

# insights

Winter 2026

## VisionCorps

### News for donors and friends of VisionCorps

For more information on services for you or someone you know, please call 866-876-6550.

*Serving Adams, Chester, Lancaster,  
Lebanon and York Counties*

## IT TAKES A COMMUNITY

When her 9-year-old granddaughter asked her to explain to a friend what her white cane was for, Tammy Stayduhar was happy to oblige. She lost much of her vision due to a brain tumor at age 15, and at the time, had never met anyone else without sight. Today, she wishes more people understood what she has learned -- that it is possible to do almost anything one wants or needs to do using senses other than vision. She appreciates VisionCorps for providing the guidance and training needed to help people adjust to living with low or no vision.

These days, however, Tammy has another reason to appreciate VisionCorps. She has been unable to get around independently using her cane and can no longer take public transportation. She has Type II diabetes, and lost a toe on one foot in 2022. Now, she has a wound on her other foot and is wearing a boot. "It's just been one long battle. I think back -- if I hadn't had help from VisionCorps' volunteer drivers to get me to my medical appointments, I don't know where I'd be with my health right now. I don't want to go through that again. I could just cry," she said. Her husband Edward is legally blind, and neither drives. They've been getting help from family members for some errands, and are now getting groceries delivered. "I don't know what I'd do without being able to depend on VisionCorps to get me to my appointments. It's such a blessing. It takes a community."

Tammy believes that VisionCorps' Volunteer Driver Program is a hidden opportunity for people who want to do good. "My dad is deceased now, but after he retired from being a truck driver, he never knew what to do with his time. I'm sure there are a ton of people who are in decent health who would really enjoy doing this for others. It can be so rewarding and it's really appreciated."

Whether it's your time, talent, or treasure, doing good for others gives one a sense of purpose. And it makes our community resilient. Just ask Tammy!



*"I don't know what I'd do without  
being able to depend on VisionCorps."*

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VisionCorps is a 501(c)(3) exempt organization. A copy of our financial statement is available upon request by contacting VisionCorps at 244 N Queen Street, Suite 301, Lancaster, PA 17603 or calling 1-717-205-4115. A copy of the official registration and financial information of VisionCorps may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

## Welcome to Our 100th Year of Service!

In 1926, a group of six people developed a small workshop in a storefront on East King Street in Lancaster with the goal of helping veterans of WWI who had lost their vision in combat. A shop supervisor taught the employees how to make baskets and cane chairs. These tasks were naturally very tactile and the team quickly picked up the production techniques, enabling them to sell their goods in stores and continue to make a living wage.



Nearly 100 years later, that small location has grown into VisionCorps, and continues to empower individuals in central and southeastern Pennsylvania with vision loss to attain independence through rehabilitation, employment and preventative services. Over the years, the philosophy of providing services to people with vision loss has shifted from a hand-holding approach to providing the tools and training necessary to empower its clients to meet their individualized goals autonomously. It's a bold mission, and one we're incredibly grateful to you for supporting.

If you've never visited one of our VisionCorps manufacturing facilities, we invite you to take a tour this year! The breadth and depth of the items produced, as well as the varying abilities of those working on the lines, is truly awe-inspiring. I grew up in a military family; the fact that the very same helmet pads which protected my loved ones while they were deployed are made right here at VisionCorps gives me goosebumps. What an impact!

Activities to celebrate our centennial year will be forthcoming, including a special gala on October 2nd - right down the street from that first auspicious 1926 location! Please mark your calendars now and watch for ways to take part. In the meantime, stay warm this winter and always remember the difference you personally make in advancing the independence and empowerment of the blind and vision-impaired community.

Gratefully,

*Crystal*

Crystal Mills

*Vice President of Development, VisionCorps*



# WHY WE GIVE

## AKSHARA RAPARLA

### Why We Give: Youth Changemakers Lead the Way

In 2020, Akshara Raparla, her brother Aneesh, and two other students from the Downingtown Area School District—then in middle and high school—co founded the Drishti Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to addressing the unmet needs of individuals who are blind or have low vision. The organization partners with local, national, and international nonprofits, advocacy groups, and community leaders, with the goal of instilling the value of public service in people of all ages.

Reflecting on the mission that drives her work, Akshara shared: “If I could wave a magic wand, I’d choose universal accessibility — a world designed from the start to include people with vision impairments. When everything is built to be accessible, it naturally supports independence, dignity, and equal opportunities in school, work, and everyday life.”

