

# NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND 2019 ANNUAL REPORT



NATIONAL FEDERATION  
OF THE BLIND

*Live the life you want.*



## WHAT WE BELIEVE

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people, because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back.



## WHO WE ARE

The National Federation of the Blind, headquartered in Baltimore, is the oldest and largest nationwide organization of blind Americans. Founded in 1940, the NFB consists of affiliates, chapters, and divisions in the fifty states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico. The NFB defends the rights of blind people of all ages and provides information and support to families with blind children, older Americans who are losing vision, and more. We believe in the hopes and dreams of blind people and work together to transform them into reality.

## NATIONAL OFFICERS

Mark Riccobono, *President*

Pam Allen, *First Vice President and Board Chair*

Ron Brown, *Second Vice President*

James Gashel, *Secretary*

Jeannie Massay, *Treasurer*

## BOARD MEMBERS

Denise Avant

Everette Bacon

Amy Buresh

Shawn Callaway

Norma Crosby

John Fritz

Ever Lee Hairston

Carla McQuillan

Amy Ruell

Joseph Ruffalo, Jr.

Terri Rupp

Adelmo Vigil



NATIONAL FEDERATION  
OF THE BLIND

*Live the life you want.*

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[nfb.org](http://nfb.org)

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends:

On the morning of Thursday, April 25, 2019, a tornado touched down in Ruston, Louisiana, doing significant damage to the homes of many members of the National Federation of the Blind of Louisiana. Ruston is home to the Louisiana Center for the Blind, one of our training centers that offers the world's strongest programs for instilling confidence and cultivating independence in blind people. It is also home to the main campus of Louisiana Tech, which houses the Professional Development and Research Institute on Blindness, a strong partner of the National Federation of the Blind. Fortunately, the training facilities of the Louisiana



***Mark Riccobono plays Braille UNO.***

Center for the Blind were not directly affected, although the homes of many staff and volunteers sustained unbelievable damage, as did parts of the Louisiana Tech campus. No one was physically injured, but among those affected by property damage was the longtime president of the National Federation of the Blind of Louisiana, [Pam Allen](#).

The National Federation of the Blind is a family, and we support each other in times of trouble as any family would. Furthermore, it is our mission to support blind people everywhere. Often, after a disaster like the Ruston tornado, blind people have specific needs, such as quickly replacing white canes, Braille writing supplies, and technology such as refreshable Braille displays—things that can't simply be picked up at the local big-box store. For all these reasons, we immediately began collecting donations from members and supporters of the National Federation of the Blind across the country to help our family in Ruston. This concerted effort raised hundreds of dollars to support staff members of the Louisiana Center for the Blind, volunteers, and Federation members, along with their families, throughout the Ruston community.

While the funds raised were critically important to those individuals and families who received direct assistance, the true significance of this event to me is the outpouring of love and support that members of the NFB extended to the affected individuals. Love is one of the most important values of our organization. It is manifest in everything we do, from teaching the skills of blindness

to formally and informally mentoring each other to providing assistance in times of need. Our love for each other, as well as for blind people not yet born or not yet known to us, is what drives our continued efforts to raise expectations and allow all blind people to live the lives they want.

While the core mission of the National Federation of the Blind is to protect and connect blind Americans, we are pleased to share our expertise and work in collaboration with blind people throughout the world as we find the right opportunities to do so. In 1964, our founder and first president, Dr. Jacobus tenBroek, helped to found the International Federation of the Blind, the predecessor of what is now the World Blind Union, of which the National Federation of the Blind is still a member. The most outstanding accomplishment we have achieved on the global stage is the Marrakesh Treaty, which is now facilitating the cross-border sharing of books in Braille and other accessible formats, benefitting the blind of America and across the globe. In 2019, we helped the National Federation of the Blind of the United Kingdom combat the spread of poorly planned “shared space” schemes, in which both vehicular and pedestrian traffic share the road without signals, signage, or crosswalks on the theory that everyone will act with more care. These have become popular in the UK and Europe, and there are advocates of such plans in the United States. The reality is that these schemes endanger blind pedestrians and others with disabilities. There is now a moratorium on them in the UK because of our collaborative work.

Last year was also another outstanding year of partnering with the private sector to make real progress in accessibility and other areas. A relationship that we began with Mattel Games in late 2018 led to the first official UNO® Cards with Braille on them being distributed to retailers beginning in October of 2019. UNO Braille is now an official Mattel Games product, available from any Target store. With help from Harkins Builders and The Verve Partnership, we completed renovations to the Barney Street wing of our NFB Jernigan Institute. This wing now has twenty-one new guest bedrooms, a fitness center, additional space for informal gatherings, and other amenities designed to make our members and guests feel at home when they attend leadership seminars and other events that we hold throughout the year. The entire remodeling project was completed without any debt financing.

None of these achievements would be possible without you, our members, partners, and supporters. You selflessly give of your time, talent, and resources to build our movement and the facilities we need. You spread the word about our work to blind people who need us and partners who can help us, building our membership and our network of support. Your love, hope, and determination is helping us turn the dreams of blind people into reality and, for that, I thank each and every one of you. We face new challenges and opportunities in 2020, including the particular impact of COVID-19 on our lives as blind people. I am confident, however, that together and with your continued support as you can give it, we will not only weather the storm but continue to thrive and build the Federation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Riccobono", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Mark Riccobono, President  
National Federation of the Blind

# BUILDING, LEARNING, AND EXPLORING

## NFB BELL® ACADEMY

The NFB Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning (BELL) Academy provides blind children with instruction in Braille, cane travel, and the other nonvisual skills they will need to achieve their dreams and live the lives they want. In 2019, 279 students continued to grow their Braille skills at thirty-five NFB BELL Academy sites in twenty-six states. By bringing students and successful blind mentors together, NFB BELL Academy fosters a positive attitude about Braille and about blindness itself. In addition, the parents of BELL Academy participants engage in activities designed to give them the tools they need to ensure their blind child's success. The results speak volumes:

“

To be honest, for a mother with a low-vision child, I was very uneducated by the blind word, and I didn't think he could attend an event like [the BELL Academy] ...A friend [who] was taking her son, told me that I should try and we did. The first day was like a whole new world of possibilities and knowledge opened up for me.

