

NEW YORK CITY HEALTHCARE PROFILES

Proving What's Possible

With no-fee adaptive services for blind and visually impaired people, **VISIONS** provides the tools needed to live life to the fullest.

According to studies funded by the National Institutes of Health, the number of Americans with vision impairments or blindness recorded in 2015 is expected to double by 2050, especially in aging populations. Even though visual impairment is named a top 10 disability in adults by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, many people aren't aware of available resources. The first step, says Nancy Miller, is seeking help.

"Our motto is, 'If you don't see something, say something,'" says Miller, executive director and CEO of VISIONS, a non-profit vision rehabilitation and social services organization. "If someone is finding day-to-day tasks challenging or is struggling to find employment due to a visual impairment, they can come to us."

Serving all ages from infants to older adults throughout New York City, the team at VISIONS considers the whole person when creating an individualized rehabilitation plan. From job placement and assistive technology training to short-term counseling and youth programs, private donations and government funding allow the organization to foster independence at no cost to those they serve.

"When I became CEO, I noticed everyone was offered a



Briana Dubon (left), intergenerational program youth volunteer, assisting Donna Hedges (right), VISIONS older adult center participant. Photo by Ryan Melendez.



Shuaibu Kabba (left) working on a mobility lesson with certified orientation and mobility specialist Alyssa Goldman (right). Photo by Ryan Melendez.



Marion Sheppard (center), instructor who is blind and hard of hearing, leading an adaptive dance workshop. Photo by Diana Cruz.

set curriculum of basic cooking, cleaning, and mobility skills," says Miller. "But there are plenty of sighted people who don't cook. So, we started asking people what they want to learn."

Walking the Walk

"Blind people come in every ethnicity, age, shape, and background," says Miller. "In a largely sighted society, there are many misconceptions about those with severe vision loss. But there's a whole world of resources that allow them to successfully navigate life."

VISIONS itself is living proof. One in three staff members is blind or has a visual impairment, and the organization prioritizes diversity in every facet. More than 50% of program participants identify as a person of color, and more than 50% of employees are people of color as well. Because New York is a melting pot, services are offered in 16 languages, including American Sign Language.

Years ago, after opening America's first Older Adult Center expressly for people with visual impairments, VISIONS was able to help a participant who was blind and hard of hearing fulfill her dream of teaching dance. Beginning as a volunteer,



Keanu Resnick (left), work readiness graduate, standing with Jessica Clarke (right), VISIONS certified rehabilitation counselor. Photo by Ryan Melendez.

the lady soon gained a following. Now in her 70s, the woman has been a paid employee for over 10 years.

VISIONS receives most referrals by word of mouth, so Miller encourages anyone with friends and family who may benefit from VISIONS services to reach out.

"We want more people to take advantage of our programs," she concludes. "Anyone can do the things they love; they just may do them differently."

A Helping Hand

Now providing hybrid services in 14 counties from just south of Albany to the tip of Long Island, VISIONS worked with 7,216 participants in 2022 alone. Community support is crucial to making it all possible, and anyone interested in employment, volunteering, or sponsorship can find more information on the organization's website.

visions
services for the blind and visually impaired

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