At 17, Akshara serves as Youth CEO of the foundation while attending Downingtown S.T.E.M. Academy. Her mother, Srikala Yellamraju, supports the Drishti team by guiding event planning, campaign development, and revenue management, and oversees global operations.

Akshara took a bold leap in VisionCorps’ 2025 Eye Drop Rappelling Event, where she was the youngest participant among 100 rappellers. “Before the event, I described it as ‘ten stories up, one step down.’ But at first, it was super scary looking down. For a moment, I thought, ‘I don’t know how I’m going to do this!’ But I just kept going. I was buoyed by the enthusiastic support of our team.”

Partnering with VisionCorps and Team Liberty Chester County—the leading fundraising team, bringing in more than \$26,000—Akshara led efforts to elevate awareness and inspire next generation youth, and she’s thrilled that many others are already eager to participate in Eye Drop 2026 and future events.

The Foundation also hosts its own initiatives. “In September 2025, we organized the 5th Annual Drishti Dash Charity Run/Walk to raise awareness and support for VisionCorps and other organizations serving the blind community,” Akshara said.

For Akshara, her work with Drishti has also been an opportunity to build valuable leadership, strategic and empathetic real-world skills. She has played a key role in marketing and outreach to sponsors, beneficiaries, partners, and donors. In addition to managing the website, events, and communications, she oversees volunteer engagement and enjoys using her creative and multimedia talents to share Drishti’s mission with the world.

“We built this organization from the ground up,” Akshara said. “Watching it grow into a sustainable, youth led initiative is a dream come true for me. I want to continue to empower the next generation of changemakers.”

Learn more at [drishtiusa.org](https://drishtiusa.org).



*Akshara Raparla at the VisionCorps’  
2025 Eye Drop Rappelling Event*

# PUBLIC TRANSIT IS KEY TO INDEPENDENCE

People who are blind or vision impaired can do almost anything that sighted people can do, except drive a vehicle. Until self-driving vehicles are readily available, dependable and safe public transportation is the key to independence for clients who are blind or vision impaired.

“It’s vital to us,” explains Jennifer Eaton, a VisionCorps certified orientation and mobility specialist and visually impaired individual. “We use public transportation and paratransit to go to work, medical appointments, to go grocery shopping, and to get to recreation. It impacts our ability to live independently. Without it, we always need to rely on someone else.”

Explaining transportation needs for VisionCorps’ clients is a public policy initiative of VisionCorps’ advocacy team. State transit funding was a controversial issue in the 2025 state budget process, with one side asking for increased state transit funding and the other side contesting that increasing transit funding would lead to big state budget deficits.

VisionCorps is working to better educate policymakers about the need to make public transit more available and accessible to improve the lives of people who are vision impaired or have other disabilities.

Clients and employees of VisionCorps recently attended a rally in Lancaster to support continued funding for public transportation across the Commonwealth.



*Photo of Jennifer Eaton speaking at the Lancaster rally by Suzette Wenger | LNP | Lancaster Online Staff Photographer.*

Without adequate funding for public transportation, says Jennifer, people who are blind or vision impaired could lose their jobs and the ability to use it for appointments and shopping.

Paratransit, where clients call ahead to schedule rides on smaller vehicles that take them door-to-door, often has issues with reliability.

“There aren’t enough drivers,” says Jennifer. “A driver calling off can impact several riders. Wait times can increase – what used to be pick-up in a one-hour window can become waiting for pick-up in a two-hour window.

“It could take half a day or more just to get to one location,” she says. “Trips are routinely cancelled making it difficult for riders to rely on the transportation.”

Fixed bus routes also have limitations. Bus routes often have only one bus per route and service may end early in the evening and not be available on certain days.

For more information on policy initiatives related to the visually impaired, please visit [visioncorps.net](http://visioncorps.net) or contact Carol Gifford at 717-205-4149.

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*Insights is a publication of VisionCorps*

**Megan Tomsheck**, President & CEO

## Questions?

Please contact **Crystal Mills**, VP of Development at **717-205-4115** or email [cmills@visioncorps.net](mailto:cmills@visioncorps.net).

Please notify us if your contact information has changed. **717-393-5894** or email [therbein@visioncorps.net](mailto:therbein@visioncorps.net)