Michael is a 25-year-old young man who graduated from Seton Hall University in December of 2017 with his Master’s degree. He studied International Relations with a concentration in international security and foreign policy analysis. Michael enrolled in a career development program that VISIONS provides to scholarship holders of the Lavelle Fund for the Blind.

Early interactions between the VISIONS Student Career Coordinator and Michael revealed his potential to be a successful professional. His low vision is coupled with weakness on the right side of his body, and as a result, he uses Dragon dictation software, along with ZoomText as assistive technologies on his computer. His undergraduate studies also focused on International Relations, and since he enjoyed the various historical and political diplomacy aspects so much, he is pursuing this field as his career.

Michael was eager to further his professional development, and incorporated all feedback that he received from the VISIONS Student Career Coordinator. He applied to as many opportunities as possible, and in summer 2017, secured an internship with the Intelligence Unit of the New Jersey Transit Police Department as an Intelligence Analyst intern. Michael’s exceptional performance as an intern, and the flexibility of his course load, enabled him to continue his internship into his Fall 2017 semester. Simultaneously, he searched for employment in his field. His efforts were rewarded in June 2018 with an offer of full-time employment from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of International Affairs, for the position of International Affairs Specialist.

For this, he needed to relocate from his family home in Andover, Mass. to Washington, D.C. Michael started his job on October 15, 2018, and is now enjoying his new life in Washington. He is excited to begin the next phase of his career, his independence and personal growth.

The Lavelle Fund for The Blind Brother Kearney Scholars Program is a collaboration with VISIONS.

New Grant for VISIONS

VISIONS has secured a new foundation grant supporting our work. On Wednesday, October 17th, the Lois & Richard Nicotra Foundation awarded VISIONS a grant to assist with outreach for the newly established Staten Island Community Advisory Board. Held at the Commons Cafe in the Bloomfield section of the borough, this bi-annual ceremony provides grants and scholarships to various nonprofits dedicated to helping Staten Island. Holly Bonner, VISIONS new Staten Island Borough Coordinator, and her guide dog, Frances, attended the ceremony, accepting the grant on behalf of VISIONS.

From left to right: Mrs. Lois Nicotra (orange suit) standing next to her husband, (Middle) Mr. Richard Nicotra. Staten Island Borough Coordinator, Holly Bonner (Stands far right) in a beige jacket, with her guide dog, Frances, a yellow labrador standing beside her.
Executive Director/CEO Message

VISIONS success is built on the excellence and hard work of its Board of Directors, staff, volunteers and the blind clients and their families. I was honored to join VISIONS Board members and staff, Lions Club members, family and friends to celebrate Mannie Corman’s 100th birthday and wedding to long time girlfriend and fellow Lion Judy Goldman. Over 25 years ago, Mannie was struggling to read the prayer book at temple services and I quietly told him about VISIONS services. He took advantage of VISIONS computer training with staff coming to his home. He quickly became an active volunteer at VISIONS at Selis Manor and soon joined the VISIONS Brooklyn Community Advisory Board and the VISIONS Board of Directors.

It is rare that you can participate in a 100th birthday party and wedding on the same day. A rare treasure is a great way to describe Mannie. He is an inspiration to all who know him. I asked him “now that you have reached 100, what is your goal?” He quickly replied, “105.” Mannie’s wife, Judy Goldman Corman, is also an active volunteer; Lions Club Member in Westchester and a great supporter of VISIONS. We wish them the best of luck and a future of happiness.

Mannie is a great example that you are never too old to learn, to take on challenges and to manage change. The thousands of blind people and their families served each year by VISIONS improve their independence, land jobs and adopt new techniques with the same positive spirit.

In this newsletter we share examples of success, even when the road to independence is rocky. We could not do it without your support and our fantastic volunteers like Robbie Davis and Burt M. Strauss Jr., representing the third generation in their families supporting VISIONS.

Thank you and know that your donation is well spent in helping someone that is blind reach his or her full potential.

Nancy D. Miller, Executive Director/CEO and her husband Jerry Miller with the birthday boy 100 year old Mannie Corman

A Publication about VISIONS/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

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Our Vision is For Everyone to See What is Possible

Our Website:
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On September 22, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BBG) hosted the Discovery Garden Early Opening for Children & Families of All Abilities. Attendees were invited to explore the garden and participate in multisensory activities at facilitated stations. Hands-on exhibits featured sound, visual and tactile elements designed for accessibility.

