

News for donors and friends of VisionCorps

For more information on services for you or someone you know,
please call 717-291-5951.

DOING THINGS FOR HERSELF

“With everything else that has been going on with me medically, losing my vision in one eye was the last thing I needed!” said Areli Duran Twyman of Mt. Joy. Areli has battled diabetes and two brain tumors among other medical challenges. But she remains optimistic and resilient. “I pray a lot and it gives me the endurance to get through things. My mom, dad, and sisters have been very supportive and encouraging. And VisionCorps has helped me a lot! They’re a great organization!”

Areli found herself losing confidence in her ability to do things for herself. At VisionCorps, she was greeted with understanding, patience, and training. “I was having trouble identifying money,” she said. “My occupational therapist suggested I look at the big numbers at the corners of bills. I was always getting quarters and nickels mixed up until she taught me to feel for the ridges. She put tabs on the ‘bake’ and ‘on’ buttons of my stove, so I can use my stove again. She taught me how to use the accessibility features on my laptop and phone. She also gave me glare shields to wear when I’m out in the sun. I’m very happy with the results that I got.”



Areli works with OT Assistant Stacie Doan to learn how to use PenFriend.

voice-labeling system. By using the pen-like device to record her voice onto self-adhesive labels attached to an object, she can then play the recording back by holding the PenFriend near the label. This is just one of the helpful devices Areli never knew existed before she came to VisionCorps. “I use it to label my clothes – I’m becoming colorblind. And to label spices – I was always saying: ‘Is this spice Italian? Oregon?’ It’s a tremendous help.”

One device, called PenFriend, is a pocket-sized

Expecting her vision to continue to decline, Areli is becoming more proactive. “I plan to begin learning braille soon. And my sister helped me fill out a Life Enhancement Award Application (see back page). Of course, I’ll always have eye problems. But now, I feel like I have a place to go where I can learn the techniques to do things for myself,” she said.

MESSAGE FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT

Happy New Year! It feels late to say that, but this is our first newsletter of 2019. However, VisionCorps' fiscal year, which began October 1, is almost halfway through! Thank you for your support throughout 2018 and for your end of year donations to support the services you are reading about in this issue of InSights.

VisionCorps is always seeking new opportunities to provide the community to support services for your friends and neighbors who are blind or vision impaired. When I visited and spoke with Areli, she enthusiastically offered her ideas for garnering more support for the services from which she benefits, and ways to share what we do with more people who need our services. Our best advocates are our clients and supporters – so if you know someone who is experiencing vision loss, please do not hesitate to provide them with our phone number, or offer them a ride to stop in and see us! The majority of our clients are not totally blind – in fact, less than 10% of people who are legally blind are totally blind – so if you know someone who feels we cannot help them because they have remaining vision, please be their advocate and let them know we are available to talk.

Included with your newsletter this month are some restaurant fundraisers we have going on in our service area. We invite you to “dine and donate” at any of these events, and invite lots of friends to join you! You can also watch our social media pages for reminders and electronic versions of the vouchers. These fundraisers are very beneficial to VisionCorps because limited resources are used to host them, yet VisionCorps benefits financially and in turn the community benefits from our services. If you're getting cabin fever, please plan to attend and enjoy lunch or dinner (or both!) while supporting VisionCorps!

Thank you again for your wonderful support and dedication to your community residents living with vision loss. Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions, concerns or comments you have.

Sincerely,



Megan Sofilka Tomscheck
Vice President and Chief Development Officer



MEMORIAL AND HONORARY GIFTS

We thank those who gave in honor of:

Burt Kirkman
Chase Musser
Chloe Brown
David Silbert M.D.
Fred Budesheim
Jennifer Eaton
Judi Reading
Melissa Riehl
Stacie Doan
Tate Messinger
Teresa Youndt

The Frances X. Schaller Jr.
Family

Charles Silar

We thank those who gave in memory of:

Ann Davis Knapp
Anna Dinkelberg
Anne Johnson
Barrett C. Caldwell
Betty Lee Eberhart
Charles Pilley Sr.
Clifford L. Behrendt
Creeda Pickell

Curtis Sechrist
Doris L. Frey
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Edward A. Ziegler
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Florence Feister
Georgette M. Rhinier
Harold, Elizabeth and
Mick Sinclair
Helen Anderson
Jason Douglass Searle
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Robert E. Fasnacht
Ruth T. Kirkman
Shirley A. Detzel
Stefania Noll
Zach Wells

These gifts were recognized during the period of June 1, 2018 through February 20, 2019. We sincerely apologize if we failed to recognize a gift. If your gift has been omitted, please call 717-393-5894 so that we may correct our records.

MARIBEL SURITA WASN'T GOING TO BE DENIED.

VisionCorps' Administrative Assistant for Business Development and Marketing wasn't going to be denied her current position in VisionCorps' Lancaster offices. Nor was she going to be denied an opportunity to succeed in VisionCorps' Upward Mobility program, which offered her a chance to chase down her dream and a better life for her and her loved ones.

"There were a lot of times I would get frustrated and feel like I wasn't going to make it," she recalled. "But I said, 'No! I have to make it. I have to reach my goal for a better life.'"

Maribel is the first person to graduate from VisionCorps' Upward Mobility program, initially presented to employees three years ago. Upward Mobility isn't offered annually, VisionCorps' Director of Human Resources Beth Tice noted, but only when a position is open.

"We want to provide opportunities for advancement to employees who may not otherwise have the chance," said Erica Evans, VisionCorps' Recruiting and Development Clerk. "Upward Mobility is a 12-month program that requires hard work and dedication and encourages the individual to strive for more."

