

News for donors and friends of VisionCorps

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

KEEPING ISOLATION AT BAY

Blindness and visual impairment are often accompanied by increased isolation, especially among seniors and people living in rural areas. The pandemic has worsened the problem. But thanks to the caring community support for VisionCorps services throughout Lancaster, Lebanon, Chester, York, and Adams Counties, people with vision loss know they are not alone.

Sandy Britcher is 71 and retired. She lives in southern York County,

in a rural community along the Susquehanna River. Ten years ago, she lost her vision and almost lost her life, in a freak accident. After months of rehabilitation and training, she regained her independence. She learned to get around outside her home using a white cane.

This past year, when the pandemic made group gatherings unsafe, Sandy was delighted to learn that VisionCorps was holding virtual

Learn more about our social and support groups on the back page!

meetings of their regular Orientation and Mobility Support Group. She found meeting virtually had unexpected benefits for her. “It’s a really good group, and now it has expanded to include people from other counties. It’s great to have a chance to connect with more people. It brings a greater sense of community.” She also joined VisionCorps’ virtual Book Club and the York/Adams Let’s Chat Support Group.

Connecting with people three days a week helps Sandy battle isolation. “It’s nice to know that there are other people out there dealing with the same things you are,” she said. “We support each other and offer our own ideas and suggestions to make doing things easier. The other day, I asked, ‘When you guys are cooking, how do you measure a teaspoon of liquid? Because with me, it either runs over the spoon or it’s not enough.’” Being able to laugh about small frustrations makes them easier to take. She joked, “I was making Christmas cookies and I think I got more flour on the floor than in the bowl!”

Donor-funded VisionCorps virtual support groups give Sandy an opportunity to connect with a vibrant group of local people from the comfort of her rural home. Together they are keeping isolation at bay, and helping each other overcome the challenges of living with sight loss.



Sandy participates in a VisionCorps support group over the phone

MESSAGE FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT

Is it too late to say, “Happy New Year!”? January came and went, and here we are in February – a year into this pandemic. VisionCorps is so thankful for your ongoing support throughout this unprecedented moment in time. Because of your support, VisionCorps has been able to continue providing services during the pandemic. While in-person services have been limited, our rehabilitation and education staff have found new ways to serve clients.

The results have yielded lots of new groups, new ways for our youngest clients to learn, and beyond rehabilitation services – a new way to consider fulfilling employment opportunities from afar.

In this issue you will learn more about how VisionCorps has shifted to serve from afar, and new groups that were developed. New groups continue to be added, and it’s a very exciting time to have something this positive arise from such a challenging time!

VisionCorps is also thankful to have been able to continue hiring new employees during the pandemic. Due to ongoing technology improvements, working remotely for certain staff members has proven to be productive and engaging. This also opens the doors to people who are blind all over the country to fulfill certain positions which are unable to be filled at the local level. This is especially true for our Contract Management Services, headquartered in Northeast Philadelphia but with employees all over the country contributing to VisionCorps’ goals.

You’ll also meet a wonderful client and friend to VisionCorps. Violet has used her experience with VisionCorps to help lead her philanthropic efforts to support others living with vision loss to receive VisionCorps Services. We thank Violet and all of our donors who continue to make our work possible!

Stay warm – Spring is just around the corner! Our hope is that you and your loved ones continue to remain safe and healthy. As always, please reach out should you have any questions about how VisionCorps can help you or someone you know!



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Megan".

Megan Sofilka Tomscheck
Vice President and Chief Development Officer

PS: If your service, social or church groups are meeting virtually, VisionCorps can provide a speaking program! We are available to share information about our services in your virtual meetings. Call 717-393-5894 to schedule a presentation!

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

VisionCorps
Foundation
— VISION PARTNER —



WHY I GIVE: VIOLET HELENTHAL



Violet Helenthal

Supporting VisionCorps Foundation was a simple decision for Violet Helenthal. She started losing her central vision 15 years ago due to macular degeneration. “I’d give anything to have my sight back,” she said. “I feel lucky to have the sight I do have left. It’s my most valuable possession.” When she sought help, VisionCorps was there for her.

