



2015 Annual Report



Blind children are encouraged to take risks, try new things, and shatter stereotypes and low expectations.



What We Believe

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people, because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back.

Who We Are

The National Federation of the Blind is the largest organization of blind and low-vision people in the United States. Founded in 1940 by sixteen individuals from seven states, the Federation now has tens of thousands of members and consists of affiliates and local chapters in every state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Members gather in chapter meetings each month, and there are state conventions of Federation affiliates every year. All affiliates are represented at an annual national convention, which typically draws between twenty-five hundred and three thousand delegates. We also do our work through special interest divisions and committees. Blind teachers, blind lawyers, blind entrepreneurs, blind students, blind clerics, blind engineers, blind people in the social sciences, parents of blind children, and others provide each other with information and support. By providing public education about blindness, information and referral services, scholarships, literature and materials about blindness, specialized aids and appliances, adaptive equipment, and support for blind people and their families, the members of the National Federation of the Blind strive to spread the word that the blind are normal individuals who can compete on equal terms with their sighted peers. Together, with love, hope, and determination, we transform dreams into reality.

Why the National Federation of the Blind?

As the original and largest nationwide organization of blind people, with seventy-five years of expertise and experience, the National Federation of the Blind is able to speak with authority and legitimacy about what it really means to be blind. While many other organizations purport to speak for the blind, only the National Federation of the Blind can authentically speak for the blind because it is the blind, speaking through democratically elected blind leaders. Other organizations cannot fully represent what it means to be blind in twenty-first century America, how much we are capable of, and the challenges we still face. This is why a strong National Federation of the Blind is important.



President's Message

Dear Friends:

When I last wrote an annual message to you, the National Federation of the Blind was celebrating its seventy-fifth year. Thanks to the outstanding efforts of members, friends, and supporters like you, we marked our seventy-fifth anniversary with astonishing growth and successes, and kindled new sparks of inspiration and energy that will continue to power our dynamic movement. We celebrated our past accomplishments and prepared to create a bright future for our organization and for blind Americans. One of many highlights of the year for me was attending the convention of our Pennsylvania affiliate, held at the very hotel in Wilkes-Barre where the National Federation of the Blind was founded on November 16, 1940. A plaque affixed to the hotel's exterior commemorates our founding. Thank you for all you did to make our seventy-fifth anniversary celebration a special one, whether it was standing in a parking lot on a July morning in Orlando and holding up an umbrella to help form a mosaic that achieved an official GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS™ title; inviting someone to a chapter meeting or other event; or making a financial contribution, no matter how large or small. The combined efforts of each of us, contributing our individual talents, and coming together with love, hope, and determination, transform the dreams of the blind into reality. I thank each of you for your contribution to our ongoing effort to raise the expectations of blind people by demonstrating that blindness is not what holds us back.



In 2004, the National Federation of the Blind opened the first research and training institute on blindness run by blind people, the NFB Jernigan Institute. Funded almost entirely by the contributions of our members and partners, the mission of the NFB Jernigan Institute has always been to develop innovative technologies, projects, and programs to solve the real problems of blindness. One of the ongoing goals of the Jernigan Institute is to foster the participation of blind children and youth in fields related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, often referred to as "STEM fields." Too many blind students are told that they cannot fully participate in the learning opportunities that take place in the science classroom. Their sighted teachers believe that it is dangerous for a blind person to use a dissecting knife or a Bunsen burner, and communicate those low expectations to the students. Even if a blind student is fortunate enough to encounter a science teacher with high expectations, the teacher may not be familiar with the alternative techniques that might be used to facilitate that student's full participation. Finally, equipment available in most educational settings and STEM workplaces is designed to be used in an exclusively visual manner.

Low expectations are the greatest challenge faced by blind students, but inaccessible technology and lack of relevant expertise among educators also contribute to an environment that does not properly value and nurture these students. Innovation is required to shift the paradigm. So, the NFB Jernigan Institute set out, from its inception, to find innovative technologies and techniques so that blind students can receive an equal STEM education and go on, if they desire, to work in the ever-growing number of STEM careers. Of equal, or even greater, importance to us is that blind students, as well as their parents and teachers, understand that blindness need not hold back a young person in any area of endeavor. To that end, all of our programs are directed by and include blind staff and volunteers, so that blind students meet and interact with role models who raise their expectations as blind people. We began with relatively small themed summer science academies, such as the Circle of Life, in which blind middle school

students dissected sharks and performed other activities related to biology, and Rocket On!, in which blind high school students launched real NASA rockets and analyzed the data from their flight. These early successes allowed us to create programs with more participants and a wider variety of scientific disciplines and activities; these included Youth Slam, Project Innovation, and STEM-X. In addition to the active participation of blind mentors, all of these programs featured non-STEM activities designed to enhance blindness skills and confidence in using them.

In my capacity as Director of Education for the NFB Jernigan Institute, I tackled the challenge of finding ways to introduce more blind students to STEM education with enthusiasm. That enthusiasm has grown, and now has a personal dimension for me; I now have two blind daughters, and I want the educational opportunities available to Oriana and Elizabeth to be the best possible so that they can achieve their full potential. As President of the National Federation of the Blind, I am committed to ensuring that these efforts continue and expand, and I believe that the dedicated members, volunteers, and staff involved with our most recent efforts in this area have taken this work to the next level.

Our latest STEM programs, funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation, will ultimately bring educational opportunities in this space to more blind people than ever before. Our STEM2U programs are conducted in partnership with some of the nation's most prestigious science museums, not only providing for an educational and inspiring experience for blind youth and their families, but also fostering relationships with these museums so that they can make their ongoing programs more accessible to blind people of all ages. Our NFB EQ programs, conducted in Baltimore at the NFB Jernigan Institute, help blind students explore their "engineering quotient" by giving them the chance to solve real-world problems using engineering concepts and skills. In the following pages, you'll read more about how these programs not only engage blind youth in STEM fields, but also give them the skills and confidence to go beyond the limits of what they believed possible in all aspects of their lives.

Of course, the National Federation of the Blind is not just the NFB Jernigan Institute, but the collective efforts of all of our affiliates, chapters, and divisions to positively change the lives of blind people. In 2015, more of our affiliates conducted Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning (BELL) academies, in more locations and serving more students, than ever before. Our division of parents of blind children launched a series of informational conference calls and podcasts to exchange and publicize ideas on how parents can best support and advocate for their kids. Affiliates throughout the country continued to build relationships with state agencies and other entities serving the blind, so that their programs will be informed by the experience and expertise of blind people. At the national level, we are continuing to expand the capabilities of KNFB Reader, our powerful app giving blind people instant access to printed documents, now available for both the iPhone and Android devices. Our Independence Market continues to provide hundreds of useful items to enhance the daily lives of blind people and those experiencing vision loss, from simple items like Braille clothing labels and magnifiers to the Bradley Timepiece, a stylish and innovative tactile watch. A new version of our NFB-NEWSLINE® app was released, and we added more newspapers, magazines, and online news sources to the service. All of these programs and activities, from those conducted by your local chapter to our national efforts, are possible because of your energy, your ideas, and your contributions. I thank you again for all that we have accomplished and for all that we will do in 2016 and beyond. Let's go build the Federation!

