

# NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND OF MINNESOTA, INC.

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## ANNUAL REPORT

January 1, 2014 – December 31, 2014



**WE ARE CHANGING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE BLIND**



**NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND  
OF MINNESOTA, INC.**

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### **I. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

No one understands blindness as well as those who live with it daily. To apply this knowledge to solving the problems of blindness, blind people formed the National Federation of the Blind of Minnesota (NFBM).

The National Federation of the Blind of Minnesota is the state's largest and oldest organization of the blind. It provides self-help programs for blind people of all ages and activities.

As blind people, we know the loss of eyesight is not the major problem of blindness. The real problem is the misunderstandings that surround blindness. This leads to well-meaning, yet harmful, actions by the sighted toward the blind. Such actions result in low self-esteem among blind people.

The NFBM overcomes this problem through education of the sighted to the reality of blindness and through mutual help among blind people. Such activities make blind people fully-participating members of society. They earn their living, raise families, and take full responsibility for their own lives.

The NFBM began in 1920 as the Minnesota State Organization of the Blind. It is a membership organization open to everyone who believes in the capability of blind people to help themselves become full participants in the community.

In 1940, Minnesota and six other states founded the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). Today, the NFB numbers over 50,000 blind people. It has organizations in every state, and local chapters in almost every sizable community.

During these many years, we have made strong progress toward equality. We have improved employment opportunities and education for blind persons in the state of Minnesota and in the nation.

Most of our members are blind, and their knowledge of blindness comes from their personal lives. Other organizations get their information on blindness through the reading of textbooks or other secondhand techniques.

### **II. THE REAL PROBLEM OF BLINDNESS**

Misconceptions and stereotypes concerning blindness have permeated common thought since the beginning of time. All too familiar are opinions such as:

- blind people are *helpless*,

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- blind people are *beggars* with tin cups,
- blind people have a special *sixth sense* to make up for their "tragic loss,"
- blind people can only survive through the *charity* of others.

Public opinion surveys reveal that blindness is the second most dreaded condition of human existence. Only cancer causes more anxiety.

This combination of fear, misconceptions, and stereotypes leads to the isolation of blind people from the mainstream of society. Since they are perceived as different, they are not accorded the same treatment as others. This results in situations such as:

- children taken from their blind parents because a social worker believes blind people cannot care for them,
- blind students denied entry to a field of study because a professor believes a blind person cannot possibly succeed,
- blind people denied insurance because an underwriter believes the blind are higher risks,
- blind passengers told by airline personnel that they must be the last to evacuate the plane in an emergency so they will not "get in the way" because a cabin attendant believes blind people are immobile,
- blind job seekers rejected because a personnel officer worries more about how the blind person will find the bathroom than whether he or she has the skills to do the job.

Those who take such actions regard themselves as well intentioned, even helpful. Yet, they seriously damage the blind person, and saying, "but I mean well," does not help.

Most people believe that without eyesight a person cannot function in such normal activities as reading and moving about.

However, the loss of eyesight is *not* the real problem of blindness. Fear, misunderstandings, and stereotypes as reflected above are the *real* problems facing blind people.

If a blind person has proper training, opportunity, and self-acceptance, blindness need be only a physical inconvenience. Without these, blindness can indeed be the tragedy most people believe it is. The key is within the blind person, and how that person faces physical and attitudinal challenges.

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### III. GOALS/PROGRAMS: THE BLIND HELPING THEMSELVES

A person can gain some understanding of blindness by reading about it and talking to persons who are blind. However, no secondhand study can match the knowledge gained by living with blindness day-in and day-out. This firsthand experience makes people who are blind most qualified to deal with other blind people in overcoming problems they meet.

The newly blinded person faces a difficult adjustment. The most effective help is meeting other blind people to learn of their jobs and the techniques they use without sight. Membership in the National Federation of the Blind provides this common meeting ground. Even more, it provides a renewal of participation and restoration of confidence.

NFBM is here to help every one of Minnesota's 10,000 blind people receive the same training, education, and opportunity as our sighted citizens. If a blind person has a problem with the workplace, the school, the family, or the government, *we are always here to help them* to bring about the necessary solution.

We do not duplicate programs and activities already provided by government or private charities for the blind. We *fill the gaps* in these programs with positive attitudes and self-confidence.

