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Technology services will help people with loss of vision

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New funding is allowing the Lighthouse Center for Vital Living (formerly the Lighthouse Center for Vision Loss) to significantly expand its technology services across the Northland. The Lighthouse offers device loans, device demonstrations, technology training, and technical support. The goal – helping people challenged by vision loss, aging or disability, harness the power of technology to live safer, more connected lives.

Executive Director Mary Junnila explains, “Technology has tremendous untapped potential to improve people’s lives. But not everyone is comfortable with technology or knows what’s possible. Thanks to new funding, we can now help many more people try technology and, hopefully, reach one of those ‘I can do this’ moments.”

“Lighthouse professionals are experts in *assistive technology*, which is technology that helps older adults or people with disabilities live more fully and independently.

Examples range from Smart Home technologies, to health monitoring or fall detection devices, to specialized computer software or augmentative communication devices, to using Alexa for daily reminders, accessing music or audio books. We respond to what each individual wants and needs.”

In October, the State named the Lighthouse a Minnesota STAR partner. STAR stands for A System of

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Additional funding in 2020 includes grants from the Northland Foundation and the Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging. Last June, the Lighthouse received a \$25,000 grant from the Northland Foundation for its *Tech to Connect* program – a program helping older adults use technology during COVID19 to connect with family and friends. The Lighthouse asks community members to consider donating used computers, smart phones or tablets for this program. The Lighthouse has also received more than \$50,000 this year through the Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging for technology services through Older Americans Act Title III and CARES Act funding.

In addition, the Lighthouse can now bill most medical insurance plans or Medicaid waivers for technology training.

The Lighthouse has expanded its mission to serve people with disabilities and aging along with those who have vision loss and, as a result, recently changed its name to Lighthouse Center for Vital Living.

The Lighthouse *Technology and Me* program for adults 55+ is a finalist for the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation's Touchstone Award, which honors community programs that embody the values of inclusiveness and civic engagement. Winners will be awarded in the categories of Generosity, Inclusiveness and Civic Engagement. The Generosity award winner is an individual or family nominated by the community for donating time, talents or funds to support nonprofit work. Civic Engagement and Inclusiveness winners are nonprofit organizations whose projects the Community Foundation has recently funded. Award winners will be announced 6:30 p.m., November 17, 2020, on WDIO television.

The Lighthouse *Technology and Me* program has also been supported by the Lloyd K Johnson Foundation and a Minnesota Department of Human Services Live Well grant.

Director Mary Junnila said, "We are grateful for these diverse funding sources, allowing us to expand and sustain our technology programing. As a result, each year we are now helping hundreds of older adults and people with disabilities realize the benefits of technology."

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