Sincerely,



Mark A. Riccobono, President
National Federation of the Blind



Together, with love,
hope, and determination,
we transform dreams
into reality.

Program Service Accomplishments

SETTING ESSENTIAL EXPECTATIONS FOR BLIND YOUTH IN STEM AND BEYOND

As a result of the ever-expanding number of career options in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, there has been an exponential increase in the allocation of resources devoted to providing educational opportunities for youth in STEM fields. But far too often, blind students are denied the opportunity to explore STEM subjects because their teachers and parents believe STEM requires sight for active participation. Furthermore, due to low expectations, blind youth typically do not have the opportunity to build leadership skills and learn what it takes to become mentors. One of our most significant accomplishments in 2015 centered on the development of our NFB EQ (Engineering Quotient) and STEM2U programs, which are designed to change these misconceptions and raise the expectations of and for blind student participants. These programs, supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation¹, are an extension of the National Federation of the Blind's National Center for Blind Youth in Science (NCBYS) initiative. Both the STEM2U and NFB EQ programs expand on the exciting and innovative work conducted by the NFB in the area of informal STEM education through previous NCBYS programs, such as Youth Slam, Project Innovation, and STEM-X.

Our STEM2U program is bringing accessible STEM learning opportunities to ninety blind and low-vision children in elementary and high school from across the United States. In addition, NFB STEM2U offers learning opportunities to parents of blind children and educators working with blind students. NFB STEM2U participants have the opportunity to engage in accessible STEM learning at some of the country's largest museums and science centers, including Baltimore's Port Discovery Children's Museum, San Francisco's Exploratorium, and the Center of Science and Industry in Columbus, Ohio. Blind youth are often not expected to be independent or capable of completing basic tasks that would be commonplace for other youth of a similar age. As one parent shared, her child "doesn't have the opportunities to go have fun and do educational things with other kids. She goes to a public school—only gets about half the experience... . She loves science." She observed of our program: "Here, it's hands on, she can experience the activities, she can experience the museum."

An objective evaluation of each of our regional STEM2U programs revealed that student participants believed they could perform better in STEM subjects because of their participation in the program. From the evaluation of NFB STEM2U Boston: "One child shared, 'I feel like I can do more math than I could do before' because he used it in the engineering activity. Another appreciated the program, sharing she did 'better' in science at NFB STEM2U because she 'had the materials I needed.'" From NFB STEM2U Columbus: "We had just started learning the engineering process at school, but now it's more clear."

Similarly, the evaluation reports reflected a change in student attitude toward their abilities as blind people to function independently. Younger participants (juniors) are assigned to groups to be mentored by older blind youth (apprentices) during the program, and NFB staff members, in charge of the program itself, are also blind. Therefore, participants are not only given the freedom to experience the program and the museum independently, they witness positive blind role models at every level of program management. From the NFB STEM2U Phoenix evaluation: "One parent shared, 'my child learned it was okay

¹ This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 1322855. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.



to be herself.' The importance of the teen mentors was highlighted by one parent who stated that their child 'builds confidence that he CAN accomplish anything he chooses to pursue, because he sees other blind role models.'" These programs provide evidence of the true ability of blind high school students to serve as effective mentors to younger age groups. While we have utilized this model in the past with success, our NFB EQ and STEM2U programs showcase the use of blind high school mentors in a more formalized way.

Our NFB EQ program, conducted at the NFB Jernigan Institute in Baltimore, affords high school students an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of engineering design processes and concepts such as prototyping and design viability, along with data collection and analysis. The program provides teens with the opportunity to hone their engineering skills—from technical knowledge, to problem solving ability, to the understanding that through engineering it is possible to improve other people's quality of life. The introduction of a revolutionary new tactile drawing method and associated techniques for teaching blind students technical drawing is one tangible representation of the innovative tools and strategies we implement to set higher expectations for blind youth during the weeklong summer NFB EQ program, and possibly a vehicle through which blind students will be able to pursue advanced engineering studies.

The National Federation of the Blind, as a nationwide consumer membership organization with tens of thousands of members, is in the unique position to utilize volunteers in the operation of our programs. Our member volunteers assist in collaborating with our program partners in their local areas, demonstrate that there is a need for the work being accomplished, and help sustain the program by continuing to work with partners after the project period. The relationships with museums where STEM2U programs have already taken place are already bearing fruit through continuing partnerships beyond the project.





It is our goal for participants, parents, and museum personnel to be affected positively by this experience, and for them to continue to raise their expectations for blind people to be competitive with their sighted peers in STEM fields and more. We have engaged teacher participants by demonstrating accessibility solutions for blind students that they can readily implement, and by providing opportunities for them to learn about the ways in which blind students participate in informal STEM education. These representatives of formal educational organizations then take the lessons learned back to their regular classrooms.

Moreover, it is our hope that our accomplishments, as described in the publications and presentations of team members, will influence the broader intellectual community. One paper emerging from the evaluation findings, "Accommodating Blind Learners Helps All Learners," authored by Mary Ann Wojton, Joe Heimlich, and Natalie Shaheen, was published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Museum Education* (Volume 41, Number 1). In

addition, Port Discovery Children's Museum staff gave a presentation on their participation at the 2015 Nanoscale Informal Science Education Network convention in the summer of 2015. Christine Reich, the co-project investigator, presented at the Association of Science-Technology Centers, and other team members presented at a maker conference in the fall of 2015 at Utah State University. Several other proposals for conference presentations by project team members are currently being considered.

While it was not an original intent of our projects to connect with formal educational organizations, a broader impact was realized this year in this regard. The NFB was able to utilize its relationship with the Ohio State School for the Blind to connect the school with the Center of Science and Industry so that students in Columbus were able to provide feedback on accessibility solutions throughout the year, and beyond. A similar connection has been established between the California Lighthouse for the Blind and the Exploratorium in San Francisco.

The National Federation of the Blind believes in the capacity of blind youth to be equally effective in the STEM fields and in other areas of education and life. In order for this belief to become a reality for all blind students, however, it is essential for *them* to be equipped with the fundamental skills required to be successful, and for their parents, teachers, and others to believe in their capacity and set high expectations. Our innovative STEM programs are another way in which, working together with love, hope, and determination, we are transforming the dreams of blind children and youth into reality.

