as part of the vast network of collaborators with whom we work. Our partnerships with Vision Support Groups, Lions and Lioness Clubs, Wisconsin Public Radio and the Girl Scouts (just to name a few) have expanded our presence throughout the state. With the election of a new governor, our legislative activity of building relationships with the governor and freshmen legislators began in earnest at the end of the year. We are developing vision services and community education programs to help promote the importance of eye care and to help people learn more about available resources as their vision decreases. Our goal is to empower individuals so they can maintain their independence and enjoy personal hobbies. Of course, we cannot do this without the support of our donors. We are grateful for the contributions that helped us achieve our goals in 2010. As we approach 2011, we will continue to reach out for additional support to assist in the statewide growth and expansion of our services. We will also begin planning for a grand celebration of our 60th anniversary in 2012—a very special milestone!

Come, take the journey of exploring our past year, as we ready ourselves to reinvigorate the Council's future!

Sincerely,




**Chris Zenchenko**  
*President*



**Loretta Himmelsbach**  
*Executive Director*





In 1952, when the Wisconsin Council of the Blind was established, its founders could not have imagined or anticipated the current and crucial need for this organization and its work. The mission of the Council, then and now, is to promote the dignity and independence of people in Wisconsin who are blind or visually impaired by providing services, advocating legislation, and educating the general public.



*“The Council is an unbelievable asset. They can do so much to help people with vision loss. The staff truly listens to you, and they personalize their approach to help you find just the right store products to meet your particular needs.” —Greg S.*

(UVEITIS IRITIS, GLAUCOMA AND CATARACTS)

*“I knew about Marshall because he spoke to one of our church groups. When I met with him about my macular degeneration, I learned so many things about my eyes, and I had a better understanding of what was going on with them.....The magnifying reading glasses make it possible for me to read parts of the paper that I used to pitch because I couldn't read the print.” —Susan C.*

(MACULAR DEGENERATION)

## Vision services

In Wisconsin alone, there are an estimated 200,000 people who are blind or visually impaired. The Council's Vision Services help individuals live successfully with changing vision.

Through one-on-one low vision evaluations, individuals learn how to maximize their remaining vision and use lighting or other optical aids effectively for reading and other near-vision tasks.



**In 2010, the Council administered nearly 150 low vision evaluations.**

The Sharper Vision Store features more than 400 assistive products that make everyday tasks easier and safer for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

In 2010, the **Sharper Vision Store** went online, and it features more than 800 products that browsers can review, 24/7, from the comfort of their home. Between the physical and virtual stores, we served more than 3,000 customers in 2010.

White canes help visually impaired persons travel with greater freedom and independence. The Council connected Jenny M. who has Retinitis Pigmentosa with an orientation and mobility intern. She taught Jenny how to effectively use her cane for safer travel. “My experience with Kay was much more than orientation and mobility training. Through her gentle nudging, patience and expertise, I learned to accept the fact that I needed a cane, and it was important to learn how to use it with confidence.”

Jenny is among the 561 individuals who received a white cane from the Council in 2010.

## Low vision support groups

Whenever possible, the Council connects individuals who have experienced vision loss with low vision support groups throughout the state. Participants learn new skills and receive helpful resources and timely information from guest speakers. Through sharing and mutual support, group members discover that they are not alone, and they become better equipped to cope with their vision loss.

## docuScan of Wisconsin

In 2009, the Council created **docuScan of Wisconsin** as part of its commitment to provide employment and training opportunities for people with vision impairment.

**docuScan** is a full-service document scanning company with expertise in converting paper or photographic documents to electronic images. Sixty percent of the staff is visually impaired, and some have additional physical disabilities. Our efforts to help businesses, organizations and governmental agencies reduce the amount of paper within their offices have had a dramatic impact on cutting waste and increasing accessibility and efficiency, as well as improving the quality of life for our employees. In 2010, **docuScan** scanned more than 1,000,000 images.

