



VERMONT ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

HELPING ACHIEVE INDEPENDENCE IN A VISUAL WORLD SINCE 1926

Dear members of the Appropriations Committee,

The Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI) has served Vermonters since 1926. We are the only non-profit in the State to offer rehabilitation services to the blind and visually impaired. Our mission is to enable Vermonters with vision problems to achieve and maintain their independence. Towards that end, we have provided independent living skills training, orientation and mobility, adaptive equipment and materials, volunteer drivers, low vision evaluations, and produced written materials in braille, audiotape and large print format. Enclosed is our latest fact sheet, and other information that tells you more about VABVI and the services we provide.

. There are an estimated 13,000 Vermonters who are currently blind or visually impaired. As the “Baby Boomer” generation ages however; this number is expected to increase to 20,000 or higher by 2030. As a result, our neighbors, parents, family and friends are among those who may be coping with a vision loss.

If you spoke to our clients, they would tell you how important our services are to them. Approximately 20% of our clients, (one in six) express concerns when they first contact us that they fear that they might have to move into a nursing home. If anything, that percentage is low as many do not want to admit to that fear. For the number of elderly adults that we currently serve, 20% is about 170 people. For those clients whom VABVI has completed providing services, about 98% of those who had expressed that concern are now confident that they could live independently in their current living situation and continue to lead fulfilling lives regardless of their vision loss.

One service we haven’t offered due to our limited resources is to provide technology training on iOS devices to our clients. Adults with disabilities tend to spend twice the amount of time online as adults without disabilities. They also report that smartphones, iPads, and the internet have significantly improved their quality of life. Our clients have asked for this training, as it is more affordable than computers with the associated assistive software since many accessibility features have been incorporated into the phones and tablets.

We have finished a six month pilot project made possible due to some very generous one-time support from a few foundations that support us. Our data shows that we have achieved very good outcomes with the clients that participated. We trained 51 people out of the 78 that were approached to be part of the pilot. With limited time, we were not able to help all of those who expressed an interest. We are finishing services for the clients that were not completed at the end of six months. Please see the attached results which is only for those who completed the training.

60 Kimball Avenue
So. Burlington, VT 05403
(802) 863-1358
(FAX) 863-1481

13 Overlook Drive; Ste. 1
Berlin, VT 05641
(802) 505-4006
(FAX) 505-4039

80 West Street, Ste. 202
Rutland, VT 05701
(802) 775-6452
(FAX) 775-4669

130 Austine Drive; Ste. 280
Brattleboro, VT 05301
(802) 254-8761
(FAX) 254-4802

So. Burl (800) 639-5861
Berlin (877) 350-8838
Rutland (877) 350-8839
Bratt (877) 350-8840

We ask therefore, for the State to increase our appropriation by \$100,000 for the continuation and expansion of our services with the addition of this iOS technology training. We would will continue to subsidize our other services, but we need your help to offer these new services. While vision loss could be seen in a negative light, the stories of success and accomplishment from VABVI's clients highlight the "can-do" attitude and joy of life that is present regardless of their vision levels. From skiing to artwork, a walk in their neighborhood or cooking a meal at home, our clients demonstrate that the only limiting factor to what can be done is their imagination.

Please join us in keeping our clients independent and contributing members of our society. I appreciate your consideration in this critical area of need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven P. Pouliot". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "P".

Steven P. Pouliot
Executive Director

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 FY20 we are asking the State to help us in the following area.

One service we haven't offered due to our limited resources is to provide technology training for the visually impaired. Adults with disabilities tend to spend twice the amount of time online as adults without disabilities. They also report that smartphones, Ipads and the internet has significantly improved the quality of their lives. Our clients have asked for this training as it is more affordable than computers with the associated assistive software since many accessibility features have been incorporated into the phones and tablets.

We have just finished a six month pilot project due to some very generous one-time support from a few foundations that support us. Our data shows that we have achieved very good outcomes with the clients that participated. We trained 51 people out of the 78 that were approached to be part of the pilot. With limited time, we were not able to help all who expressed an interest. We are finishing services for the clients that were not completed at the end of the six months. Please see the attached results which is only for those who completed the training.

We ask therefore, for the State to increase our appropriation by \$100,000 for the continuation and expansion of our services and the addition of technology assistance. This is still less than \$1000 per client per year. We will continue to subsidize our services, but need your help to offer these new services. Please join us in keeping our clients independent, connected, and contributing members of our society.