DR. JACOB BOLOTIN AWARDS

Each year the National Federation of the Blind distributes Dr. Jacob Bolotin cash awards at its annual convention. These awards recognize individuals and organizations working in the field of blindness that have made outstanding contributions toward achieving the full integration of the blind into society on a basis of equality. The Jacob Bolotin Award Program is funded through the generosity of Dr. Bolotin's nephew and niece, Alfred and Rosalind Perlman. The late Mrs. Perlman established the Alfred and Rosalind Perlman Trust to endow the award program.

Dr. Jacob Bolotin (1888-1924) was a blind physician who lived and practiced in Chicago in the early part of the twentieth century. Dr. Bolotin fought ignorance and prejudice to gain entrance to medical school and the medical profession. He became one of the most respected physicians in Chicago during his career, which spanned the period from 1912 until his death, and was particularly known for his expertise on diseases of the heart and lungs. Dr. Bolotin used his many public speaking engagements to advocate for the employment and full integration of the blind into society. Interested in young people in general and blind youth in particular, Dr. Bolotin established one of the first Boy Scout troops consisting entirely of blind boys and served as its leader.

The eighth annual Dr. Jacob Bolotin Awards, with a total cash value of \$50,000, honored five innovators in the blindness field on July 10, 2015, as part of the National Federation of the Blind annual convention in Orlando. A \$5,000 award was presented to Professor Nicolaas tenBroek, a computer science instructor at Heartland Community College in Illinois and grandson of Jacobus tenBroek, the founder of the National Federation of the Blind, for his creation of a course to teach computer science students how to design accessible mobile apps. A \$5,000 prize was also presented to the United States Association of Blind Athletes for its creation of a state-of-the-art training center for blind goalball players so that they can prepare for participation in the 2016 Paralympics and beyond. A \$10,000 prize was jointly awarded to the University of California, Davis, and the Centre for Molecular and Biomolecular Informatics for their collaboration on an accessible computerized system for creating 3D tactile models of molecules and molecular interactions. A \$10,000 award was also presented to Seedlings Braille Books for Blind Children for its outstanding work producing Braille and print-Braille books for blind children of all ages. A cash prize of \$20,000 went to the Southern Arizona Association for the Visually Impaired for partnering with the organized blind to improve rehabilitation services for blind Arizonans.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Each year, the National Federation of the Blind awards thirty scholarships to blind high school seniors and college or graduate school students from the United States and Puerto Rico. The scholarship awards range from \$3,000 to \$12,000, and each year over \$100,000 is awarded. In addition to the NFB scholarship, each of the winners received a \$1,000 check and plaque from Ray Kurzweil, a Google Chromebook, and a \$1,000 cash award from Google.

The scholarships are presented at the banquet of the National Federation of the Blind convention, which in 2015 took place in Orlando, Florida. The winner of the \$12,000 Dr. Kenneth Jernigan Memorial Schol-

arship, which is named for the outstanding leader and visionary who served as President of the organization from 1968 to 1986, receives the honor of briefly addressing the banquet. The 2015 winner of this scholarship was Brianna Brown of Texas, who is pursuing a career in special education.

The members of the 2015 scholarship class were a diverse group studying a broad range of disciplines including engineering, economics, special education, law, and software design. They represent the best and brightest our country has to offer; and just as important, they represent the future leadership of the National Federation of the Blind.

Here is the complete list of 2015 scholarship winners and the awards they received:

\$3,000 NFB Awards: Katie Adkins (Kentucky), Douglas Alt (Michigan), Karen Arcos (California), Annika Ariel (California), Liliya Asadullina (Pennsylvania), Michael Ausbun (Nevada), Mary Church (California), Bryan Duarte (Arizona), Alexandra Engraf (North Dakota), Robert Gulleedge (Alabama), Miriam Lozneanu (South Carolina), Nefertiti Matos (New York), Mark Myers II (Missouri), Crystal Plemmons (North Carolina), Jason Polansky (Maryland), Christopher Stewart (Kentucky), and Kelsi Watters (Wisconsin)

\$3,000 Adrienne Asch Memorial Scholarship: MarChé Daughtry of Virginia

\$3,000 E.U. and Gene Parker Scholarship: LaShawna Fant of Mississippi

\$3,000 Charles and Melva T. Owen Scholarship: Tamika Williams of Alabama

\$3,000 Pearson Scholarship: Dezman Jackson of Maryland

\$3,000 Lillian S. Edelstein Scholarship for the Blind: Teri Stroschein of Oregon

\$5,000 NFB Awards: Chase Crispin of Nebraska, Karolline Sales of Louisiana, and Kaitlin Shelton of Ohio

\$5,000 Larry Streeter Memorial Scholarship: Mary Abby Jusayan of Rhode Island

\$8,000 Oracle Excellence in STEM Scholarship: Kaitlyn Kellermeyer of Texas

\$8,000 Oracle Excellence in Computer Science Scholarship: Hannah Werbel of Washington

\$10,000 Charles and Melva T. Owen Scholarship: Sarah Meyer of Indiana

\$12,000 Kenneth Jernigan Scholarship (funded by the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults): Brianna Brown of Texas

NFB-NEWSLINE®

Since July of 1995, the National Federation of the Blind has operated NFB-NEWSLINE®, the world's largest newspaper service for the blind and print disabled. NFB-NEWSLINE® is an audio information service that provides access to over four hundred publications, including more than three hundred local and state newspapers, ten national newspapers, sixteen breaking news sources, fifteen international newspapers, fifty magazines, five Spanish-language newspapers, and several blindness-specific publications, including the *Braille Monitor* and *Future Reflections*.

In addition to these four hundred periodicals, NFB-NEWSLINE® also provides access to emergency weather alerts, seven-day weather forecasts, television listings, job listings, and advertising circulars.

Subscribers can access NFB-NEWSLINE® services in a number of ways, including using a touch-tone telephone, on the web at www.nfbnewslineonline.org, via MP3 or dedicated book players, or through the NFB-NEWSLINE® Mobile app, which is available free in Apple's iOS App Store. Subscribers can also choose to have newspapers sent to their email addresses, allowing them to read the newspaper on their computer or portable device. NFB-NEWSLINE® is available in forty-five states and the District of Columbia.

In 2015 a total of twenty-four new publications were added to the NFB-NEWSLINE® service. These included four breaking news feeds, two international newspapers, eight magazines, and local newspapers in seven states.