**docuScan of Wisconsin** received the 2010 Sustainable Workforce Development Award sponsored by *In Business* magazine and Sustain Dane. The award “recognizes a company’s commitment to creating jobs that positively impact the environment, or provides training to its current workforce on issues of sustainability.” **docuScan** also received an ADA Business Award sponsored by Access to Independence for “...exceeding the intent of the ADA by making their business accessible and accommodating to people with disabilities through physical accessibility or accessible programs or services that welcome people with disabilities to utilize their business.”



## Training

With the guidance of a **Vision Rehabilitation Teacher**, individuals learn to live with increased independence through strategies and techniques, adaptive products or assistive technologies, and/or environmental adaptations. They are able to manage daily living activities such as personal care, reading, writing, communications, home management, leisure, social, vocational and educational tasks with renewed confidence.



**The Council offered 355 rehabilitation training home visits in 2010. Services to persons 55 years and older in rural, underserved counties in Southwest Wisconsin increased by 23% last year.**

*“I really appreciated the opportunity to meet people who have been dealing with blindness for a long time and have accepted their situation and learned how to live active, productive lives. To see how positive and energetic these people were was a great help to me.”—Gary S.*

*“Jean (Kalscheur) is like my Fairy Godmother when she visits! She has brought me magnifiers, lights and computer and appliance markings. She helped me set up ZoomText, and she showed me how to access family history files on my computer.”—Vilja L.  
(MACULAR DEGENERATION)*





*“Losing my vision taught me to learn again. The Council staff provided invaluable assistive technology training. I learned how to use Microsoft WORD and Excel, plus how to surf the Internet, find files, and copy CDs using burning software. I spend a large part of my day on the computer as I communicate with work clients.” —Gary D.*

(RETINITIS PIGMENTOSA)



Orientation is knowing where you are, where you’ve been, and where you’re going. Mobility is the set of physical skills required to move through the environment. **Orientation and mobility** services teach people how to travel safely and as independently as possible. Working one-on-one with the Council’s Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist, individuals gain confidence in travel, and they can remain active, mobile and connected.

**Assistive technology** includes a comprehensive assessment and customized training in assistive technology. We provide these services at the Council office, in one’s home, or at one’s place of work. In 2010, nearly 1,100 individuals received computer technology training or advice from the Council.

A grant from the State of Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) provided **roundabout training** to approximately 30 orientation and mobility instructors and DOT staff. Participants learned ways to teach a blind or visually impaired pedestrian how to cross streets at roundabouts.

## Advocacy

Legislative advocacy has been a cornerstone of the Council’s mission since its founding in 1952. The Council is a strong voice for Wisconsin citizens who are blind or visually impaired on issues that involve local, state and federal rules, regulations, initiatives, policies and legislative proposals.

The Council’s main legislative priority in 2010 was crafting and advocating for passage of the Wisconsin Educational Materials Access Bill that provides instructional materials in Braille for blind and visually impaired students. We also collaborated with and supported the Blinded Veterans Association of Wisconsin in their effort to achieve representation on the Wisconsin Council on Veterans Programs.

**Legislative Day** at the Capitol provided Council members and supporters an opportunity to discuss issues regarding education services for students who are visually impaired, the definition of service animals, employment initiatives, and other legislative concerns. Participants visited all Assembly and Senate offices and distributed information about issues that have a dramatic and important impact on the lives of people who are blind or visually impaired.

**Philanthropy Day** is an annual Council event that celebrates the support and work of legislators, educators and persons in public service on behalf of Wisconsin citizens who are blind or visually impaired.

Among the 2010 recipients was Senator Russell Decker whom the Council recognized for his public service and contributions to the quality of life in Northern Wisconsin.



