



Vision Loss Alliance

of New Jersey

Formerly NJ Foundation for the Blind

Fall 2016

New Program Director Strengthens Programs, Outreach

Low vision specialist Elsa Zavoda became program director of Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey in the spring, and already she has begun strengthening offerings and expanding outreach for adults who lose their sight.

Zavoda, an occupational therapist for nearly 20 years, has focused her career on helping adults adapt to vision loss so they can remain independent. She launched three successful low vision programs, and is the only occupational therapist in New Jersey to have earned a specialty certification in low vision from the American Occupational Therapy Association.

“Elsa brings to the table a depth of experience that meshes with our expertise and vision,” Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey Executive Director Kris Marino said.

“My goal is to increase awareness of Vision Loss Alliance’s outstanding programs,” Zavoda said.

She is expanding the Better Health & Wellness offerings in Denville, increasing awareness and visibility in Montclair, Ridgewood and Sparta, where the nonprofit runs select programs, and researching future locations for Vision Loss Alliance programming.



Elsa Zavoda, MS OTR/L, SCLV, CLVT

The Morristown native earned a graduate certificate in low vision rehabilitation from the University of Alabama in 2007. The rigorous specialty certification in low vision that she earned from the American Occupational Therapy Association in 2010 required 600 patient contact hours. Zavoda has facilitated a low vision support group in Somerset County for six years.

“I’m very impressed by Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey, the skill level and compassion of its instructors and the motivation and engagement of the participants,” said Zavoda, who lives in Bridgewater with her husband, Douglas, and their two sons.

Fall Showcase

October 15th

12:00 - 3:30p.m.

Open to the Community

Ever wonder how a person can cook a meal or paint a beautiful scene without sight? Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey is hosting a Fall Showcase Day to give the community a close-up look at programs and technologies that are empowering adults with vision loss.

Experience what it’s like to pour water from a pitcher without sight in a demonstration of our adaptive cooking class. Bang on a drum. Check out the amazing iPhone and iPad apps that can tell you the color of your outfit, and the contents of jars and cans of food. Other hands-on demonstrations include art and pottery, horticulture therapy and line dancing.

The Lions Club will conduct free vision screenings in its Eye Mobile.

The New Jersey State Library’s Talking Book & Braille Center, which delivers free reading materials in accessible formats to individuals with vision loss, will be at the event, along with Vis-Abilities Inc. and Eye Assist, LLC, vendors that offer adaptive products.

The event, which marks **Blindness Awareness Month** in New Jersey, will be held at Vision Loss Alliances’ Denville location, 155 Morris Ave.

Visit vlanj.org for more information!

Dear Friend,

It's been nine months since this wonderful organization adopted a name that better reflects our collective efforts to support adults with profound vision loss. We are working hard to spread the word about Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey so that the organization comes quickly to mind when vision loss strikes. People feel scared, anguished and often hopeless at that point, but we have a long history of restoring hope and confidence.

To strengthen our programs and expand outreach, we hired Elsa Zavoda, MS, OTR/L, SCLV, CLVT, as program director. Elsa has nearly 20 years' experience helping adults adapt to vision loss so they can remain independent.

One of our objectives is to get programs into communities so participants don't have to travel far to get the support they need. We now offer our cutting-edge technology program at the Montclair Public Library. The 13-week iPhone/iPad training teaches participants how to use accessibility features and specialized apps.

If you attended our Just Jazz4 benefit concert in May, you met Jackie Millard, who wowed the crowd with the story of how she learned to live with profound vision loss. Jackie credits Vision Loss Alliance with helping to restore her confidence, and she's now a volunteer here, helping others learn to put technology to work for them.

I would love to hear what you think about our new name and the direction we're going. Please call me or drop me a note. And please, help spread the word by telling friends and acquaintances about us. Remember the 1980s commercial for Faberge Organics shampoo? Tell two friends about Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey, and they'll tell two friends, and so on, and so, and so on... Thanks!

Sincerely,

Kris Marino



Executive Director
kmarino@vlanj.org
(973) 627-0055, ext. 333



Kris Marino
Executive Director

Thanks!

'Inquiring Minds' Will Want to Check Out This New 13-Week Class

Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey's new class, Inquiring Minds, will help participants explore solutions to the array of challenges facing adults with profound vision loss.

"Inquiring minds is designed for the curious individual, nourishing the mind and body," said Vision Loss Alliance Program Director Elsa Zavoda.

The 13 sessions are taught by experts in their field and cover

topics such as techniques for calming the mind, managing diabetes, and the healing power of Reiki. The course will also explore low vision optical aides and devices, and rehabilitation techniques to assist with everyday activities.

The class, offered at Vision Loss Alliance's Denville location, started Sept. 8 and runs weekly on Thursdays through Dec. 8. Register now, as the course is expected to fill up quickly.

For information about registration or other programs offered at Vision Loss Alliance, visit vlanj.org or call (973) 627-0055, ext. 312. ●



Resilience

In Her Own Words: One Woman's Story of Resilience

Meet Jackie Millard, a volunteer and participant at Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey. Jackie developed vision problems as a child, but lost her sight as an adult in 2004. The Long Valley resident and married mother of two teenage boys shares how she came to terms with vision loss and learned to use the latest adaptive technology.

I was always very organized, a big planner, preparing for every possibility...but nothing can prepare you for losing your vision.

After the final surgery to save my sight, the doctor removed the bandages and asked if I could see. I wasn't sure if my lids were open. My heart sank.

I could not see the faces of my family, I couldn't watch the boys play sports. No more photography or sight-seeing. No more enjoyment of the beauty of my home, my woods, my lovely town. For a while I suffered from pretty severe anxiety and depression. I had to work through the grieving process.

When I felt like I could get back on my feet, I went to what was then called NJ Foundation for the Blind and learned software called Jaws that allowed me to use my computer just as I had before my vision loss: email, the Internet, Microsoft Word and Excel.

While computer skills are great, what really was important is that

I had renewed my confidence, and I began to rebuild my life!

I went back to school, started volunteering in the community, took a leading role in my church, and became a yoga instructor.

Two years ago, when I heard about Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey's technology programs for the iPad and iPhone, I was really excited — and really nervous.

I have learned so much. I use the voice memo app to record my church choir practices so I can rehearse at home. I read all the time, and must have 20 books stored on my iPhone right now. I use the money reader to organize my cash. I use the CamFind app or TapTapSee to identify the color of my clothes. I have apps to read my email AND snail mail. Often, participants find and share useful tools they discover.

The peer support group at Vision Loss Alliance has also been a tremendous help to me.

It's a comfort to be around people who understand the daily challenges of living without sight, sharing advice and venting frustrations.

I can't say enough about Vision Loss Alliance of New Jersey. It helped restore my confidence and independence, as it has for so many others.



Jackie Millard and her husband, Jim.

*This story was adapted from the speech Jackie Millard gave at Vision Loss Alliance's Just Jazz4 benefit concert in May.



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

Just Jazz4 was held on May 20, 2016 at the Morris Museum in Morristown, and was a tremendous success! Guests enjoyed wine and hors d'oeuvres while they listened to the smooth sounds the Justin Kauflin trio.

Thank you to our sponsors!

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Visit vlanj.com to see photos of the event.



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