

Services now available to all older adults and to individuals with any disability.

Dear Friends,

Like many nonprofits, we are asking ourselves right now — what is our most important role in the current crisis? ... In our case, we believe the answer relates to technology.

Lighthouse professionals are experts in technology. We provide training and technology to promote safety, independence and quality of life for older adults and people with disabilities. We offer device loans, remote training, and technical support — often free of charge. Our **Tech to Connect Campaign** is distributing technology devices to older adults and people with disabilities — so they can be safer and more connected during this crisis. **We offer tech training and ongoing support along with any device.**



Photo above by Jamie Rabold, professional photographer and Lighthouse staff member.

While many of us work from home — thankful for the technology that allows us to do our jobs and connect with family and friends — consider that this technology is often not available to individuals who are especially isolated or vulnerable. Our Tech to Connect Campaign is designed to bridge that gap.

For more than 100 years, the Lighthouse mission has been to empower individuals who are blind or visually impaired. We remain 100% committed to this mission, but we now serve individuals of all ages— all disabilities. Our new mission: “Fostering vibrant lives for individuals with vision loss and other challenges to independence.”

Lighthouses have been helping humans navigate their way safely home for more than 2,000 years. We are a different kind of “Lighthouse,” but it is our goal, too, to provide vital help, light and hope to people in our community through the current storm — the COVID-19 pandemic.

Peace,
Mary Junnila, Executive Director

Please help by donating any used tablets, computers or smartphones (no more than five years old), so we can refurbish them and re-deploy them to help individuals isolated and vulnerable during the COVID-19 crisis. Contact Mary at 218-624-4828 ext. 1004, or mjunnila@LCFVL.org.

A Story of Hope ... and a Prayer

Bob is a 71-year old man who is Deaf and lives in an assisted living setting. Sign language is his first and preferred language, but staff in his facility do not sign. His family members sign, and visit often.

Social distancing requirements around COVID-19 left Bob almost totally isolated and unable to communicate — his family unable to visit or talk to him, and staff with only limited means to communicate such as gestures or pointing.

Bob's family contacted the Lighthouse for help getting any kind of device that would allow Bob to communicate with family again. A Lighthouse occupational therapist (OT) accessed funding to get Bob an iPad, with family contributing what they could. The Lighthouse OT set the iPad up for FaceTime and loaded an app for sign language interpretation. She also added family contacts and photos.

Sadly, the social distancing that isolated Bob so harshly did not protect him from contracting COVID-19. He is now hospitalized and bravely fighting the disease. Bob brought the iPad with him to the hospital, but at first was not allowed to use it due to hospital security rules. With this development, our occupational therapist offered help in a different way. Over the phone, she helped family members install Google Duo — which allows them to video chat (and sign) with Bob, using a tablet provided by the hospital. Subsequently, the hospital has also agreed to let Bob use his own new iPad.

Most recently, we hear Bob is doing better! Our thoughts and prayers are with Bob and everyone now fighting COVID-19. We are grateful that technology is allowing him to communicate with loved ones and staff during this time.



Pictured above is Bob's iPad with the sign language app that translates spoken or written words into signs.

150+
Number of clients
Lighthouse served in just the first two weeks
after Governor Walz
announced stay-at-home order

A Camp for Blind and Visually Impaired Teens — Delivered Remotely

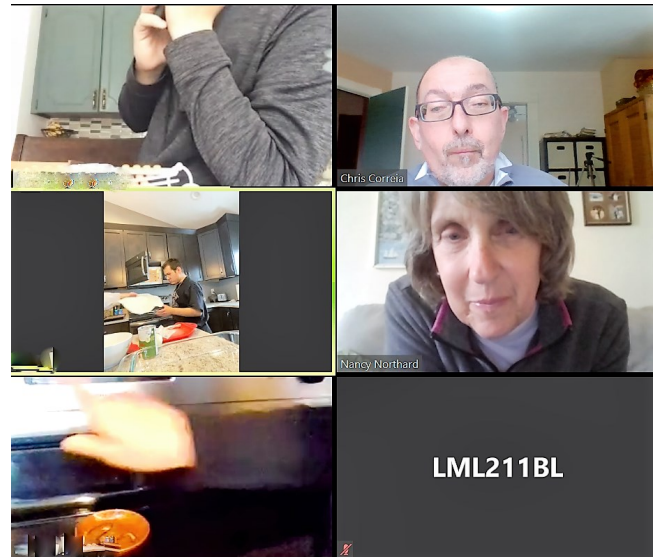
“The cooking was the best part of this camp”

— Riley, 15, camp participant

Our Teen Transition Program conducted its fourth weekend camp of the school year on April 3-5. Unlike prior camps, however, this camp was entirely online via Zoom. It was a great success!

