

VERMONT ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND
AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED
NEEDS STATEMENT

The Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired has served Vermonters since 1926. Our mission is to enable Vermonters with vision problems to achieve and maintain independence. Towards that end; we have provided skills training, adaptive equipment and materials, volunteer drivers, low vision evaluations, and have produced written materials in braille, audiotape and large print format.

Providing these supports to the visually impaired costs less than \$1000 per client annually. Compared to the cost of a nursing home, (which is 15 times more likely when a senior citizen becomes visually impaired) this program is very cost effective, and we actually save the State money by keeping them independent and in their homes. As our population ages, their need of our services has also increased. For those who are 75 and older, one in four will experience some form of vision impairment. For FY18 we are asking the State to help us in three key areas.

- Our first need is to increase the number of teachers that we employ and to reduce the amount we subsidize the programs. For the fiscal year just ended, we served about 1250 adults, an increase of 65% from 10 years ago. It has been 11 years since we have received an increase in funding. We currently subsidize adult services by \$285,000. The need is there; and the number of our senior citizens continues to increase, but we cannot further subsidize the program and our staff is maxed out for what they can handle. We can't spend the amount of time that we'd like to with our clients due to this, but more of a Band-Aid approach.
- The second need is to increase funding for our volunteer ride coordinators. We receive funding for mileage reimbursement, but the time needed to organize and line up the volunteers with the clients' needs, etc. is not completely covered. We have gone from about 300 ride requests a year when we started in 1986 to over 2600 rides in FY16. The funding to cover these costs has not kept pace with the demand. Transportation for visually impaired people is very high on their list of needs. Being able to get to a doctor, getting the groceries or occasionally going out for a social event is important to them so that they do not feel isolated. As a ride of last resort, these rides help to keep them independent and active in their community.
- The third need is for technology training of the visually impaired. Adults with disabilities spend twice as much time online, on the average, as adults without disabilities; and these adults are much more likely to report that the Internet, smartphones, and iPads has significantly improved the quality of their lives. These facts are particularly true for the blind and visually impaired because of the nature of that disability. There are many apps in the marketplace that can help the visually impaired. We hope to provide Assistive Technology Services to help train clients on these devices. These assistive devices will include I Phone and Pads, screen print enlargers as well as speech and Braille input and output devices. Currently, there is no one available to provide this training.

We ask therefore, for the State to increase our appropriation by \$50,000 for the continuation and expansion of our services and the addition of technology assistance. This, in addition to the Federal Global commitment Funds would mean a total increase of about \$230,000. This is still less than \$1000 per client per year. We will continue to subsidize our services, but need your help to reduce the amount that we subsidize. Please join us in keeping our clients independent and contributing members of our society.