The program is offered to blind or vision impaired employees who have been with VisionCorps for at least one year.

Maribel, like her brother Jose, has Albinism, a congenital condition characterized by a lack of pigment in skin, hair and eyes. Often with albinism, the eye does not produce enough melatonin during development, which causes parts of the eye to evolve abnormally, affecting vision.

At the time Upward Mobility was offered, Maribel was working as a production employee in the Enterprise Group in Lancaster. She enjoyed her job and the people she worked with, but when the Upward Mobility program was offered, Maribel signed on.

"I was nervous about it," she said, knowing that of the several employees who applied, only one would be chosen. Still, the Puerto Rico native and product of Passaic, N.J. was thankful for an opportunity not presented by her previous employer.

Prior to coming to VisionCorps, Maribel had worked for Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind (now IFB Solutions), sewing troop uniforms for the government. She worked there for five years, but said the company didn't provide employees opportunities to move up.

At the suggestion of her friend and VisionCorps employee, Hiram Medina, Maribel moved to Lancaster. She was hired by VisionCorps and was eventually given the career opportunity she dreamed of. She applied for Upward Mobility, but told Hiram she likely wouldn't be chosen by VisionCorps' internal panel because there were those whose knowledge of computers was greater than hers.

When Esmeralda Sanchez, VisionCorps' Director of Human Resources at that time, told Maribel she was the panel's "chosen one," Maribel could barely believe it.

"I screamed and tears came down," she recalled. "I was so excited."

Esmeralda warned Maribel it was going to be a "hard year," but Maribel had a ready reply.

"I'm up for it."

What followed was a time-intensive, year-long schedule of courses and lessons that only began when her 7 a.m.-3 p.m. workday in EG ended. She was in training daily from 3 p.m. to 4-4:30 p.m., and



Maribel learns new features of the iPad to assist in her daily living.

spent evenings studying as well. She enrolled in the Hadley Institute for the Blind and also studied National Industries for the Blind Business Basics and Integrated Behavioral Health.

"The training was all on my own time," she said. "But I always said that if I wanted this position and wanted to do better for myself and my family, I would have to put everything I have into it."

VisionCorps provided the tools and support, and she received additional support from family and friends.

"When you really want to reach something," Maribel said, "you have to put all your effort into it and don't let anybody tell you that you can't do it."

Legendary golfer Arnold Palmer said once that the "most rewarding things you do in life are often the ones that look like they cannot be done."

Maribel agrees. The Upward Mobility program is difficult, she said, but she recommends it to anyone who has a strong desire to reach a goal.

"You go through a tunnel but at the end of the year you see the light and you realize the hard work is worth it," she said.

"I'm glad I was the first person in the (Upward Mobility) program. It's made a big difference in my life."

WHY I GIVE – DR. ALBERT ALLEY

“I’m a newcomer to the vision business, I’ve only been an ophthalmologist for 47 years,” Lebanon ophthalmologist Albert Alley joked. Helping people with vision issues has been a life-long passion, and has taken him all around the world.

In 1965, as Alley was finishing his medical internship, doctors were being drafted to serve in Vietnam. “I enlisted in the Air Force as a flight surgeon,” he said. When the call came for volunteers to assist civilian ophthalmologists at the base where he was stationed, Alley found his life’s calling.

Dr. Alley established a private practice in Lebanon in 1970, and it’s brought him much satisfaction over the years. “The success rate for vision corrective procedures and treatment is good. You



Dr. Alley performs surgery during a mission trip.

know you’ve done something beneficial for your patients by their reaction!”

But there are gaps in what an ophthalmologist can do to support the needs of someone with vision loss. VisionCorps helps to fill those gaps. Dr. Alley knows the benefits of VisionCorps’ rehabilitation services, especially for his patients with macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, and other chronic eye diseases. “They function better in their daily lives. They are more independent, and have a better attitude about their condition,” he said.

VisionCorps’ employment program is making a marked change in the lives of two of his young adult patients. “It adds so much to their lives! They feel they have some purpose and direction,” Dr. Alley says. “They are productive – going to work and earning a wage. And they are able to socialize with others who are successfully dealing with their visual disability, and are contented and fulfilled.”

Serving on the VisionCorps Board of Directors increased Dr. Alley’s support and respect for the organization. His generosity helped VisionCorps build a new facility in Lebanon called The Alley Center for the Blind. “I didn’t want people in my community to have to travel to access these world-class services,” he said.

Dr. Alley’s desire to help people with vision loss has no borders. On a trip to the Philippines, he was dismayed to witness cases of preventable blindness. “People were going blind from cataracts,” he said. “This is a treatable disease – a 30-minute operation!” In 1990, he



Dr. Albert Alley, long-time supporter of VisionCorps.

co-founded World Blindness Outreach (WBO). “We focus on cataract, corneal transplants, and correcting crossed-eyes in children,” he said. “We’ve launched close to 100 missions in 26 countries, and have operated on more than 10,000 people with different degrees of blindness.” Grateful patients have created monuments and murals in his honor. (WGAL-TV showcased his 25th vision mission to the Dominican Republic that took place in January of this year in a one-hour TV special on March 6.)

Locally, VisionCorps is the guiding influence in the selection of eligible recipients for WBO’s Life Enhancement Awards. “These awards go to people with visual disabilities who could benefit from a gift of a high-tech instrument, training program, or financial assistance with transportation,” Dr. Alley said. “I feel blessed to be involved with VisionCorps. I speak from the heart, because I’ve seen first-hand the difference it has made in the lives of my patients.”

insights

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