Camp included sessions on self-advocacy, cooking, technology and mobility. There was even a Saturday night movie with popcorn!

Students cooked a chicken dish for Friday dinner and pancakes on Sunday morning. Technology class taught skills to write and publish for a blog. Other sessions focused on guide dogs, how to use Lyft and Uber, and a virtual tour of national parks.



The photo above shows images of three students in their home kitchens preparing their Friday evening dinner. They are guided by two Lighthouse Instructors on Zoom.

“I thought you guys did a fabulous job of pulling this together so the kids could have their weekend . . . you guys were very creative in making this work for the kids.”

— Parent

Lighthouse Summer Camps for Teens with Vision Loss

Cooking Camp - Remote Edition - Saturday, June 13 – Sunday, June 21

This camp will be offered remotely to students at home. It will highlight cooking skills in a significant way, along with relevant use of technology.

Movement & Music - Saturday, July 18- Sunday, July 26

This camp will highlight movement and travel, along with some technology and literacy, under the umbrella of a music theme. (Planned onsite in Duluth, but will be remote if necessary).

Technology & Taekwondo (TNT) - Saturday, August 8 – Sunday, August 16

This camp will have a strong technology focus for all skill levels. It will also feature daily lessons in martial arts. (Planned onsite in Duluth, but will be remote if necessary).

**A word from
Betsy Mistek,
Associate
Director
and
Case Manager**



While we are dealing with these difficult and uncertain times, Lighthouse professionals are connecting with current and past clients and new referrals. We are doing everything we can to help!

This includes consultation by phone, online, or even in person in certain cases. We offer assistance with technology, device loans, training, emotional support, support groups, and connection to other resources and services. Our store is open via phone for mail orders.

Especially now, technology helps connect people. We help people get the technology they need in their home to be safe and independent, to stay connected with their friends and family, and to have new opportunities for socialization or training.

For example, the **Amazon Echo** is voice controlled, easy to use, and can give folks access to information, entertainment, and more. The Amazon Echo Show also has the feature of a screen display for face-to-face connection with others.

There are lots of devices - we can help you decide which device will work best for you or someone you care about.

If you are interested in learning more, please give me a call at 218-624-4828 ext. 1003.

Betsy

**A Happy Story:
Carmen gets back to
what she loves — sewing.**

Carmen is in her 90s and lives in an assisted living facility in Duluth. She used to love to sew, but she gave it up long ago due to low vision.

Carmen's eye doctor referred Carmen to the Lighthouse, requesting help with navigational skills, magnification and more. We offered help in many areas—but it was sewing that most interested Carmen. Thanks to support from MN State Services for the Blind, Lighthouse instructor, Haley was able to visit Carmen's home many times, showing her some simple adapted sewing techniques for people with low vision. Carmen learned fast! After just a few sessions she was able to thread her entire machine, with the use of a self threading needle. She also now uses an adaptive needle threader called the "Deluxe" Needle Threader.

During this time of self-quarantine, Haley is calling Carmen weekly offering over-the-phone training as needed. Carmen is set up well with an independent sewing project, grateful that she is able to continue doing what she loves — sewing.



Lighthouse Programming Responds to COVID-19 Crisis

Helping individuals be safer and more connected.

Technology Services

Available to any older adult, or to individuals of any age with a disability.

- **Devices demos and loans are available**, or we can help clients secure their own devices.
- **Training and ongoing support** offered remotely for clients, family and caregivers.
- **Tech Help via Phone:** Need help with your computer, tablet, or smartphone? Call Aaron between 10 am and noon on Tuesdays at 218-624-4828 ext. 1010, or leave a message at any other time.

Other Services Being Offered (Mainly Remotely)