In 2015 the NFB-NEWSLINE® system received a telephone call from a subscriber every 13.26 seconds, and a subscriber accessed a piece of information every 3.3 seconds using one of the available access methods, including the touch-tone telephone. During 2015, 4,497 new subscribers signed up for NFB-NEWSLINE®, bringing the total number of subscribers to 111,249. A total of 2,378,207 calls were made to NFB-NEWSLINE® over the telephone. NFB-NEWSLINE® provided 38,515,067 minutes of news to subscribers. Over the same period, 2,312,554 newspapers were emailed to subscribers. TV listings were accessed 520,773 times, and magazines were accessed 481,374 times. Newspapers were accessed 9,286,974 times during the year. The NFB-NEWSLINE® online service was accessed 7,240,501 times through the use of the web service, the iPhone app, and other download methods.

Subscribers constantly tell us how invaluable they find the service:

Carson in New Mexico says, “I really like the fact that I have some way of getting information by myself. I don’t need any help. I just need my phone. It makes me feel independent and more confident. I love that there are so many different magazines that I can read. I used to go into the store and find all the magazines near the checkout line and wish I could just grab them and read like everyone else. Thanks to NFB-NEWSLINE®, now I can read them too.”

Lindy in Florida, “I used to get really nervous whenever I heard the weather alert bulletin notice on my television. You cannot understand the panic that a person feels when they hear that noise and do not know where the severe weather is going to strike. I used to have to call friends in the area and ask them to check for me. I feel so much better now that I can call the NFB-NEWSLINE® service and check the report. It is a huge weight off of my chest.”

Sharonda in Georgia, “Using NFB-NEWSLINE® to look for jobs makes navigating the job search so much easier for me. I really love the fact that I can just zip through the ads and email myself the ones that are relevant. I just found my dream job! NFB-

NEWSLINE® has increased my independence, access to information, and ability to be an active participant in my community. I am so glad that the service is available to me and others who are blind and print disabled.”

Danielle in Kentucky, “I was born with both a hearing and vision impairment and find it most effective to interface with the NFB-NEWSLINE® app through my 14-cell Braille display on my iPhone and my iPad. I’ve used NFB-NEWSLINE® for almost ten years now, but didn’t realize the power of this service until I went off to college. I relied on my parents a great deal, as many young people do. When I went off to college in my freshman year, I had to become more independent. This is where the weather alert on my NFB-NEWSLINE® app became a vital tool for making informed decisions. The past two winters have been extremely brutal and unpredictable, which happened to be my first two years of college. I had to pay close attention to the weather reports to stay out of harm’s way. When I needed to study or do research at the campus library, I had to make sure that the outside elements would not prevent me from arriving or departing safely. I could have asked some of my fellow students about the weather conditions, but the weather alert on the NFB-NEWSLINE® service gave me a very detailed report on the conditions, much more detailed than anyone would have given, and I accessed this information independently, which is how I like it! Thank you for being there for me, NFB-NEWSLINE®.”

KNFB READER APP FOR IOS AND ANDROID

Over forty years ago, the National Federation of the Blind partnered with Ray Kurzweil to develop technology that would help blind people to acquire access to the various print materials that we all encounter in our daily lives. Our first iteration of this revolutionary technology was the Kurzweil Reading Machine, which was the size of a household appliance. In 2014 the National Federation of the Blind, working with K-NFB Reading Technology Inc. and Sensotec Inc., released the KNFB Reader app for iOS devices, and in 2015 the app for Android smartphones and tablets was released. The app uses the device’s camera and state-of-



the-art optical character recognition technology to give the blind instant access to the contents of print materials. We can now hear our mail or the menu at our favorite restaurant spoken using text-to-speech technology, or read it in Braille with a refreshable Braille display. This app continues to fundamentally change the everyday lives of many blind people around the world, helping us to get the information we need and live the lives we want. In 2015, the AppleVis community awarded KNFB Reader a Golden Apple Award for 'Best Assistive iOS App of the Year' for the second year in a row. KNFB Reader was also inducted into the AppleVis Hall of Fame in 2015. The KNFB Reader app is available in the iTunes App Store and the Google Play Store.

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND FREE WHITE CANE PROGRAM

The National Federation of the Blind believes that the long white cane is a means to independence for the blind. The white cane has proved a useful tool to millions of blind people in navigating their environments with confidence and safety. It is a tool that allows blind people to travel where and when they want, and as such promotes independence and self-sufficiency.

We believe that independence and freedom to travel are so critical to the quality of life of blind people that every blind person should have a cane, regardless of ability to pay. That is why the National Federation of the Blind offers free fiberglass canes to blind users through its Free White Cane Program. Any blind individual in the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico may request a cane for their personal use. Requests may be made as often as every six months.

In 2015 the National Federation of the Blind gave over four thousand canes to blind people across the United States, helping to ensure that blind Americans live the lives they want.

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND FREE SLATE PROGRAM

In addition to giving away free white canes, the National Federation of the Blind also gives free slates and styluses to blind people who need them. The slate and stylus have long been and continue to be valuable tools for writing Braille.

The slate and stylus is the only Braille-writing system that has the same portability, flexibility, and affordability as a pen and pencil. From labeling canned goods to jotting down a phone number, the uses and advantages of the slate and stylus to the blind are as varied as those of the pencil or pen to the sighted.

Any blind individual in the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico may request a free slate and stylus. Requests may be made as often as once per year.

In 2015, the second year of this program, over three hundred slates and styluses were given free of charge to blind users.

Braille Programs

NFB BRAILLE ENRICHMENT FOR LITERACY AND LEARNING (BELL)

The NFB Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning (BELL) Academy, first launched by our Maryland affiliate in 2008, continues its role as a pioneering force in reversing the Braille literacy crisis in America. Despite evidence that Braille literacy increases the likelihood of employment, fewer than ten percent of students who are legally blind in the United States use Braille. NFB BELL Academy provides intensive

Braille instruction to blind and low-vision students who can benefit from additional Braille education in the summer months.

During NFB BELL Academy, students use Braille throughout the day in authentic activities, such as using Braille while cooking to read recipes and identify or label ingredients, in addition to more formal instruction in Braille reading, Braille writing, and non-visual skills. One parent enthused, “The NFB BELL program changed our lives this year. My daughter learned more in two weeks at NFB BELL than she did in a two-month program last summer!”

Students also learn through games and other cooperative activities. Another parent observed, “One of my girls really enjoyed practicing Braille with an experienced Braille reader (a blind adult), and the other loved the beeping kickball. Both girls had fun painting, reading, writing, dancing, playing with blocks, coloring, and spending time with their friends.”

This unique program also brings together successful blind mentors and students, fostering a positive attitude about Braille in the students. Students learn from Braille users themselves that Braille is an invaluable tool for completing a wide variety of tasks independently and efficiently. Many parents highlight the importance of access to blind peers and adults—an experience their children rarely have. One parent said, “Being taught by blind adults was a great learning experience. It helped [my daughter] understand that as a blind person she can still be anything she wants to be, including a teacher.”

