

## SUPPORT, COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION



*Dennis Rewkowski enjoys making music at a pre-pandemic gathering.*

When someone loses their vision, they begin a journey that can be challenging, emotional and often isolating. That's why VisionCorps' monthly local support groups are highly valued by participants.

Recently, however, the COVID-19 pandemic has made public gatherings unsafe. VisionCorps keeps clients connected by transitioning face-to-face meetings to online video and phone conference sessions. Instead of a single monthly support session, clients now have access to weekly gatherings. The sessions include: "Let's Chat" social group, a book club and presentations on vision conditions. There is also a session dedicated to orientation and mobility challenges for people using white canes, guide dogs, talking GPS and other aids.

One regular participant is Dennis Rewkowski of Downingtown, PA. Dennis knew he had a genetic vision disorder, but assumed he was a carrier, since it hadn't affected his eyesight. Suddenly, at the age of 65, he lost his central vision within a span of two weeks. He contacted VisionCorps and began learning different ways to do things safely. He also started attending the Chester County support group.

"We would meet once a month at a local church," Dennis said. "In the beginning, I found it humbling. I'd been so focused on my own struggles. In the support group, I found myself among some people whose situations were a lot different than mine. It put my problems into perspective." As time went on, he began to feel a true sense of community. "It was a place to

bond and make friends. And the folks at VisionCorps are unbelievable! The empathy, concern and care they offer is wonderful."

"I'm on the call to learn and have fun," Dennis said. He is known for his sense of humor, and banters with others on the line. "I like to make people laugh, or at least smile."

For Geraldine S., 2020 has been a difficult year. "I'm very much alone, and I appreciate the group telephone calls. It's really been a blessing in my life to be able to share things the sighted world doesn't understand." She especially enjoys the book club.

Friendship, connection, empathy, help and humor are the ingredients that make VisionCorps support groups a valuable service for people who are blind or visually impaired.



*Geraldine S. demonstrates using an audio book player.*

## MESSAGE FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT



Thank you for giving VisionCorps the resources to not only get by during this pandemic, but also take advantage of new opportunities to grow our services to the communities we serve. Your past support, has made the present possible.

The past six months have been a challenge for everyone – there were many unknowns, and now perhaps even more.

While everyone personally has handled this differently, VisionCorps as a whole has vowed to stay the course and continue to offer services – however we can, safely – so that our clients do not experience lapses in service.

In this issue of Insights, you can learn about steps that have been taken to stay connected with clients through technology. We also discuss how technology has played a critical role in allowing services to continue throughout the pandemic. We also meet the Musser family, whose child is one of our youngest clients – we even touch on technology in their story because the father, Steve, has used social media to raise funds for VisionCorps!

With the world changing rapidly around us, VisionCorps continues to evaluate and adapt to keep up. This would not be possible without YOUR support, and on behalf of our clients, employees and board, I thank you! If you – or anyone you know – is experiencing vision loss, please reach out to us by calling 866-876-6550, and press option 1 to connect to Rehab.

Take care and stay safe!

Megan Sofilka Tomscheck  
Vice President and Chief Development Officer

## You Can Be A Partner Towards Independence

The VisionCorps rehabilitation team is busy year-round, providing vital services to our friends and neighbors living with vision loss.

**Mobility, daily living skills, and a support system can be challenging for any of us – but especially those with vision loss.**

**That's why we are looking for Vision Partners.**

Become a **Vision Partner**, someone who commits to give monthly, and you'll provide the gift of independence to those who are blind or vision impaired.

Signing up is easy, and you can cancel at any time, or quickly change the amount you give.

Join at [VisionCorps.net/Donate](https://VisionCorps.net/Donate)



**VisionCorps**  
Foundation  
— VISION PARTNER —

## DO YOU BELONG TO A GROUP THAT NEEDS SPEAKERS?

VisionCorps is proud to be able to offer speaking programs to community groups! Is your service, social, or church group meeting virtually? This is a great opportunity to have VisionCorps speak about our services. Programs are tailored to the group and can be a general overview of programs available, educational information about interacting with people who are blind, or how we can help the aging population experiencing vision loss. If your group meets between 8 am and 3 pm, we can even provide a virtual tour of our facility while it is operating – get up close to our production lines and see first-hand our industrial operations including the helmet pad line for the US military, and cleaning product line for Federal facilities.