During the past year, we concentrated on the following areas:

EDUCATION – increasing public understanding of blindness and the capabilities of blind people to reduce misconceptions and stereotypes:

- NFBM presented talks, films, and seminars to local and statewide organizations. We spoke to many school students, civic clubs, churches, and community organizations. Communicating with both sighted and blind people is a key function of our organization.
- NFBM served as an information center for blind persons of all ages, their families, people losing their sight, and the public at large. Over 600 phone calls came into our office requesting information or help.
- NFBM published and distributed *free-of-charge* newsletters containing information on blindness, work done by blind persons, and current issues facing the blind:
  1. The *Minnesota Bulletin*, published quarterly, contains information of direct interest to the blind. NFBM members and public and private agencies serving the blind receive it free-of-charge in their choice of Braille, print, and recorded editions. It is the *only* Braille publication in the state containing Minnesota current events.
  2. The *Braille Monitor*, published monthly by the NFB national office, contains national news and information on issues facing the blind. NFBM members receive Braille, print,

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and recorded editions. National and local governmental and community leaders also receive this publication.

3. *Future Reflections*, published quarterly by the NFB national office, contains news and information on issues facing the parents of blind children. It helps parents deal with the special problems they face in getting their blind children through today's educational systems.
- NFBM distributed resource materials produced by the NFB national office for use by anyone interested in learning more about blindness and problems faced by the blind, including various resource guides and literature on various subjects relating to blindness:
    - Braille
    - Children and Youth
    - Daily Living
    - Diabetes
    - Discrimination
    - Education
    - Employment
    - Government
    - History
    - Low Vision
    - Parents
    - Public Relations
    - Recreation
    - Rehabilitation/Training
    - Seniors
    - Social Security
    - Technology
  - Material dealing with public attitudes toward blindness aimed at dispelling misunderstanding and stereotypes. This includes items such as *Blindness: Handicap or Characteristic*, *The Myth and the Image*, *Concepts and Misconceptions*, *New Insights on Old Outlooks*, and *The New Generation*.
  - NFBM furnished management and technical aid to Blindness: Learning in New Dimensions (BLIND). BLIND is a training center created by a group of blind people. It provides comprehensive training in Braille, white cane, home management, and community living. This is the only center providing such a thorough program in Minnesota.

**ADVOCACY** – working to be sure that blind Minnesotans receive the services they need to lead active, fulfilling lives:

- NFBM secured more instruction in Braille, white cane usage, dog guide usage, and other "alternative techniques." As part of this effort, our members served on several task forces,

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committees, and councils for State Services for the Blind (a division of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development) including:

1. a task force to examine technology needs of blind people in areas such as computers and word-processing,
  2. an advisory council to oversee operating the agency and make recommendations to the Commissioner of Employment and Economic Development,
  3. an "independent living" committee to develop programs for blind people of all ages to be sure they receive training that will enable them to live in the community.
- NFBM acted to be sure blind people have access to vital services such as telephone directory assistance, public transportation, the voting booth, airline travel, etc.

**SELF-AWARENESS** – overcoming the notion that blindness means inferiority, incompetence, and helplessness:

- NFBM was a continuing forum for discussion of the day-to-day problems often faced by blind people and a source of practical solutions to those problems.
- NFBM supported opportunities for blind persons to develop confidence in the use of the alternative techniques of blindness (for example use of white cane and Braille.)
- NFBM provided role models that are a living demonstration to other blind people that they too can compete on terms of equality.
- NFBM helped blind people deal with the crushing feelings of shame and inferiority many feel due to public attitudes toward blindness.

**MUTUAL-HELP** – exchanging knowledge gained from firsthand experience with blindness:

- NFBM served as a counseling and referral center for blind Minnesotans seeking rehabilitation and employment.
- NFBM presented seminars for blind students and for parents of blind children.
- NFBM helped blind college students to continue their education through a state scholarship and the NFB national scholarship program.
- NFBM made available aids for blind people such as white canes, talking clocks and calculators, watches, Braille slates, styluses and paper.

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At NFBM, we help the blind by working for long-range changes that guarantee blind persons will have an equal opportunity in our society. Blind and sighted people work together in NFBM because we want to help each other have better lives. We believe the blind can take a normal part in society. We are getting proper training for the blind and changing outmoded laws, regulations, and stereotypes.

We are making progress. We must continue to inform service providers, the blind, and the public about issues affecting the blind. We must keep the NFB active as a source of help and support for the blind, their families, and their employers.

Through the positive philosophy of the National Federation of the Blind, we have reached a new level of awareness that helps us to deal constructively with blindness. We are now able to say, not only to ourselves but also to the public, that we are persons with a full range of human qualities, strengths, and weaknesses. We are persons of all descriptions who just happen to be blind. Blind people do have choices, and we can decide how we will live. The fight for equality is a struggle that we will win. We welcome all who share our goals to join us in our attempt to help ourselves.

### **IV. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT**

The membership of NFBM sets its programs and policies. Membership is open to blind or sighted persons interested in our mission. To be sure that these programs and policies reflect a true understanding of blindness, the majority of the members must be blind.