To insure that the Garden’s docents were prepared to work with children who are visually impaired or legally blind, BBG asked VISIONS to provide a special training.

Annalyn Courtney Barbier, VISIONS certified senior orientation & mobility specialist, provided a hands on training session. She explained the various types of vision loss and how that affects how each visually impaired person looks at something; docents were provided with special goggles that simulated various eye conditions and acuities and then teamed up to practice with the models and actual plants. Annalyn also explained proper terminology. It is acceptable to use the words “look” and “see” but when describing the position of an object do not use a phrase such as “over there.” Be specific by saying “to your left” or “the pot is at 3:00” using the face of a clock as a reference. At the actual event, the docents utilized the training to provide a wonderful morning for the visually impaired attendees and their families.

Kate Fermoile, Director of Interpretation and Exhibitions at BBG, had this to say: “The partnership with VISIONS is already a great success. Our docents learned so much from the training that they then were able to put into practice with families from VISIONS a few days later. We look forward to our continued work with VISIONS.”
By Darcie Whelan-Kortan; Vice President, Whelan Group

Darcie Whelan-Kortan is a parent of a blind child. Her struggles to allow her son to achieve his own level of independence are plaguing the development of both son and mother. Her story is the struggle between letting him do for himself, even if it means hurting himself, and the very natural desire to do acts of daily living for him.

Tim has been struggling with anger. He has been violent a few times, and will resist me physically if I try to force him to go to bed, go to his room, stop wandering outside in the dark. He is, by now, nearly as tall as my five-foot-two.

Recently he wanted to make a quesadilla by himself just like his sister does. I told him he could do everything, but he couldn’t get the shredded cheese. Two pounds of shredded cheddar was going to become a fistful of that cheese on the floor. So I said no. There was screaming and stomping and slamming of doors. Our family therapist keeps telling me to stop saying no. She says that it is in those moments when someone else tells us no, gives us limits, says “You can’t,” that our self-esteem is whittled away. I resisted, insisting “but can you imagine? Two pounds of cheese all over the floor. I don’t want to clean that up.” “You won’t,” she said. “He will.”

Today he wanted to cut his bagel. They come partially cut in the bag, just held together on two sides. Did I let him use a butter knife to try and cut through, as he had tried to do with his vision rehab therapist (a professional who helps blind people gain independent skills)? I did not—I said no. I told him, “I will cut them and put them in the bag for you.”

In that moment when I said he couldn’t cut the bagel, I let loose an arrow to his self-worth. What is a bag of cheese for a healthy sense of self? What is a mangled cinnamon-raisin or even a wound from a butter knife for your self-esteem? We are always saying no, or prepping things in his world so he can have a (false) sense of accomplishment. But in that moment of struggle with the bagel, when the doughy hinges won’t come free, when he is sawing away with his inadequate hands and his fingers can’t hold onto either the bagel or the knife, he is finding himself in the struggle.

Nothing is easy for him. But nothing is harder than hearing “you can’t” before you’ve even begun. More literally, he may not have arms as strong as yours or mine, but what does he achieve when he hugs you and makes friends everywhere he goes? He may not have a mouth that speaks highly intelligible words, but his smile is so powerful it turns indigo dusk to rosy dawn.

The real work of his life has been unfolding all along. That work is in sharing his heart with others, in being, as Tim’s hero Beverly Cleary once wrote of his favorite very-imperfect character Ramona, “a little sparkler.” I have been driving Tim crazy with my response to his doing for himself—with no after no after No. But the response of the rest of the world to the magic he brings is a resounding, full-voiced “Yes, yes, yes!”

The Manhattan Advisory Board held their annual Awards Reception on September 13 and raised $30,000 to support VISIONS free services. Our honorees were Jose Collado & Alex Grimpas of the Malibu Diner, Gertler & Wente Architects LLP, Dr. Charles Hollander of the Sight Improvement Center and Allison Sesso of the Human Services Council. Many thanks to Keynote Speaker Holly Bonner, creator of www.blindmotherhood.com. The event was hosted at the AIG headquarters.

