



Vision Loss Alliance

of New Jersey

Formerly NJ Foundation for the Blind

Spring 2016

Ah! The joy of finding peas!

My name is Kath and I lost my sight in 2009 to Diabetic Retinopathy. I got my first glimpse of the value of Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey's tech program a few years ago while enrolled in the organization's Better Health and Wellness program in Montclair.



I was using a flip phone at the time and couldn't imagine any reason for switching to an iPhone. My phone allowed me to dial numbers vocally, and really, what more did I need?

In the Better Health and Wellness program, I was surrounded by classmates whose knowledge and wisdom I admired and trusted. I heard them using amazing applications. The first app that really grabbed my attention was one called "BlindSquare." It worked in a manner similar to

that of a GPS in a car, but this one enabled a blind or visually impaired person to know exactly where she was standing on a block or in a mall! What freedom!! Another app that drew my interest was called "TapTapSee." This one identified items photographed with the phone. Ah! The joy of finding peas in the can when you open it, as hoped for.

I decided to sign up, buying an iPhone just before classes started at the Denville location.

The experience wasn't easy at first. There I was in an unfamiliar space that offered a frustrating set of classes that had me wanting to throw the phone out the window — or at the least across the room. But I was surrounded by classmates who understood where I was coming from, and who both commiserated with me and taught me to laugh at the experience. I found teachers with enormous knowledge of these highly technical topics and even greater patience with people like me who were groaning students convinced they'd never learn.

Over time I did learn, and I went on to use the iPad and a Bluetooth keyboard. These days, I volunteer as an assistant teacher, where I get the great blessing of sharing in and cheering on my students' successes!

Expanding iPhone/iPod Training to Montclair

To meet the increasing demand for technology training for adults with profound vision loss, Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey is expanding its program to Montclair, where it already offers its Better Health and Wellness programs.

“Participants in our iPhone/iPad training say it opens their world, helping them stay connected, informed and organized.”

Vision Loss Alliance
of New Jersey
—Executive Director
Kris Marino

The nonprofit will partner with the Montclair Public Library to introduce the program in Essex County. The 13-week program will be offered three times a year, starting in September.

Vision Loss Alliance plans to hold several information sessions at the Montclair library in the spring and summer. For more information, contact Linda Groszew, senior program manager, at programs@vlanj.org.

Dear Friend,

Much has happened since I last wrote to you! First and foremost, we adopted our new name, Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey, in January. It is the culmination of more than a year of brainstorming with dozens of supporters, participants and community members.

Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey embodies what we truly are: an alliance of individuals, organizations and communities dedicated to helping people who lose their sight learn to adapt to their new reality — and thrive.

We kicked off this new phase of our 73-year history with an open house at our new Denville location in February. Guests had the opportunity to meet participants and see some of the tools and technologies used to help them live independently.

I cannot overstate how critical our work is: more than 130,000 adults over age 35 in New Jersey live with vision loss, and cases of eye diseases that can lead to vision loss are increasing as the population ages. Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey provides the only comprehensive, nonresidential vision rehabilitation program for adults in New Jersey. We provide wellness programs in Montclair, Ridgewood and Sparta, as well as in Denville, so people can participate in yoga, horticultural therapy, group drumming and fitness classes close to home.

As you'll read in this newsletter, we will begin offering our popular iPad/iPhone training, which teaches participants to harness the power of these devices, at the Montclair Public Library in September.

Please spread the word about our good work. Like us on Facebook and be sure to visit our new website, vlanj.org.

All of us at Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey are inspired by this organization's rich history, and we're committed to ensuring that adults with profound vision loss have access to life skills training and programs that enhance their emotional and physical wellness. Enjoy the rest of the newsletter, and know that you are making a huge impact on people's lives through your support of Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey.