**Contact Megan Tomscheck to inquire about a speaker by calling 717-205-4115.**



## A WINNING TEAM!



*Jennifer and Steve Musser with children Chase, left, and Jack, right.*

Steve and Jennifer Musser of Lititz, PA, have experienced first-hand the value of VisionCorps services. They now want to help make it available to all who need it.

At 6 months of age, their son Chase was diagnosed with Leber's congenital amaurosis, a disorder of the retina. "There's a grieving process that goes on when you learn your baby is blind," Jennifer said. "Everyone deals with it differently. I'm a physical therapist and immediately started seeking resources. That's when we got connected with VisionCorps." Her husband responded in a different way. "He kept his emotions inside," Jennifer said. "But outwardly, he looks for ways to give back by helping other families in need."

Families raising children who are blind or vision impaired must find different ways to help them learn about their world. Sighted children learn primarily by imitating others. Children with sight loss explore the world through touch. "I appreciate the guidance we received early on as parents," Jennifer said. "It would have been natural for me to get into the habit of handing Chase things he wanted or had dropped. But that wouldn't foster his independence."

Through VisionCorps, Chase was introduced to braille and began learning to use a cane as soon as he could walk. Today, the 6-year-old is thriving! He's busy learning his way around his kindergarten building with his mobility instructor from VisionCorps.

In appreciation for the guidance and services Chase has received over the years, Steve looks for creative ways to give back. The cause is close to his heart. He's on a mission to generate community support for families who can't afford services.

An avid drag racing enthusiast, his team is proud to sport the VisionCorps logo on its dragster and Time Bomb funny car.

By bringing them to local car shows and events, he's turned them into a vehicle to raise support and awareness for VisionCorps.

Steve is also a successful car salesman for DEL Toyota. At his urging, in 2016, DEL sponsored an event to benefit VisionCorps.

Friends and family rallied to help Steve exceed his goal in a Facebook birthday fundraiser to support VisionCorps. "Do us a favor and help someone who needs it," Steve wrote. "Blindness is no joke! This has nothing to do with my family. It's helping people who need it."

By sharing their personal experiences with others, both face-to-face at community events, and via social media, Steve and Jennifer are helping to make new friends for VisionCorps. And they are helping families with children who are blind or visually impaired get connected with the services they need to succeed. It's a winning team!

*To see Chase in action, check out recent coverage from WGAL8 TV on the VisionCorps Facebook page.*



*VisionCorps president and CEO Dennis Steiner poses with one of the cars branded with the VisionCorps logo.*

# CHANGING LIVES THROUGH TECHNOLOGY



Technology has been a hot topic during the pandemic as millions of people now rely on it to stay connected to family, friends and the workplace through teleconferencing software like Zoom and Teams, or even FaceTime calls.

VisionCorps has been working to implement technology into our rehabilitative services for several years. It has been a focus overall at the agency to improve operations and efficiencies. For people who are blind, in particular, technology has been a game-changer.

Advances in technology have provided many tools for people who are blind, including the following:

- Smart glasses which are wearable devices that use high definition cameras to transmit either images to a screen where eyeglass lenses would be, or audible descriptions of what is in the sightline of the wearer

- Portable Handheld CCTVs which take the power of a large, desktop CCTV – a device with a computer-like monitor which will magnify anything put under a camera and project it onto the screen – and puts it in the palm of the users hand
- Apps for the Vision Impaired for use on smartphones and tablets have been developed that can provide audio description of visual information, narrating the world around them.

What all of these advances – and there are many more we could list – have in common is they are giving people who are blind the tools needed to remain independent. VisionCorps is committed to training and assisting any clients with technology related needs and questions. We realize technology is not going away anytime soon – in fact, quite the opposite. With the number of people who are blind expected to continue to rise due to the baby boomer population experiencing age related vision loss, technology will continue to expand and grow in leaps and bounds.



With the continued support from our donors like you, VisionCorps can ensure we will be right beside our clients, responding to new technology and putting the power of technology into the hands of our clients!

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## insights

*News for donors and friends of VisionCorps*



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Insights is a publication of VisionCorps Foundation  
Dennis Steiner, President

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