

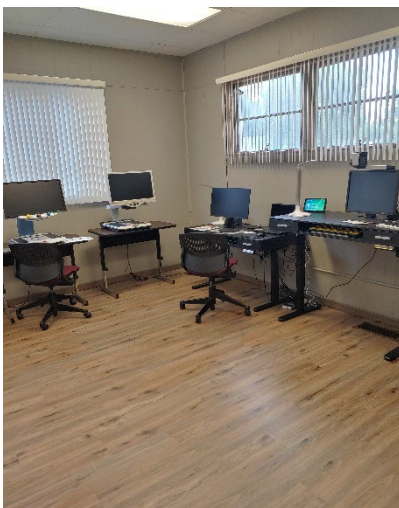
FINAL REPORT SUMMARIZING IMPACT CENTRAL ILLINOIS GRANT SPEND

On July 1, 2022, the Central IL Center for the Blind & Visually Impaired was awarded a grant from Impact Central Illinois in the amount of \$20,000. This grant was designated for a combined project of updating our kitchen and our Technology Center and we were diligent about splitting it as specified in our request: \$3,000 for our tech support/assistance person, \$5,000 for the tech room and the remaining \$12,000 for the kitchen. This grant served as the kick start for what we quickly realized would be an ongoing, and vital, project as we serve the blind and visually impaired community. With that in mind, as we were working on meeting the goals of the grant, we actively sought and were successful at obtaining support, particularly for the technology aspect, from other sources as noted in this summary. This was especially important since this area is an organic and time-sensitive service requiring continuing modification to stay up-to-date moving forward.

OUR JOURNEY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

We knew early on that some basic features required updating. For the kitchen, these included refurbishing our industrial-style stove, replacing the countertops and sink and adding a dishwasher. The wooden cabinetry near the stove was removed, primarily for safety reasons, and replaced with a stainless-steel table and shelving combination on either side of the stove. We also disabled the grill top (which was constantly hot) to make that area safer. We ran into a roadblock when it was discovered that our chimney (which runs through the kitchen) was leaking and required repair prior to moving forward. Verizon awarded us the funding to properly repair this so we could continue our work in the kitchen.

Once these basic needs were met, the cabinetry and backsplashes were repaired and/or repainted. This completed the physical refurbishment. We then were able to add specific assistive features such as Braille labels for the cabinetry, bump dots to identify certain areas, and specially designed items such as tactile measuring cups, temperature indicators and other small devices to enhance the accessibility and safety of the kitchen area.



The first thing that needed to be done in the technology room was to remove the unsafe carpeting and replace the flooring with a hard laminate that provides textural cues for safe mobility in that area. We also needed to repaint the entire room. We paid particular attention to colors that provide the appropriate contrast for the visually impaired. We removed a permanent counter and were able to purchase individual workstations that allowed for rearranging the area depending upon the need. We were able to onboard a staff member who could provide technical assistance and lead our tech committee as we determined what would best serve our patrons as this room was put into use. The most versatile and appropriate equipment was identified and included large screen computers, desk-top and handheld print-to-audio devices, readers and magnifiers. We also were able to obtain the appropriate lighting for the area that can be adjusted depending upon the visual acuity of the individuals using the area.

We were able to receive support from other organizations including Rotary of Peoria-North, the Indo-American Society of Peoria, the Pilot Club of Peoria, the employees of the Uftring Auto Group and several individual donors. This enabled us to get a variety of devices and the appropriate software to assist multiple levels of visual impairment.

OUTCOME AND IMPACT

As we told our story, it quickly became clear that what we were doing was making a difference for those affected by vision loss. As of right now, we have areas that are fresh, safe, and up-to-date and meet the educational, social and even emotional needs of individuals impacted by the loss of their sight. By being able to inform and teach these individuals that their life can be productive and enjoyable thanks to the advances made in technology – at ALL levels, not just electronically - we have seen people’s entire outlook change for the better.

It also became evident this was a project with no end. Technology will continue to advance, and it is our mission to keep up with it and be able to offer it to those who are in need. With that in mind, we have committed to continue to tell our story, ask for support and work to serve the blind and visually impaired as well as their families and caregivers. Since the start of this project two years ago, we have more than quadrupled our educational opportunities through classes and one-on-one instruction. Just since the beginning of 2024, we have offered nearly a dozen classes (all while the technology room was in progress) and we know with our rooms ready for regular use, this number will continue to rise. As we promote our capabilities through our newsletter, social media, word-of-mouth, etc., we are seeing a significant increase in contacts asking for more information, providing evidence the need is there and on-going.

It is safe to say this project would never have gotten off the ground in such a significant way if it wasn’t for the grant provided by Impact Central Illinois. In recognition of this, Impact Central Illinois is featured on a plaque hanging in our technology room. As I write this, I remember presenting our “case” at your meeting where the decision would be made as to grant recipients. I said at that time, “the CICBVI may be small, but we are mighty.” Now, two years later, we are bigger, and I would even say mightier, but we are also humbled by the response we have received throughout Peoria and so very grateful to Impact Central Illinois – this never would have happened at such an amazing level without you.

With heartfelt thanks,

Paula Balistreri, Operations Manager
On behalf of the staff, board and patrons of CICBVI

June 26, 2024