Sincerely,



Kris Marino, Executive Director



*Kris Marino
Executive Director*

Eye on the Arts

Fifteen artists from Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey's Better Health and Wellness program displayed their paintings and pottery at the Gaellen Center for the Arts in the Leon & Toby Cooperman JCC in West Orange. The exhibit ran from Nov. 8 through Dec. 18. To see our photo gallery, visit vlanj.org. ●



Celebrating A New Era

Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey hosted an open house in February to celebrate the 73-year-old nonprofit's accomplishments as it enters a new phase.

"We envision a life for all individuals with profound vision loss that is healthy, independent and productive, with individuals in their homes, returning to their work or activities, and participating in social and community activities," Vision Loss Alliance Executive Director Kris Marino told the 40 guests. The event took place at Vision Loss Alliance's new Denville location on Morris Avenue.

Marino explained that the nonprofit changed its name from NJ Foundation for the Blind to Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey to more accurately

reflect what it is: an alliance of individuals, organizations and communities dedicated to helping adults who lose their sight learn to adapt and regain confidence.

Guests got to try devices and technologies used by the visually impaired.

"I'm amazed with what people living with vision loss are faced with, but I'm also amazed by all they can do," said guest Timothy Brunnock, who poured a glass of water from a pitcher while blindfolded. Brunnock didn't spill, thanks to a liquid level indicator.

Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey offers classes in Denville, with limited classes in Montclair, Ridgewood and Sparta. The nonprofit plans to expand offerings to other communities in the future.



Come See Us at the Denville Rotary Street Fair on Sunday, June 5

Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey will be at the 35th Annual Denville Rotary Street Festival on June 5. Visit us on Broadway near First Avenue, between 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Who knows? You may even hear some drumming! The festival is happening rain or shine, and admission and parking are free.

Save the Date! Blindness Awareness Month Open House

Join Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey on Saturday, Oct. 15 for an open house community event marking White Cane Safety Day and Blindness Awareness Month.

Between noon and 3:30 p.m., guests can tour Vision Loss Alliance's Denville location, at 155 Morris Ave., and enjoy demonstrations on healthy cooking, art, technology, horticulture, drumming, line dancing and more!

The Sayreville Lions Club Eye Van will be on hand for free vision screenings, and delicious healthy baked goods and other snacks will be available for purchase. Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey participants will provide entertainment.

Since 1964, White Cane Safety Day has celebrated the ability of people with profound vision loss to enjoy independent, productive lives. New Jersey has celebrated Blindness Awareness Month since 2009. Visit vlanj.org for more information!

Time Hop Trivia

Did you know that Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey got its start as a social club? In 1943, a group of people with profound vision loss started the New Jersey Association for the Blind in Newark to create their own social network. By 1955, they changed the name to NJ Foundation for the Blind and opened a summer camp for blind women in Denville, which operated for five decades! ●



Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey

Formerly NJ Foundation for the Blind

155 Morris Ave., Ste. 2
Denville, NJ 07834

Ways to Give

There are many ways you can help improve the lives of people with profound vision loss.

Your support of Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey allows us to provide services and training that empower individuals, and expand access to those programs.

Make a Gift or Pledge

You may make a one-time contribution or recurring donation online at vlanj.org/donate-now or by mail. Gifts may be made in honor of or in memory of a person you want to recognize. Mailing address: 155 Morris Ave., Denville, NJ 07834

Legacy Giving

Make a planned gift to Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey. Leave a specific dollar amount or asset to the nonprofit in your will, or make a residual bequest, which provides a portion of your estate after other bequests and expenses are paid. Other options include naming Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey as a beneficiary of an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) or life insurance policy, deeding property to Vision Loss Alliance, or donating long-term appreciated stock or securities.

In addition to your charitable deduction, you can avoid capital gains taxes.

Matching Gift Program

Many companies offer matching gift programs that will double the impact of your contribution. Check with your employer to learn if your gift qualifies for a match, and please include the matching gift form with your contribution.

For more information, contact Development & Communications Director Nina McCormack at (973) 627-0055, ext. 323, or at nmccormack@vlanj.org. ●