In addition to serving blind students, NFB BELL Academy provides parents with training and resources so that they may continue to provide learning and enrichment opportunities for their children throughout the year. Parents gain the skills and knowledge they need to help ensure that their blind children grow up to be successful adults. Parent participants also appreciate the opportunity to get to know other parents of blind children and successful blind adults who connect them with a vast number of useful resources and ideas.

In the summer of 2015, twenty-five states hosted thirty-four NFB BELL programs, which served almost three hundred blind students throughout the United States. NFB BELL students leave each BELL Academy excited about Braille, eager to learn more, and connected with dozens of blind mentors who can answer any questions they may have about Braille and blindness.

BRAILLE READING PALS

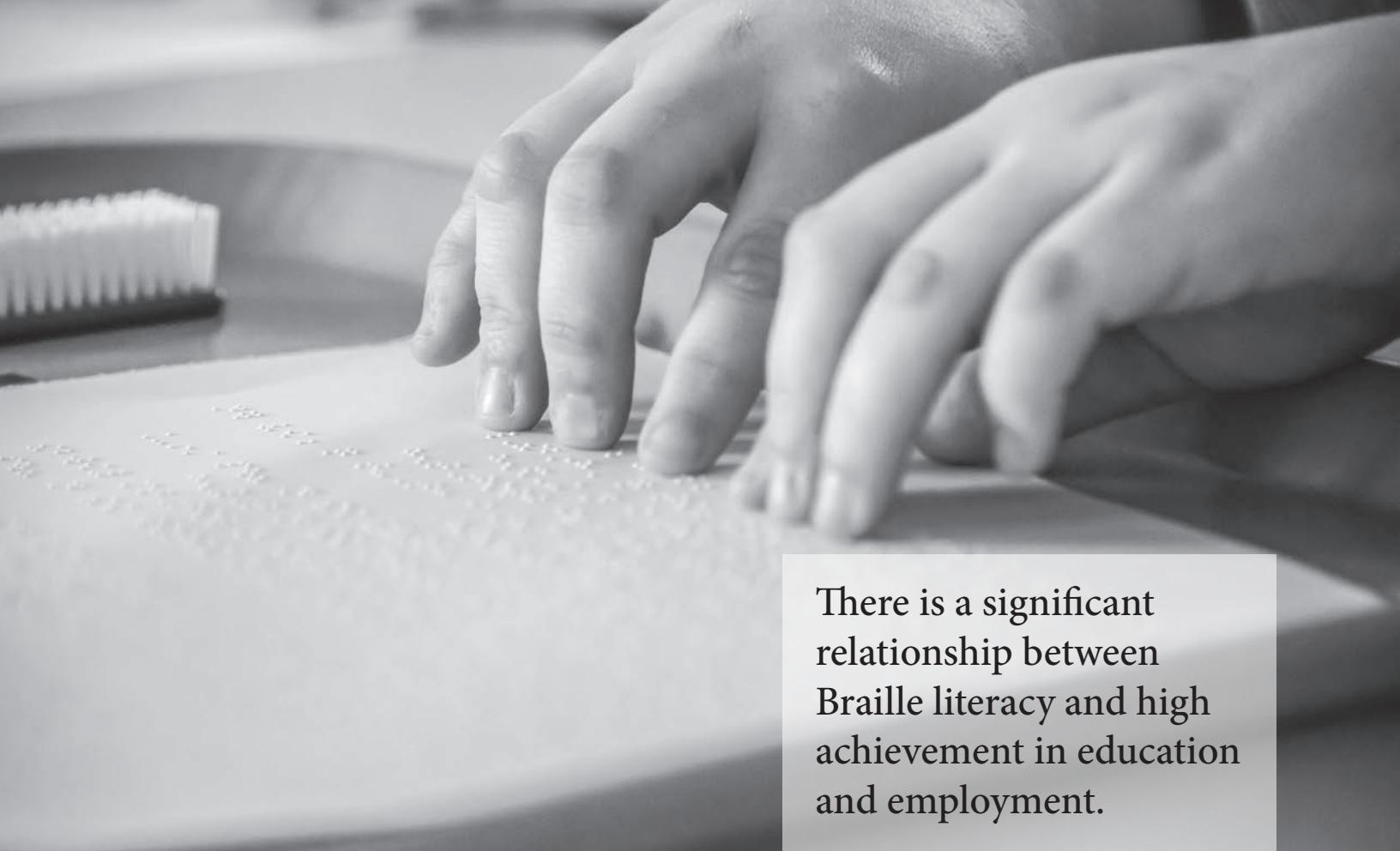
The Braille Reading Pals Club is an early literacy program that fosters positive attitudes about Braille in children and their families and promotes a love of reading by encouraging parents to read daily with their blind or low-vision child. The program strives to introduce young children and their families to Braille by directing parents to essential resources and effective literacy strategies that promote success for their young blind children. Members of the club receive a print-Braille book, a plush reading pal, quarterly Braille activity sheets, Braille birthday cards, a monthly parent enewsletter, and a subscription to *Future Reflections*, the quarterly magazine of the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children.

BRAILLE LETTERS FROM SANTA

In December of 2015, the National Federation of the Blind once again offered a special holiday service for children who read Braille. For the ninth year blind children were able to request Braille letters from Santa in care of his helpers at the NFB Jernigan Institute, who sent Santa’s replies in Braille and print so that parents and children could read together. Proficiency and fluency in reading Braille are best achieved by taking every opportunity to read Braille, and the Braille Letters from Santa program is another fun way to implement that goal.

BRAILLE TRANSCRIBING AND PROOF-READING CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

In late 2006, the NFB Jernigan Institute was awarded a contract by the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped of the Library of Congress to conduct that agency’s National Braille Transcribing and Proofreading Certification Program. The NFB Jernigan Institute now conducts all administrative functions of the certification program, including the recruitment,



There is a significant relationship between Braille literacy and high achievement in education and employment.

training, and evaluation of individuals wishing to become certified Braille transcribers and proofreaders. The implementation of this program by the National Federation of the Blind has significantly increased the number of qualified Braille transcribers and proofreaders, thus making Braille literature, instructional materials, and musical scores more available to the blind of America. As of December 2015 the program has submitted the names of 2,050 individuals to the Library of Congress, indicating that they have successfully completed the certification courses in literary, mathematics, and music transcribing or proofreading.