The Brooklyn Advisory Board has had a busy summer: starting off with a wonderful Awards Dinner at Marco Polo Ristorante on June 13. We were proud to honor the Hon. Dr. Kim Best, President, 79th Precinct Community Council, Inc; Scot Medbury, President, Brooklyn Botanic Garden; WellCare Health Plan, Inc.; and Dolly Williams, President, A. Williams Construction. An Applebee’s Flapjack Breakfast on June 23 and a terrific night at the Brooklyn Cyclones in August provided both social networking and funds for VISIONS consumer services in Brooklyn.
On Tuesday September 25th, 2018 VISIONS Queens Advisory Board held the 2nd Annual, Party with a Purpose, at the Douglaston Manor.

The evening focused on VISIONS Summer Transition Program, a four-week residential experience, at Queens College, designed to build legally blind teenagers’ skills and independence through career exploration using technology, orientation & mobility, social interaction, and unique educational sessions throughout the city. Executive Chef, Franco Raicovich, Queens Advisory Board Member, shared his experience working with the students.

In July, in a session focused on hospitality, Chef Franco taught the teens how to prepare Fuzi pasta in the kitchen at the Douglaston Manor.

A short film showcasing this year’s program created by volunteer local film maker, Emma Leavy was shown to the attendees featuring both program participants and VISIONS staff.

Alanna Ray, past participant and summer intern shared the positive impact VISIONS has had on her life as a legally blind teenager and young adult. VISIONS CEO, Nancy D. Miller addressed the audience, acknowledging over 30 years of dedicated service of the late Sandra Delson to the VISIONS Queens Advisory Board.

Honoree Edward Chung, Chairman of the Chinese Center on Long Island, Board Member Community Board 8 & Jamaica Estates Association received a citation presented by State Assemblyman Anthony D’Urso. Mr. Chung also received a citation from Assemblyman David Weprin, presented by Queens Advisory Board Member, Anthony Lemma Sr.

October 16 Third date is a Charm for VISIONS Golf and Tennis Fundraising Event

More than 100 guests enjoyed the beautiful course, courts, grounds and lavish meals at the Fairview Country Club for the re-scheduled event after two rain cancellations. Robbie Davis and Ric Apter, long time VISIONS volunteers, again co-chaired the successful day. Former football Giant Karl Nelson offered remarks at the dinner. VISIONS Board President Nancy T. Jones, enjoyed the day along with fellow Board members Luke Fowler, Ted Klingos, Dr. Jim McGroarty, Jag Rao, Bob Schonbrunn and Burt Strauss. Proceeds support VISIONS Center on Blindness programs held on the VCB campus in Rockland County. It is not too early to Save the Date Tuesday May 21, 2019 for next year’s event at Fairview CC.
Volunteer Testimonials

Working at Visions is a highlight of my week. The programs are efficiently scheduled and the facility is wonderful to work at. Staff is always available to help and listen to any questions, comments or ideas. Teaching classes at VISIONS has made me a better instructor and I look forward to continuing with this amazing and important organization.

Being a volunteer I realized how much I took for granted over the little things like using a computer, reading books, or even eating during a meal. VISIONS has showed me the various methods and ways that individuals who are blind or visually impaired can use to adapt to their surroundings. Compared to other volunteer work I have done, VISIONS seems to genuinely care about the wellbeing of each and every individual that walks in through the doors.

VISIONS Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired is a wonderful organization that makes a meaningful impact to its clients and community as a whole. This is an organization that offers a multitude of services to individuals of all ages who are legally blind or visually impaired. Their services range from employment services, to a senior center in Chelsea, a community center, vision rehabilitation services, caregiver support, to a residential facility in Spring Valley, NY. This an organization that I would highly recommend to anyone seeking services related to vision loss.

I have been a volunteer at Visions for about four years. I look forward to the time that I spend there each week. The staff really cares about the residents and the clients. There are so many programs and special events for the visually impaired such as Proms, Talent Shows, Jewelry Making and many more to normalize their everyday lives. I have learned that people with disabilities can live and enjoy life to the fullest, and I truly believe that VISIONS does everything possible to see that happen. I will continue to volunteer at VISIONS and be part of that wonderful experience.

As a volunteer advisory board member, having been introduced to the organization by a member of the organization who urged me to get involved with VISIONS. I hired an intern this past summer to work with me in my insurance business. The young lady I hired was very smart, pleasant, and a hard worker. What I’ve noticed about the organization so far is the tremendous job it’s doing educating people about all what visual impairment is and helping those who have this disability with self-esteem issues and all the other issues related to learning how to function in society as a human being. This organization does great work and is to be commended for the dedication to its mission.
We also want to thank the following for their donation of goods and services:

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