Success Stories

For some success stories for the committee I'd like to highlight the following stories of the iOS program from our teacher Sarah Barton's perspective. Please note how above and beyond Sarah goes to provide comprehensive services, even being on call for an emergency call from Maine when a client was traveling. Our teachers are truly dedicated to our clients:

- Sarah has a client in the Chittenden County who is now able to see her phone because of the size of the print and she can text her daughter in Maine, and has just learned how to set calendar events. The thing she is most excited about is the magnifier feature on the phone because she is actually very uncomfortable with someone reading the menu to her and she said today this is going to be a "Life saver"! This client also has a hearing impairment and being able to connect her hearing aids to the phone via Bluetooth was huge as well. She has all the sound channeled to her left ear which is her better ear!
- Sarah had to help her via the phone when she was in Maine visiting her daughter. She was watching her grandchildren and her hearing aids stopped working with the phone. Sarah spent an hour on the phone with her and her grandson and found out that her left hearing aid wasn't working. They adjusted the volume to play in her right ear so she could use her phone. Her grandson called a few weeks later and asked how Sarah was. The client knows many Sarah's, so she asked which one, to which he said "the phone girl, grandma!"
- Another client on Washington County has a lot of other health issues and NEEDED his phone to be able to contact individuals as well as doctors. Everyone who had tried to help had taken the phone from him and changed something, but never showed him what they did or why. After the first lesson where we changed the accessible features to a classic invert of the colors and the size of the print he was able to then see what was on his screen. He is now able to use Siri to text his wife, to have Siri tell him if he has any new text messages or emails and to read them to him. He can add and edit his contacts and even has changed the ring tones for his wife and brother so he knows when he gets something from them.
- Another client in Lamoille County went from never having seen an iOS device to owning a friend's old iPhone. She can connect to a Bluetooth keyboard and use her iPhone to get online, to send emails, to read her BARD books and is working toward being able to submit her grocery orders online! Now here is the kicker; this wonderful client is completely blind! She has learned lots of the Voiceover gestures that she needs to control her iPhone by touch as well as learning the keyboard commands to control her iPhone with her wireless keyboard! She said she finds herself just playing with the iPhone and exploring all the different things it has to offer!!

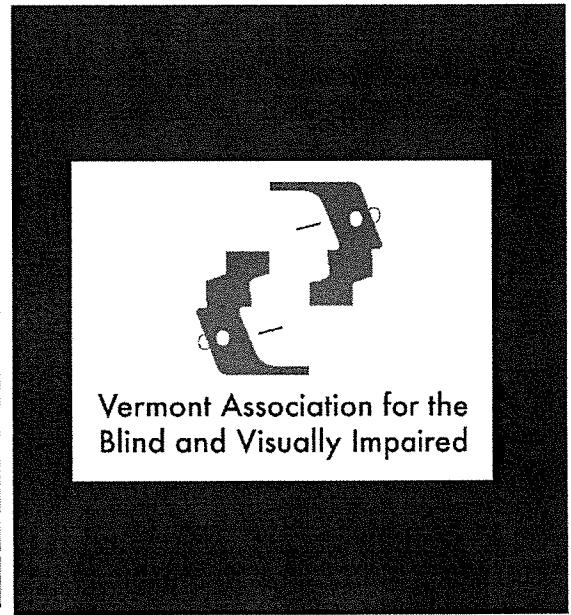
TALKING POINTS

1. The Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI) helps Vermonters with a vision problem to stay independent and remain in their community. National statistics for our type of services says that without them,
 - a. They are 15 times more likely than other seniors to end up in a nursing home.
 - b. They are 17 times more likely to fall and break a leg than other seniors.
2. We actually save the State money. Our services cost less than \$1000 a year per client. A nursing home costs \$70,000 a year. Many of our clients express their concerns that they will end up in a nursing home due to their vision loss. But by the end of our services, 98% of those who had those concerns say they no longer have that fear.
3. The number of clients that we serve each year continues to rise, about an 80% increase from 13 years ago. Our subsidy was about \$300,000 a year; so I sincerely thank you for approving Commissioner Hutt's recommendation to increase our funding by \$60,000 this fiscal year from some underutilized funds in another area. I am asking you for an additional \$100,000 for a new service.
4. With this additional funding, we would:
 - a. Offer technology training in IOS devices such as smartphones and tablets.
 1. A study showed that people with disabilities spend twice as much time online as adults without disabilities.
 2. It was also reported the smartphones, iPads and the internet have significantly improved their quality of life.
5. We finished a six month pilot project made possible due to some very generous one-time report from a few foundations that support our work. Our data shows we achieved very good outcomes with the clients that participated.
 - a. We trained 51 out of the 78 people that were allowed to be part of the pilot.
 - b. With the limited time and funding, we were not able to help all of those who expressed an interest.
 - c. Please see the attached results which is attached for those who completed the 10 sessions of training. We are finishing up the training for the remaining 21 participants.
4. Most elders want to stay in their community and to stay independent. Please help us to do so with our visually impaired neighbors.