In addition to the day-to-day operations of this program, the transition to Unified English Braille (UEB) has necessitated significant revision of course material, re-training of staff, and additional credentialing of individuals certified under older Braille rules. During 2015, a major revision of the course manual for transcribers was completed so that it aligns with Unified English

Braille. The new version also includes additional reading exercises to test Braille reading skills as well as instruction on the use of Braille translation computer programs to assist with Braille transcription. The manual has been made available in print and Braille formats simultaneously. The course instructors received training in order to evaluate lessons, tests, and manuscripts according to UEB. Beginning in January 2015, all new students in the transcribing and proofreading courses began learning under the rules of Unified English Braille, and students who had been working in the older version of the course were switched to the new version during the year. Any literary transcribing or literary proofreading certificates issued with dates after December 31, 2015, will signify that the transcriber or proofreader is certified in UEB. Multiple editions of a three-part test were created and administered to test for the "Letter of Proficiency in UEB," which is an add-on credential for transcribers and proofreaders who were certified under the pre-UEB rules. By the end of the 2015

contract year, seventy-four individuals had earned a Letter of Proficiency in UEB from the Library of Congress.

Jernigan Institute

PROMOTING EQUAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY

In the twenty-first century accessing the internet, and using the various devices that connect to it, for conducting routine interactions and transactions, is taken for granted by most people. The internet is used on computers, tablets, smartphones and other devices, not only to access information and entertainment, but also to shop for groceries and other goods, conduct financial transactions, access educational content, pay bills, make travel reservations, choose a restaurant for dinner, and much more. More importantly, the increasing number of applications and service platforms based “in the cloud” (i.e. on the internet) means that the employment of many people depends on equal internet access. Specialized applications for everything from call center management to accounting to database management are no longer handled by dedicated software programs, but through internet-based websites and applications.

Unfortunately, blind people cannot depend on full and equal access to any internet service. This is because information and services on the internet are traditionally presented with the assumption that the end user can perceive and interact with the content visually. While specialized programs and devices can convert internet content into synthesized speech or display it in Braille, these “access technologies” are limited by the visual presentation of much internet data. Specialized software programs for the blind, known commonly as screen readers, can easily interpret text, but not images; these programs cannot tell



A black and white photograph showing a woman from the side and slightly from behind. She is wearing dark-rimmed glasses and a dark headband with a small, rectangular screen attached to it. The screen displays a portion of a news article. The woman appears to be reading the text on the screen.

Technology holds the promise of equal access and equal opportunity for the blind.

of John Graf's fate is he
5, 1970, during an escape
available to explain where
on January 26 and the d

what an icon or graphic represents. A picture of a shopping cart isn't sufficient for a blind person to know its function. This problem, of course, extends beyond internet content as well, but increasingly the internet is the primary area of concern because of the movement to the cloud just described.

This problem is neither inevitable nor without remedy. Digital information, being simply a series of 0's and 1's that are interpreted by devices based on their programming, is not inherently visual. In order to make a website or application more usable by a screen reader, its developer simply needs to be familiar with the guidelines, tools, and techniques that are available to help interpret the content for users who are blind. In the shopping cart example, the developer can add an "alt tag," text that does not display on a user's screen but can be read by screen readers (and other applications like search engines), that identifies the icon and causes the screen reader to verbalize or display it as the words "shopping cart." The goal should be to ensure that a blind user can access the same information and engage in the same interactions as any other user. This is what is meant by the term accessibility. While the concept of accessibility has been around for a long time, is required by both federal and state laws, and has been thoroughly incorporated into the international guidelines that describe how the internet should work, it has not been given sufficient attention by the community of programmers and developers who generate internet content and applications. Sometimes this is because of unwillingness to consider the blind as first-class citizens needing equal access, but it is also the result of internet content developers not having the specific knowledge to incorporate full accessibility into their products.

The staff of the NFB Jernigan Institute seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by participating in national and international conferences on digital information and services; by conducting events at our facilities in Baltimore; and by engaging directly with the various companies, both large and small, who are building and using the internet. Our staff is increasingly recognized for its expertise in technology products for those who are blind or losing vision and the integration of accessibility prin-

ples into mainstream technology. In 2015 experts from the NFB Jernigan Institute were invited to present at such diverse venues as Harvard's Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study; the thirtieth annual International Technology and Persons with Disabilities Conference conducted by California State University at Northridge (CSUN); and the M-Enabling Summit in Washington, DC. We also worked directly with Maryland's Loyola University to improve the accessibility of its website and content, as well as engaging with technology companies such as Microsoft, Amazon, and Google.

The National Federation of the Blind Center of Excellence in Nonvisual Access to Education, Public Information, and Commerce (CENA) (established through an appropriation from the state of Maryland) and the Maryland Technology Assistance Program hosted the fourth Web Accessibility Training Day on November 4, 2015. For the first time ever, the event had a virtual component, so that participants unable to travel to Baltimore could participate remotely. Between online and in-person attendees, this year yet again broke the previous record for attendance. It was also the most packed Web Accessibility Training Day ever in terms of content with two full tracks for technical and policy topics after the introductions and the keynote by Microsoft's Wendy Chisholm. The recorded sessions will become available as an archive.

The NFB Jernigan Institute also hosted a small-scale pilot training on manual and automated testing for web accessibility, and began conducting "accessibility training boutiques," a series of small-scale free events on a variety of accessibility-related topics. In addition to web accessibility, the boutiques have covered publishing e-books that are accessible to the blind, creating accessible PDF documents, and more.

The International Braille and Technology Center for the Blind (IBTC), the world's largest evaluation and demonstration center for access technology and housed at the NFB Jernigan Institute, continues to serve as an ever-changing, ever-updating demonstration of how technology can help blind people succeed in every aspect of their lives. It is not only



a venue at which consumers can engage in hands-on exploration of new and existing products, but also a springboard for collaborations with mainstream and access technology companies seeking to improve their products. Products added to the IBTC for demonstration and evaluation in the past year include the OrCam optical character recognition glasses, the Smart Beetle Braille display from HIMS, and the new Perkins forty-cell Braille display. The NFB Jernigan Institute also continues to maintain an access technology resource list so that individual consumers, along with schools, rehabilitation agencies, and others, can explore options and keep track of the latest access technology developments.

The blind cannot live the lives we want without full and equal access to the technologies that are available to the rest of society. The term “digital divide” has been used to describe the lack of access by disadvantaged groups to the internet and other technologies, and it applies to the blind as well. In the twenty-first century, equal access is required for any group of people, including the blind, to fully participate in society as first-class citizens. It is necessary for education, employment, and participation in community life. It is therefore one of the defining issues facing blind Americans, and will remain a key focus of the work of the National Federation of the Blind.

