

Variety the Children's Charity of WI Summary Report

Information about the Applicant

Vision Forward Association is a 103-year-old nonprofit in Milwaukee that serves the needs of individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Our mission is to empower, educate and enhance the lives of individuals impacted by vision loss through all of life's transitions. We serve all stages of vision loss across the lifespan from babies, toddlers, and school-age youth to working adults and seniors. The degree of vision loss for those we serve ranges from people who were born blind, to people who have inherited eye conditions, to people who have lost vision mid-life due to disease or injury, to people who have low vision as a result of age-related eye diseases (macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy). Our programs and services are always provided regardless of an individual's or family's ability to pay. During our last fiscal year starting April 1, 2021, and ending March 31, 2022, we served approximately 4,000 individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

Statement of Need

Vision Forward is seeking a grant of \$10,000 from the Wispact Foundation to support transportation needs for individuals who are blind and visually impaired. The primary goal of a person with vision loss is to lead an independent life, with transportation a critical means to that end. Yet transportation remains a significant challenge for adults with vision loss. The loss of the ability to drive has a huge impact on the independence of adults with vision loss, especially those who have been driving for the majority of their lives. The lack of transportation options can lead to social isolation, which can lead to depression and a decline in health.

Our vans travel an 80-mile radius of Milwaukee. Last year our clients were living in the following cities: Beaver Dam, Brookfield, Burlington, Cudahy, Glendale, Iron Ridge, Janesville, Kenosha, Lake Geneva, Menomonee Falls, Mequon, Milwaukee, Mount Pleasant, Muskego, New Berlin, Oak Creek, Oconomowoc, Pleasant Prairie, Racine, Sheboygan, Shorewood, Sturtevant, Wales, Waukesha, Wauwatosa, West Allis, and West Milwaukee. For many clients, especially our older adults and seniors who do not have family members available to transport them, our transportation program is the only affordable way for them to access the vision rehabilitation services and support they need at Vision Forward to live successfully with vision loss.

Another component of our transportation program that costs thousands of dollars is our home visits. Several of our staff travel to clients' homes to deliver services. For example, our Certified Low Vision Therapists (CLVTs) usually follow up a client visit to our Low Vision Clinic with a home assessment. During this home assessment, CLVTs ensure that clients can effectively use prescribed vision aids as well as apply new skills and techniques to their daily living environment. The CLVTs assess the low vision client's home for appropriate lighting, priority item placement, flooring contrast, and open pathways for safe navigation.

Through the assessment, a therapist may make adjustments to a client's living areas and/or suggest ways to improve visibility within the household to reduce the risk of a fall.

In addition to our CLVTs, our Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs) offer early intervention services for young children newborn to three years old in clients' homes. Our TVIs travel throughout Milwaukee and beyond to ensure that each baby and toddler with vision loss has a functional vision evaluation. The functional vision evaluation is one of the primary responsibilities of the TVI. The goal of the assessment is to determine what and how the child sees, and what can be done to best facilitate learning with residual vision and other senses, such as hearing and touch. During the child's first years, functional

vision evaluations need to be reviewed several times and then supported with ongoing services. Vision Forward's TVIs use their special expertise to help develop the young child's cognitive, physical, social-emotional, adaptive, and communication skills. They work closely with caregivers and other members of the early intervention team to demonstrate how they can help the baby or toddler learn strategies and skills to develop at the same pace as their sighted peers.

Project Goals and Expected Benefits

Transportation is a funding area for the Wispact Foundation. Therefore, we believe this proposal is a good fit for the Foundation. Our transportation enables people who are blind and visually impaired to access services at Vision Forward. Without our program of drivers transporting clients to and from our facility, and without the commitment of our CLVTS, TVIs, and COMS to conduct home visits, our clients would be cut off from critically important vision rehabilitation services. Our expected goal is to ensure that all individuals with vision loss in Wisconsin can access services at Vision Forward so that they can lead full, active and independent lives.

Project Implementation Plan

Vision Forward's transportation program is year round. There is no project timeline other than utilizing your funding for our transportation program as soon as it is received.

Evaluation Plan

Budget

Staff Recommendation

The grant application can be recommended for approval. The amount of \$10,000.00 requested will be included in the overall amount of \$60,000.00 that will be allocated to acquire mobility and other enabling equipment that will directly benefit the persons with disabilities served by the organization. This aligns with the initiatives of the foundation.