- **Occupational Therapy:** Available to individuals of all ages with vision loss or other challenges to independence. We are providing service over the phone and via remote technology. If you don't have a device for remote connection, we can loan you one! We will consider in-person services if there are compelling health or safety needs.
- **Consultation Services:** Available for adults 60+. Includes risk assessment, resource referral and training to help individuals maximize their own goals, safety and quality of life.
- **Telephone Reassurance:** Staff and volunteers are reaching out to all the folks we have served, just to talk or to connect them with needed resources.
- **Peer to Peer Support:** We can match interested clients with peer mentors for regular phone conversations. Contact Lynne at 218-624-4828 ext. 1020.
- **Support Groups:** For individuals who are blind or have vision loss. Meetings are being held **over the telephone every Tuesday at 1pm**. Contact support group leader, James Kelm, ahead of time at 218-241-1683 for specific call-in-information.
- **Adjustment to Blindness Training:** For individuals who are blind or have vision loss. Our professionals are providing training over the telephone and via remote technology for people of all ages. We will consider in-person services for compelling reasons.
- **Orientation and Mobility Instruction to School Students:** The Lighthouse has contracts with schools in our region for this service. We are now delivering training remotely.
- **School-Year Transition Program and Summer Camps** for people 14-21 years of age with vision loss. School year program now being delivered via Zoom sessions! The June cooking camp will be offered remotely. Stay tuned for location of July and August camps.
- **Lighthouse Store: Our store is open** for online or telephone orders. Products can be shipped only to Minnesota or Wisconsin residents. Call 218-624-4828 ext. 1008.

Services often
available at little to no
cost to clients.

Call Betsy
at 218-624-4828
ext. 1003

“I have video chatted every day with Mom since we were hooked up and I think she loves it! I am thrilled to have this!” —Barbara’s daughter

Barbara’s Story of Hope

“Barbara” lives in an assisted living facility. She has received occupational therapy services in the past to help her with her low vision.

Her family used to visit her every day, but with the COVID-19 restrictions, in-person visits have become impossible. When we reached out to Barbara, she was scared. She told Laura, our occupational therapist, **“I never thought I would die alone.”**

Using funding from Title III (Older Americans Act), Laura got an **Echo Show** for Barbara, set it up, and remotely trained family members how to call and use drop-in features to connect. Laura delivered the device to the front door of the assisted living facility. It was the day before Barbara’s birthday.

Barbara was able to see family for her birthday!



Heath is Ready for Work!

Heath is a kind, impressive young adult who is preparing himself to be a great employee. He wants to work in an office setting. Heath also has cerebral palsy, and while he is skilled on the computer, it is hard for him to use a typical keyboard and mouse.



Sheri Cooke, a certified Assistive Technology Professional (ATP) at the Lighthouse, met with Heath about his goals. She trialed many different adaptations and types of equipment with him.

After seeing what worked best, Sheri recommended that Heath’s social worker order three things: The n-Abler



adaptive joystick mouse with switches for the left and right click; a large print keyboard with

color contrast; and a stand to put the keyboard at best height.



Heath, continued

The new equipment has made all the difference. Heath can now use the computer much more easily. In fact, he recently put together his first job resume and also applied online for a couple of positions.

COVID-19 is delaying Heath's job hunt for a little while, but he continues to connect with Sheri as needed. He is also emailing friends and setting up Zoom get togethers.

With a good coat and boots, Minnesota winters are not only bearable but breathtakingly beautiful. The work has been not only painless but deeply rewarding. The real challenge revealed later as COVID-19.

How strange to be coming into my own as an orientation and mobility instructor during utterly disorienting and immobilizing times.

What is O&M really about when we can't teach in person, and students are under "stay at home" orders? I think in the simplest terms O&M is about empowering people to navigate everyday life with independence and grace. "Grace" often means ease, elegance, or refinement of movement. But grace also harbors the meaning of courteous goodwill.

I'm compelled during these trying times to think of things differently. Maybe it's less about traveling with grace, and more about extending it to others. Maybe it's less about independence, and more about nurturing our interdependence.

Last weekend we hosted our first *fully remote* camp for transition students. I was skeptical of the idea of a remote camp, especially its ability to satisfy students' need for meaningful interaction and instruction. Then they logged in from across the state and participated joyfully and simultaneously in things like cooking pancakes, virtual tours, and discussions about guide dogs. I'm still excited about it, over a week later.

I am grateful, despite COVID-19, to be here, to be working for an organization that embodies the compassionate professionalism I aspire to.

Reflections from Alexandra, Graduate Student Intern at the Lighthouse



In January I came to the Lighthouse as a bright-eyed intern from North Carolina. My first few weeks were

defined by the sense of being surrounded, mesmerized by snow—something I'd never experienced. Several folks warned that living in a place with wild winters would be challenging for a southerner. I focused on what I thought to be the real challenge: learning the demands of my chosen profession. I'm an aspiring orientation and mobility instructor (O&M), which means I work with people who are blind or visually impaired on ways to get around safely and independently.

As it turns out, neither the weather nor learning to teach O&M has been all that challenging.

Services described in this newsletter have been funded or supported in part by many individuals and organizations, including:



**Title III Older Americans Act
Volunteer Services of Carlton County**

**Brandon Otway
Carl Lindgren
Mary Junnila**

Help Us Help Our Community!

[Donate Now](#)