JACOBUS TENBROEK DISABILITY LAW SYMPOSIUM

The eighth annual Jacobus tenBroek Disability Law Symposium was held March 26-27, 2015, at the National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute. In celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the theme of the 2015 tenBroek Symposium was “The ADA at Fifty: The Future of Disability Law and the Right to Live in the World.” Over 220 disability rights

advocates from across the United States attended the symposium to hear leading disability rights attorneys and scholars discuss their vision of the status of disability and disability law in 2040 and examine what remains to be done to achieve Dr. tenBroek's goal of equality of opportunity for all. Essays based on presentations from the symposium have been published by the National Federation of the Blind in a book titled *The Future of Disability Law: Essays from the 2015 Jacobus tenBroek Disability Law Symposium*. The book is available in large print from the NFB Independence Market and in accessible ebook and large print formats from iUniverse, Amazon, and other book retailers.

JACOBUS TENBROEK LIBRARY

The work of the Jacobus tenBroek Library in 2015 was mainly focused on a series of special projects related to the year-long activities surrounding the seventy-fifth anniversary of the National Federation of the Blind. These projects not only helped generate excitement for the long and significant history of our organization among our members, but also provided the foundation for new partnerships with other organizations and helped to expand the tenBroek Library's reach to new audiences. Among the many exciting projects we participated in, two made truly significant contributions toward the achievement of our core mission. The first was the design and construction of a tactile, talking timeline of the NFB's history created with the innovative staff at 3DPhotoWorks. Featuring historical photographs and audio recordings of significant events in NFB history, this remarkable exhibit was displayed during the 2015 National Convention and now greets all visitors to the NFB Jernigan Institute in Baltimore. The second was the creation of an accessible online exhibit, which featured the digitization of original records and correspondence created during the founding of the NFB in 1940. This online exhibit was made possible by Digital Maryland, the state representative of the Digital Public Library of America, and was unveiled just in time for the celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary on November 16, 2015.

In addition to these exciting projects, the tenBroek Library continued to expand our library and archival collections and worked to increase their ease of

access by both Federationists and the general public. Our commitment to making the great wealth of knowledge preserved in NFB literature available online saw great strides this year. Our goal to make all thirty volumes of the Kernel Books series available in audio format was brought closer to realization, as was our ongoing project to digitize all legacy issues of the *Braille Monitor*. We were also fortunate to work with Dr. Mara Mills, assistant professor of media, culture, and communication at New York University, to digitize the earliest audio recordings of the *Braille Monitor*, funded by NSF Scholars Award #1354297. And our archival collections were enriched by the generous donation of the Leonard Robinson Collection; Mr. Robinson was a blind lawyer instrumental in the passage of the Randolph-Sheppard Act in 1936 and served as the first director of its vending program from 1938 to 1971.

Once again, our professional staff processed a high volume of reference requests and hosted both national and international visiting researchers. Among these researchers was Allie Tubbs, a bright young middle school student from Iowa, who chose to center her presentation for the 2015 National History Day competition on NFB founder and library namesake, Dr. Jacobus tenBroek. Working with library staff, Tubbs researched and constructed an impressive entry and went on to place second nationally in the category of Junior Individual Performance.

Library staff also worked to increase our exposure and share our expertise by participating in professional library conferences and forums. This included a poster on the importance of Braille preservation in archives presented at the Society of American Archivists' 2015 annual meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, and a talk given to the Library of Congress's Organization of Employees with Disabilities on the early efforts of the NFB to effect positive changes to the Social Security Act, which was later published as an article in the *Braille Monitor*. Through these and other projects, the National Federation of the Blind Jacobus tenBroek Library continues to work to become the most trusted resource for non-medical-related information on blindness and the central repository of the history of the nation's blind.

Donors

We would like to thank the following donors for their generous contributions given in 2015. It is only because of their generosity that the National Federation of the Blind can continue its work to raise the expectations of blind people and ensure that the blind live the lives they want.

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The white cane has proved to be a useful tool to millions of blind people.



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Jacobus tenBroek Legacy Society

The Jacobus tenBroek Legacy Society honors friends of the National Federation of the Blind who are helping raise the expectations of and for the blind through their commitment of a legacy gift to the organization. Jacobus tenBroek Legacy Society recognition is given to those committed individuals who support the work of the National Federation of the Blind by including us in a will or living trust, a life-income gift, or by making the NFB a beneficiary of a life-insurance policy or retirement plan. Individuals enroll in the Legacy Society by advising the National Federation of the Blind, in writing, that they have included the NFB in their estate plan.

Some donors wish to remain anonymous, and the National Federation of the Blind honors these requests. However, we offer the following recognition of these selfless individuals as an expression of our sincere appreciation, and in an effort to encourage others to make a similar commitment.

Linda M. Bloodsaw
Charles and Jacqueline Brown
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Fredric and Cathlene Schroeder
Lisa Tran
Ramona Walhof



Financial Statement

STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES

Year Ended December 31, 2015

REVENUE AND GAINS AND OTHER SUPPORT

Public Support:	
Contributions	\$15,490,169
Donated Services	4,327,731
Government Grants	1,912,295
 Total Public Support:	 21,730,195
Revenue:	
Sales - Independence Products and Publications	733,932
Investment Income (loss)	(755,959)
Royalties	1,646
 Total Revenue:	 (20,381)
Total Revenue and Gains and Other Support	\$21,709,814