iOS Pilot Project Skills		Set Goal	Achieved	Removed
1	Plug the charge cables into my device and recharge it	39	39	
2	Turn the iPad/iPhone/iTouch on and off	39	39	
3	Lock or unlock the screen and identify the home button	38	37	
4	Control the volume and mute/lock rotation features	38	35	
5	Identify visually or by touch, text on the screen	43	37	
6	Adjust the preference settings as desired	46	31	1
7	Set and adjust preferred accessibility settings as needed (zoom, voiceover, contrast, magnifier, assistive touch, etc.)	41	26	
8	Use the App Switcher to move between open apps and close apps	41	25	1
9	Utilize voice commands and Siri to control features of the device.	40	24	1
10	Add and edit contacts	35	24	1
11	Make phone calls and/or use Facetime	39	26	2
12	Send and receive email and/or text messages.	40	26	3
13	Add and remove events from the calendar.	34	19	3
14	Set and use timers and reminders.	32	18	2
15	Search the internet to gather information.	34	22	1
16	Download/Purchase apps from the iTunes Store	36	23	2
17	Orient to a new app.	37	26	1
18	Identify where to find information on helpful apps to assist the blind and visually impaired.	32	21	
19	Learn how to update the operating system and where to learn more about the devices and changes to the system.	36	26	
Totals:		720	524	18



Everyday Independence



Vermont Association for the
Blind and Visually Impaired

Fiscal Year 2018 In Review

The Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI), a non-profit organization founded in 1926, and is the only private agency to offer training, services, and support to visually impaired Vermonters from birth to end of life.

Our Mission: *“To enable Vermonters whether blind or visually impaired, to be more independent, to cultivate adaptive skills and to improve their quality of life”*

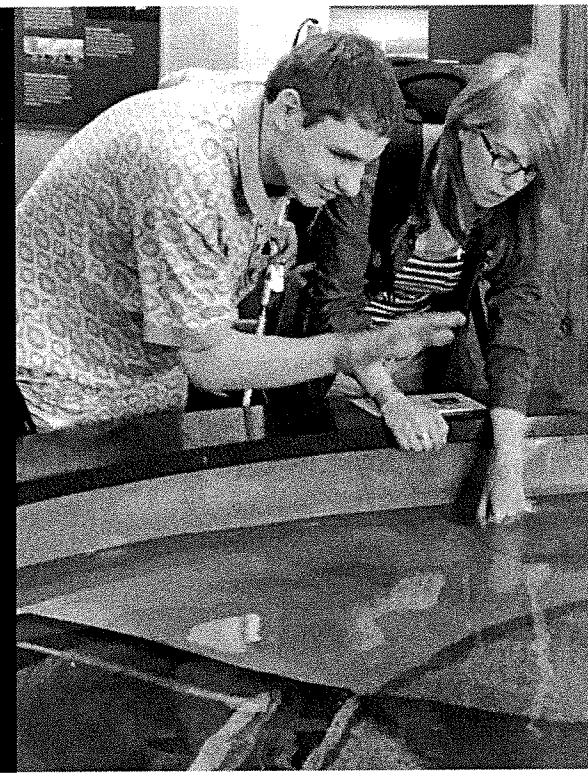
2018 Stats at a Glance

115 clients participated in Peer Assisted Learning and Support Group (PALS) across **14 counties** in VT.

65 towns and cities supported VABVI by providing **\$29,919.00** in donations.

VABVI provided services to 350 children and 1,420 adults – totaling **1,770 clients served in 2018!**

153 volunteers donated **8,547 hours** of service, and volunteer drivers **drove 118,808 miles** in the past year!



Overview of Services

Adult Services: VABVI offers rehabilitation services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired, helping them to continue performing daily living tasks and activities that may have become difficult. Services are provided in a group, at a central training site, or in the home.

Children's Services: VABVI employs licensed Teachers of the Visually Impaired to work with children from birth through high school graduation, teaching daily living skills, Braille, socialization, assistive technology, use of adaptive equipment, career educations, visual efficiency skills, recreation skills, self-determination, orientation, and mobility skills. These licensed Teachers of the Visually Impaired work in the home and school environments. Each summer, children can practice independent living skills and meet with friends in a supportive "camp" environment as part of the Intensive Residential Life Experiences (IRLE) program.

Adaptive Equipment: Specialized devices can make all the difference for a person living with a visual impairment. Equipment such as swing arm lamps with magnifiers and Closed Circuit TVs can help maintain an independent lifestyle. VABVI also provides assistive technology, support and training.

Volunteer Services: VABVI's Transportation Program provides statewide transportation for medical appointments, grocery shopping, and a limited number of personal trips for Vermonters who are blind or visually impaired. Volunteers also record materials on tape or into Braille, go into the home to assist with paperwork and reading mail, or help in our offices.

Support & Counseling: As part of our agency's Information and Referral Service, each staff member is specially trained and experienced in guiding individuals through all of the resources available to them. The cornerstone of VABVI's adult support services are the Peer Assisted Learning and Support (PALS) groups which meet monthly across the state. Members listen to an educational speaker, and then have an opportunity to share their frustrations and achievements with their peers.

South Burlington Office
60 Kimball Avenue
802-863-1358

Berlin Office
13 Overlook Drive
Suite 1
802-505-4006

Rutland Office
80 West Street
Suite 202
802-775-6452

Brattleboro Office
130 Austine Drive
Suite 280
802-254-8761