

# Blind advocacy group's history is one of change

by [Access Press Staff](#) // October 10th, 2014

Vision Loss Resources is marking 100 years' service in 2014. The agency is an independent, nonprofit organization. It serves the Twin Cities area counties of Anoka, Carver, Chisago, Dakota, Hennepin, Isanti, Ramsey, Scott, Washington and Wright. Assistance is available at low or no cost to people living in the service area, with services provided by dedicated professionals or trained volunteers.

Vision Loss Resources offers a community services program that includes individual in-home assessments, life skills classes, support groups and peer counseling. The agency also provides training, education and consultation to other agencies, organizations, corporations and businesses on a variety of rehabilitation program and assistance through DeafBlind Services Minnesota are also offered.

The 1993 merger of the Minneapolis Society for the Blind and St. Paul Society for the Blind created Vision Loss Resources. The Minneapolis Society for the Blind was incorporated in March 1914, which is used as the centennial date. An initial focus for both societies was job creation and the opening of sheltered workshops including the manufacture of straw brooms.

Both societies worked and sometimes clashed with other advocacy groups. Disagreements over sheltered workshops, worker compensation and organizational governance dated back to the 1940s. In the 1970s people with blindness and low vision were swept up in a high-profile nationwide advocacy movement, led in part by then-National Federation of the Blind President Kenneth Jernigan. "What we after is a new concept of blindness," Jernigan said in a 1973 *Star Tribune* article. "We are not prepared to be just good blind people."

The article pointed out that the infighting surprised many outsiders. "The general public might think all of this is not like the blind," the article stated. "And to at least some blind people, that's part of the problem. A growing movement among the blind in Minnesota and the nation is aimed at changing what they consider to be a public attitude that the blind are helpless. They want more of a voice in the agencies that serve them."

The "activist-blind movement" included demonstrations, lobbying and at times, sharp disagreements with agencies designed to provide assistance to blind and persons with low vision. The federation and the Minneapolis society had lengthy legal disputes over board membership and representation. Those disputes continued into the 1980s.

Today, while groups may still disagree on some issues, all share the important goal of improving the lives of people with blindness and vision loss.

As part of its centennial celebration Vision Loss Resources' clients, students, alumni, family and friends contributed original stories, essays and poems to a book, *The Way We See It: A Fresh Look at VisionLoss*. The anthology describes struggles and triumphs of people living with vision loss or blindness. The writers' ability to come to terms with vision loss and dealing with

adversity is celebrated while they all acknowledge their continued challenges, in humorous, frightening, heartwarming and challenging accounts.

To learn more about Vision Loss Resources or to purchase the book, go to their [website](#).

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*Access Press is interested in reader submissions for the monthly History Note column, to complement the articles written by Luther Granquist and other contributors. Submissions must center on events, people and places in the history of Minnesota's disability community. We are interested in history that focuses on all types of disability topics, so long as the history has a tie to Minnesota. We are especially interested in stories from Greater Minnesota. Please submit ideas prior to submitting full stories, as we may have covered the topic before. Contact us at [access@accesspress.org](mailto:access@accesspress.org) or 651-644-2133 if you have questions. The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities.*