EXPENSES

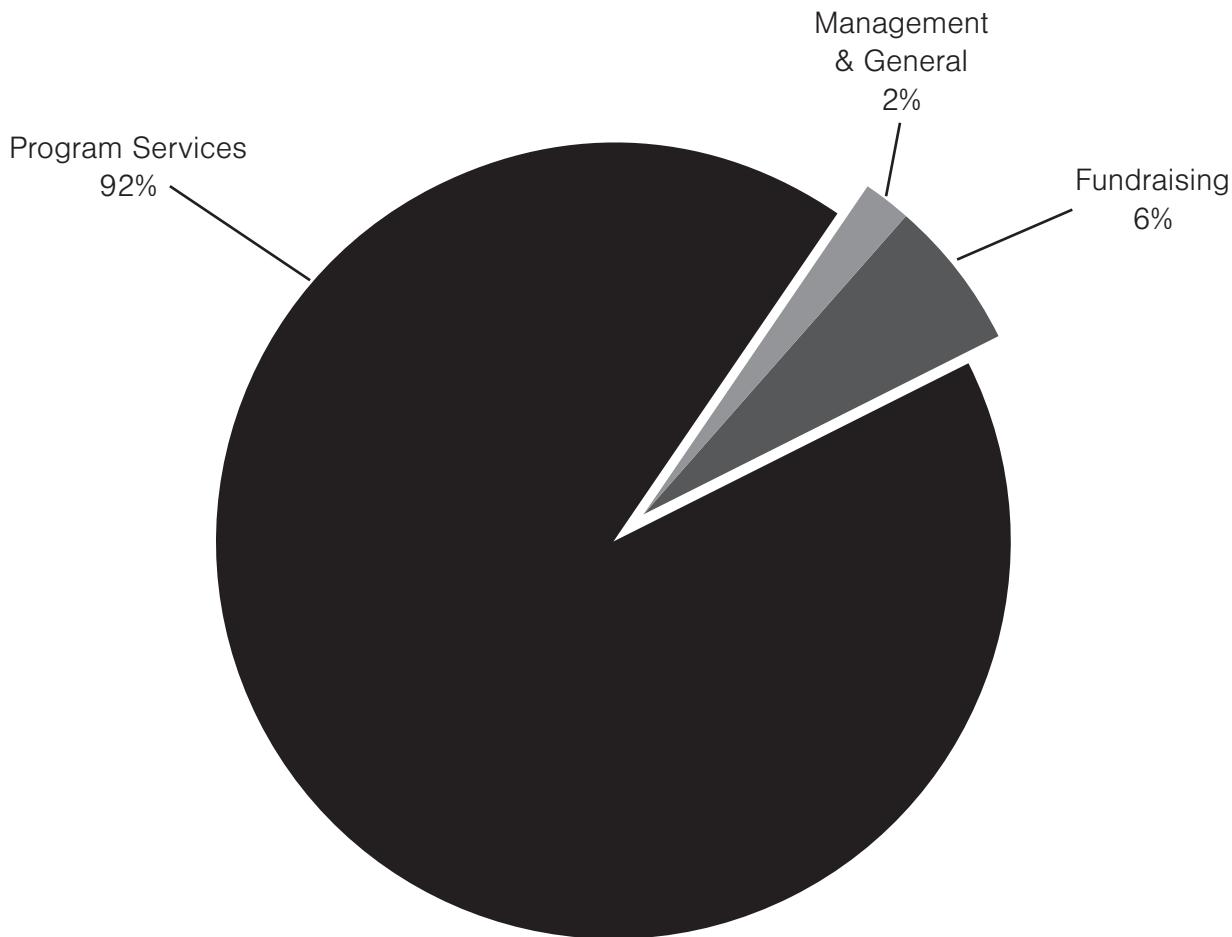
Program Services:	
Blindness Integration	\$8,347,811
Civil rights, advocacy and self-organization	5,969,380
Nonvisual access technology, methods and systems	5,177,613
 Total Program Services	 19,484,804
Supporting Services	
Management and General	531,269
Fundraising	1,332,531
 Total Supporting Services	 1,863,800
Total Expenses	\$21,358,604

Changes in Net Assets	\$351,210
Net Assets - Beginning of Year	\$21,675,083
Net Assets - End of Year	\$22,026,293



The National Federation of the Blind meets the rigorous Standards for Charity Accountability set forth by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance. The NFB maintains a GuideStar Exchange Gold Participant status, and is an approved charity participant in the Combined Federal Campaign.

PROGRAM SERVICES, MANAGEMENT AND GENERAL, AND FUNDRAISING EXPENSES AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL PUBLIC SUPPORT



Financial statements presented have been audited by Rosen, Sapperstein and Friedlander, LLC. Complete audited statements with accompanying notes for the National Federation of the Blind can be obtained by contacting the offices of the National Federation of the Blind, 200 East Wells Street at Jernigan Place, Baltimore, Maryland 21230, (410) 659-9314.

The National Federation of the Blind, a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, is eligible to receive contributions that are deductible for computing income and estate taxes. Donors should consult their attorney or financial advisor to discuss the tax implications of any donation they make or contemplate making to the National Federation of the Blind.



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How You Can Help

As you have read in the previous pages, the National Federation of the Blind is a dynamic organization with numerous programs that dramatically improve the lives of blind people and people with low vision in the United States. We could not do this critical work without the generous support of others. Here are some ways that you can help us continue to help blind people live the lives they want:

Donate Online—Contributions by credit card may be given at one time or pledged over a period of time. Credit card donations can be made online at nfb.org.

Donate by Mail—Checks should be made out to the “National Federation of the Blind” and mailed to the National Federation of the Blind at 200 East Wells Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21230.

Honorary or Memorial Gifts—Contributions made to honor a special person, to commemorate a special occasion, or to pay tribute to an individual may be made by family members or friends. These gifts may be made online or by mail.

Donate a Vehicle—You can donate a vehicle to the National Federation of the Blind by calling 1-855-659-9314 or by visiting nfb.org/vehicledonations.

Donate Clothing—If you live in Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, or Virginia, you can donate clothing and other household items to the NFB. You may take your items to a GreenDrop collection site or call 1-888-610-4632 for home pickup. Learn more by visiting nfbpickup.org.

Bequests—You could name the National Federation of the Blind as the recipient of part of your estate in your will or as a designated beneficiary. You could also consider designating the NFB as the beneficiary of a life insurance policy or retirement plan, thereby giving a substantial gift for a relatively modest annual outlay of funds.

Appreciated Securities—Gifts of securities can be made by transferring ownership to the NFB. By

making a gift of appreciated securities, the donor may claim an income tax charitable deduction based on the full market value of the gift.

Matching Gifts—Matching gifts are made by companies in order to encourage charitable giving by their employees. For more information on this type of program, contact the human resources department at your place of employment.

The following types of gifts are also appreciated, but please contact us first to make sure that your gift will be of use to the NFB:

Real Estate—Gifts of real property may be claimed as an income tax charitable deduction based on the fair market value of the property. Donors may also avoid capital gains taxes and eliminate certain costs associated with the transfer of real estate title.

In-Kind Donations—In-kind contributions of goods and services are welcomed by the NFB.

HOW ELSE CAN I HELP?

Become a Volunteer—Americans today devote millions of hours to helping charitable organizations. You too can make a difference by helping the NFB with your skills and talents. The NFB can match those skills and talents with our volunteer opportunities. For more information on our volunteer opportunities, please call Patricia Maurer at (410) 659-9314, ext. 2272.

Spread the Word—You can help the NFB by spreading the word that the blind are normal individuals who can compete on equal terms with their sighted peers and by connecting blind persons who need help with our organization. For more information on making a donation or gift to the NFB, please contact Outreach Programs at (410) 659-9314.

You can also help by sharing information about the National Federation of the Blind and its programs on social media. Follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/nfb_voice or like us on Facebook at facebook.com/NationalFederationoftheBlind.

A close-up photograph of a young boy with short brown hair, wearing a white t-shirt with a dark blue collar and a small logo on the chest. He is looking down at an open book he is holding with both hands. The book has a teal cover visible. In the background, there are shelves filled with books, suggesting a library or bookstore setting.

Thank you for your
continued support!



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND

Live the life you want.

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