**In 2010, the Council spent more than 400 hours on direct and indirect advocacy on behalf of the blind and visually impaired in Wisconsin.**

## Education

A grant from the Madison Rotary Foundation enabled the Council to develop and present **“Everyone Sees Differently,”** a collaborative effort with Girl Scouts of Wisconsin-Badgerland Council. This activity-based program helped girls and young women gain an awareness of the meaning of blindness and low vision and an understanding of participation in daily activities by people who see differently. Girl Scouts learned about common eye conditions that cause blindness or low vision, taking care of one’s eyes, etiquette toward those who are visually impaired, training a dog guide, reading Braille, using a computer, participating in sports and doing everyday activities.

Due to the huge success of this program, we offered “Everyone Sees Differently” twice in Madison and once in Baraboo in 2010. **Approximately 200 Girl Scouts of all ages and their troop leaders attended.**

One of the four leading causes of vision loss in older adults is macular degeneration. In October 2010, the Council partnered with the University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences to present **“Progress in Sight VIII,” a free, daylong symposium about macular degeneration.** Participants learned about the latest advances in and treatments for this eye condition. Ophthalmologists from the UW-Madison and UW Health Eye Clinics and an expert panel of speakers discussed important issues, skills and solutions for those facing vision loss due to macular degeneration.

The symposium also featured two free, Council-sponsored workshops for professionals and caregivers of people with vision loss.



**Approximately 500 people from throughout Wisconsin attended this event.**

*“...BRAVO for putting on an outstanding program! My girls are still talking about it and would love to participate again. Thank you so much for having such wonderful role models for the girls. They made connections with each of them.”—Katie H., a troop leader*



*“I really appreciated the clear and concise descriptions and illustrations of the eye as well as the explanation of macular degeneration and the different types. It’s a much easier way to develop an understanding of this condition than during a doctor’s office visit.”—event participant*



**2010 Scholarship recipients**



**Mary Mesman, one of the Vision Mosaic Mural artists**

In 2010, the Council launched a newly-designed website that has become a trusted resource for timely information, education and connection. We also established a presence on Facebook.

**At the end of 2010, our new website had generated more than 55,000 hits per month.**

Through a Speakers Bureau and educational seminars, we provide information, inspiration and resources for people with changing vision. In 2010, we reached nearly 5,700 individuals.

Each year, the Council awards nine scholarships to students enrolled full or part-time in colleges and vocational schools to help them fulfill their educational and professional dreams. In 2010, \$12,500 was awarded.

In March 2010, the Council teamed up with Edgewood College art therapy students and their professor in a new venture that embraced the idea of uniting the Madison community through the arts. A large-scale mosaic mural, composed of more than 100 unique artwork panels, was created by people of all ages, including students from the Wisconsin Center for the Blind & Visually Impaired in Janesville and residents at Oakwood Village West. The goal of the project was to support the programs and services of the Council and raise awareness of the profession of art therapy. Approximately 75 people attended the mural unveiling.



**In 2010, the Council served 11,433 people throughout Wisconsin's 72 counties. Council members and staff logged 49,596 miles for programs, services and advocacy.**

We are proud to be affiliated with these organizations that share our vision and values:

- Badger Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired
- Blinded Veterans of Wisconsin
- Business Enterprise Program
- Wisconsin Center for the Blind & Visually Impaired
- Community Shares of Wisconsin
- Lions Club

The Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired is dedicated to making a visible difference in the lives of people in Wisconsin who are blind or visually impaired. With the help of grants, bequests and private donations, we have been able to enhance opportunities for independence and provide services for better living.

**“Supporting the independence and vision needs of current and future generations.”**

The **Legacy Circle** of the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired creates a giving opportunity to meet the needs of the Council for generations to come. Your planned gift will assure the financial sustainability of the Council as we face an ever-increasing need for our services.

Through a bequest in your will, designation of life insurance, as a beneficiary of other retirement plans, stock transfer, or other option as discussed with your financial planner, you help ensure the continuity of our work.