Through VisionCorps’ educational presentations at her retirement home in Lancaster, Violet learned more about her disease and the services available to help her maintain her quality of life. A former hiker, she continues to stay active by walking the halls of her retirement home. “At this point, I can see enough to get around, and I know where everything is.” But she has trouble recognizing faces, and can no longer see text.

“I’m really happy with what VisionCorps has done for me,” Violet said. “They put a big red button in the center of my phone, and I know from memory where the rest of the numbers are and I can make calls. They also put raised red dots on my stove and washing machine dials.” Best of all, she got a DaVinci

video magnifier that reads printed text aloud. She really enjoys VisionCorps’ monthly conference call reading group. “Right now, we’re reading and discussing the book ‘Thunder Dog’—about a blind man and his guide dog who escaped from the 78th floor of the World Trade Center on 9-11,” she said. Vision Corps also helped her receive books on tape.

Recently, Violet celebrated her 92nd birthday. She was thrilled to receive 25 cards, as well as flowers, chocolate, and invitations to dine out. She looks back with satisfaction over the course of her life. “I grew up on a farm in Chester County. We were a big family with little money, but we always had food on the table. I didn’t want to remain a poor farm girl,” she said. She saved money from babysitting and waitressing to cover tuition and became a nurse anesthetist. She married and had a family. After her husband passed away, she traveled the world.

Violet celebrates a life well lived by supporting things that have brought her joy: her church, nature conservation, music, the arts, and VisionCorps. She’s invested wisely through the years. She gives via donation, through foundations, through trusts that earn her dividends, and in her Will. Through her efforts, countless others will be able to enjoy a better quality of life. “It just shows what you can do if you try,” she said.



Violet reading her birthday cards

VIRTUAL SUPPORT GROUPS EXPAND

Virtual support groups for clients of VisionCorps, a necessity during the pandemic when it is not safe to meet in person, are so popular that the groups are expanding.

VisionCorps started the virtual groups, where clients can meet on Microsoft Teams, a teleconferencing app on which you can connect by using your phone or online to help clients who could no longer meet in person. Many seniors use the groups to meet with others in their counties. If seniors are not able to login online, VisionCorps staff calls them to connect them to the group.

The groups meet an hour or so and are led by a facilitator from VisionCorps. The goal is to connect clients who are even more isolated than usual during the pandemic, said Chris Aments, vice president of rehabilitation and education for VisionCorps.

“We found that hosting virtual groups is a way to offer additional support to our clients,” said Ament. “Instead of driving to a location in one of the five counties we serve, hosting a group, and then heading back, we can host a group online for a larger number of clients from all different counties.”

As one client, Geraldine G. explained, “I’m very much alone, and I appreciate the group telephone calls.

“It’s been a blessing in my life to be able to share things the sighted world doesn’t understand,” she said.

“I especially enjoy the book group.”

Current monthly support groups, separated by counties, include: Virtual Sight Loss Support, where clients listen to a speaker and then discuss the topic, and Let’s Chat, an informal discussion group. Weekly support groups that include residents from various counties include Mobility Motivation, a group about mobility and remaining independent, and Book Club, where members listen to a chapter of a book and then discuss it.

The virtual groups were so popular that VisionCorps has expanded them with three new groups for clients:

- Dog Guide Group for dog guide users to share issues and experiences. Find out what it’s like to work with a dog guide and how to get one. Dog handlers interested in mentoring those interested in dog guides are also invited to join. This group recently started.
- Young Women’s Support Group for women, ages 18-50, another group that recently started, for women to talk about daily issues such as safety, everyday tasks, and hobbies. They will learn things like how to apply make-up and discuss social media posts of interest.



Miranda Golden hosting the Virtual Book Club

- Spanish-Speaking Support Group, a new group scheduled to start soon, will give clients a chance to connect in their native language for informal discussions.

Those interested in finding out more or joining any of the groups should contact Rehab Services at 717-205-4141.

insights

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