The members vote on decisions at open meetings. These meetings occur at regular intervals: monthly in local chapters, semiannually at a state convention, and annually at a national convention.

Members elect officers and directors at all three levels. In each case, again to assure a true understanding of blindness, the president must be blind.

Thus, our programs are constantly undergoing review by the people being served. They have the most knowledge of the need for and effectiveness of those programs.

### **V. FUNDING**

The National Federation of the Blind of Minnesota is a tax-exempt charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Federal Internal Revenue Code. Contributions to it are tax-deductible.

We receive no funding from government agencies or the United Way. The contributions of individuals, corporate donations, foundation grants, and fund raising by members finance all of our programs. Our income is from the following sources:

- Individuals 77%

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- Grants 19%
- Investments 4%

The Minnesota Attorney General and Minnesota Charities Review Council recommend that at least 70% of contributions go to programs. NFBM does much better than that. Contributions to the NFBM are spent as follows:

- Programs 96%
- Management 3%
- Fundraising 1%

No contributions go to professional fundraisers. Our fund raising expense is so low because we do it ourselves, as volunteers. In fact, most of our fund raising expense (86%) is for printing and postage.

**All funders can be confident that their continued support will directly help blind people, not fund raisers or highly paid executives.**

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**VI. STATEMENT OF SUPPORT, REVENUE, AND EXPENSES  
AND CHANGES IN FUND BALANCES**

Fiscal Year ended December 31, 2014

|  |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
| Income   |                         |
| Public Support   |                         |
| Contributions  | \$23,290                |
| Corporation and Foundation Support                           | 6,230                   |
| Bequests   | <u>6,112</u>            |
| Total Support  | 35,632                  |
| <br>   |                         |
| Revenue  |                         |
| Dues   | 1,190                   |
| Interest and Dividends                                       | 4,933                   |
| Sales and Service  | <u>1,007</u>            |
| Total Revenue  | <u>7,130</u>            |
| <br>   |                         |
| Total Income   | 42,762                  |
| <br>   |                         |
| Expense  |                         |
| Program Services   | 67,446                  |
| Supporting Services  |                         |
| Management and General                                       | 4,928                   |
| Fundraising  | <u>150</u>              |
| Total Supporting Services                                    | <u>5,078</u>            |
| <br>   |                         |
| Total Expenses   | 72,524                  |
| <br>   |                         |
| Change in Unrestricted Net Assets Before Extraordinary Items | (29,762)                |
| Unrealized Gain (Loss) on Investments                        | <u>71,295</u>           |
| <br>   |                         |
| Change in Unrestricted Net Assets                            | 41,533                  |
| <br>   |                         |
| Net Assets, Beginning of Year                                | <u>506,685</u>          |
| Net Assets, End of Year                                      | <u><u>\$548,218</u></u> |

(Upon request, we will supply a complete set of financial statements of our activities.)

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### VII. BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The membership elects the officers and directors for two-year terms at a statewide convention. All officers and directors are blind. The board meets at least quarterly.

#### OFFICERS

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| President -      | JENNIFER DUNNAM, Minneapolis<br>Manager of Braille Programs<br>National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute |
| Vice-President - | STEVE JACOBSON, Edina<br>Lead Computer Analyst<br>3M Company   |
| Secretary -      | JUDY SANDERS, Minneapolis<br>Braille Proofreader<br>Minnesota State Services for the Blind                         |
| Treasurer -      | THOMAS SCANLAN, Minneapolis<br>Information Systems Manager<br>Retired  |

#### DIRECTORS

PAT BARRETT, Minneapolis  
Seeking employment

ROB HOBSON, Minneapolis  
White Cane Travel Instructor  
Blindness: Learning in New Dimensions, Inc.

SHEILA KOENIG, Minneapolis  
Language Arts Instructor  
Edina Public Schools

BRYCE SAMUELSON, Hayfield  
Freelance Web Designer/Developer and Owner  
Samuelson Contracted Services LLC

BEV STAVRUM, Clearwater  
Stay-at-home foster parent

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### **VIII. CHAPTERS**

Chapters meet monthly to discuss matters relating to blindness, converse with local officials, and plan activities to improve public understanding of blindness. All chapter presidents, except the Parents of Blind Children, must be blind.

Metro (Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area)

Rochester (Rochester and Southeast Minnesota area)

Central Minnesota (St. Cloud and central Minnesota area)

Riverbend (Mankato and Southwest Minnesota area)

Twin Ports (Duluth and Northeast Minnesota area)

Minnesota Association of Blind Students (statewide)

Minnesota Parents of Blind Children (statewide)

Seniors Division (statewide)