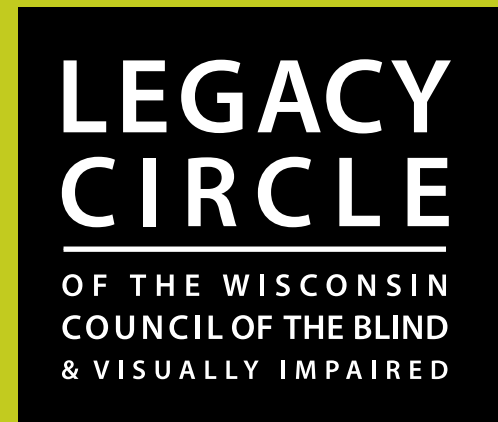
Since our founding director’s gift that created the George Card Endowment, we have been developing this fund for annual support of our programs. With your gift to this fund, we can continue to advocate, support and supply the needs of the blind and visually impaired in Wisconsin so they are able to remain independent, active and connected.

**Here are some ways you may wish to participate:**

- Bequest in your will
- Designation of the Council as a beneficiary in your life insurance, IRA, annuity or other retirement plan
- Stock gift
- Other options as established with your financial planner

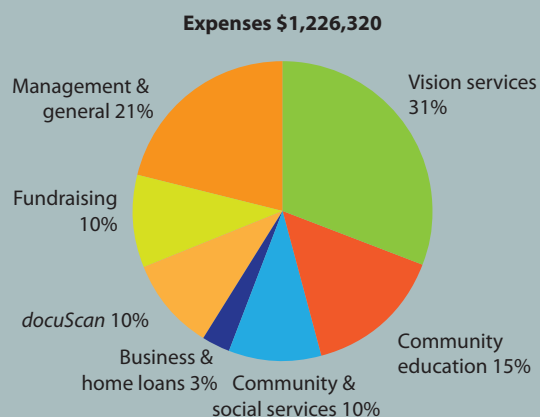
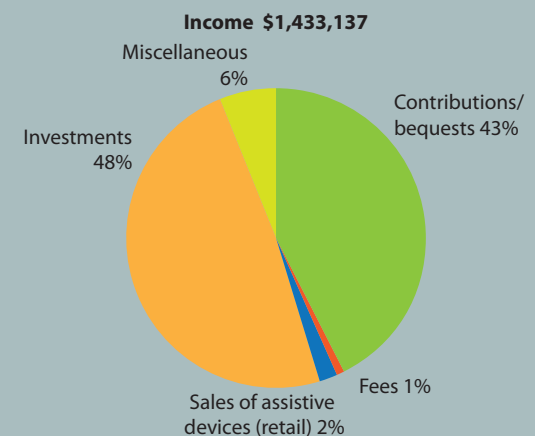
We work with knowledgeable and secure advisors to grow your gifts so they continue to reap benefits. This sound fiscal policy has helped strengthen this fund through the generous donations of supporters and wise financial planning.

**To make a gift or for more information, please contact the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired at 754 Williamson Street, Madison, WI 53703-3546 or call our Fund Development Director at (608)237-8114.**



*“We make a living by what we get,  
but we make a life by what we give.”  
—Winston Churchill*

## Financial Summary



The accompanying condensed financial data and graphical presentations as of and for the year ended December 31, 2010 were derived from the consolidated statements which were audited by Wegner LLP CPA's and Consultants. 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.

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***We send a grateful thanks to the hundreds who donate under \$50 every year.***

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*We check our names carefully but mistakes happen. If we made an error in your donation or name, please accept our sincere apologies.*

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*Program Assistant*

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*docuScan Project Assistant*

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*docuScan Project Manager*

### **Calvin Tucker**

*docuScan Project Assistant*

### **Barbara Weiss**

*Administrative Assistant*

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*Lobbyist*

### **Judy Nolde**

*Grant Specialist*



754 Williamson St.  
Madison, WI 53703-3546

(608) 255-1166  
Toll Free 1-800-783-5213  
Sharper Vision Store (608) 237-8100

[www.wcblind.org](http://www.wcblind.org)

"No pessimist ever discovered the secrets of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new heaven to the human spirit."

—Helen Keller



Member of Community Shares of Wisconsin