”



“

NFB BELL Academy has helped me achieve goals in Braille and discover new things about myself, I didn't even realize. And make new, great friends.

”



## EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVES

The [early childhood initiatives](#) of the National Federation of the Blind provide young blind children and their families with support and guidance to master the fundamental skills of literacy and independent travel. The Braille Reading Pals Club introduces young blind children and their families to literacy through Braille. The program fosters positive attitudes about Braille and helps sighted family members promote a love of reading through the shared reading of print/Braille books with their blind children. The Early Explorers program introduces young blind children and their families to the long white cane so that the children will become more independent, confident, and curious travelers throughout life.



**30 BLIND STUDENTS  
LEARNED THAT  
STEM IS  
WITHIN REACH!**  
Ways to Give

## NFB EQ

Far too often, blind youth are denied the opportunity to explore science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) subjects because it is assumed that sight is required to succeed in these disciplines. Unfortunately, many teachers, parents, and students are unaware of the nonvisual solutions, many of which have been created by blind scientists and engineers, that enable blind people to engage in STEM education and careers. Due to this lack of knowledge and the resulting low expectations, blind students are discouraged from pursuing an exciting area of potential interest, exploring employment in lucrative STEM careers, and participating in the development of ideas and innovations that will change the world.

“

I can hardly put into words how incredible the program was for me. Learning core concepts towards our ultimate goal of building a sound structure, actually building something tangible, learning about different accessibility tools, and meeting a diverse group of people from all over the country—it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and I really hope to be more involved with the National Federation of the Blind in the future.

”





For over fifteen years, the National Federation of the Blind has pioneered [programs to increase the participation of blind youth in STEM fields](#). Our latest program, supported by a five-year grant from the National Science Foundation, is [NFB EQ](#) (“Engineering Quotient”). NFB EQ is a week-long summer engineering program for blind and low-vision teens from around the United States. Participants spend each day engaged in activities designed to strengthen their knowledge of engineering as well as their problem-solving abilities. In the evenings, they explore the local community and participate in various recreational activities. The second program took place in Baltimore in 2019, and additional programs are planned through the summer of 2021.

## SECURING INDEPENDENCE & INFORMATION

### NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND FREE WHITE CANE PROGRAM

The National Federation of the Blind believes that the long white cane is a means to independence for the blind. The white cane has proved a useful tool to millions of blind people in navigating their environments with confidence and safety. It is a tool that allows blind people to travel where and when they want and, as such, promotes independence and self-sufficiency. Each year, we celebrate White Cane Awareness Day to increase public awareness and understanding of the positive effect this simple tool has on the lives of blind people.

We believe that independence and freedom to travel are so critical to the quality of life of blind people that every blind person should have a cane, regardless of ability to pay. That is why the National Federation of the Blind offers free fiberglass canes to blind users through its Free White Cane Program. Since we began the program over a decade ago, over seventy-two thousand free white canes have been distributed.



*Alida Gallaugo*  
SOC. ART.

**IN 2019,  
6,742 PEOPLE  
RECEIVED FREE  
WHITE CANES!**  
[Ways to Give](#)



1,938,656  
SUBSCRIBER  
CALLS  
Ways to Give

## NFB-NEWSLINE®

In 2019, subscribers placed 1,938,656 calls to the service, accessed our mobile app 428,526 times, and downloaded 9,077,083 full publications.

Adults who are losing vision often tell us that the first thing they miss when reading becomes difficult is perusing the newspaper each day. To support them, and to allow all blind and low-vision people to be well-informed citizens, we created NFB-NEWSLINE. This unique, free-to-users service provides access to over five hundred national and international daily newspapers, magazines, and online news sources.

“  
**I really missed reading the paper after I lost my sight. I watched the news but felt like I did not get nearly as much detail. When I realized I could read the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* like I used to, a whole new world opened up for me. I no longer feel like I am missing out on the world around me. — Shelia Gear, Georgia**  
”

The service can be accessed via touchtone telephone, computer, mobile app and, now, with smart speakers that use Amazon Alexa. To learn more about the service, visit [nfbnewslineonline.org](http://nfbnewslineonline.org).

# NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND JERNIGAN INSTITUTE

The [headquarters of the National Federation of the Blind](#), located in Baltimore, Maryland, is the NFB Jernigan Institute. The original building, once the home of various manufacturers, was purchased by the Federation in 1978, with a newer, more modern building added in 2004. The complex houses the [Center of Excellence in Nonvisual Access](#), the [Independence Market](#), the [Jacobus tenBroek Library](#), and more. In 2019, we completed a major remodeling of the north-facing wing of the building to create more and improved sleeping accommodations, a fitness center, and new areas for informal gathering and networking. The space includes the new Ray and Diane McGeorge Living Room, named for two long-time members of the National Federation of the Blind whose leadership, mentoring, and contributions go back to the 1950s. The living room's beautiful fireplace and fountain create an elegant but homey ambiance that is perfect for relaxing after a day of working to build the National Federation of the Blind.



## RECOGNIZING INNOVATION AND EXCELLENCE

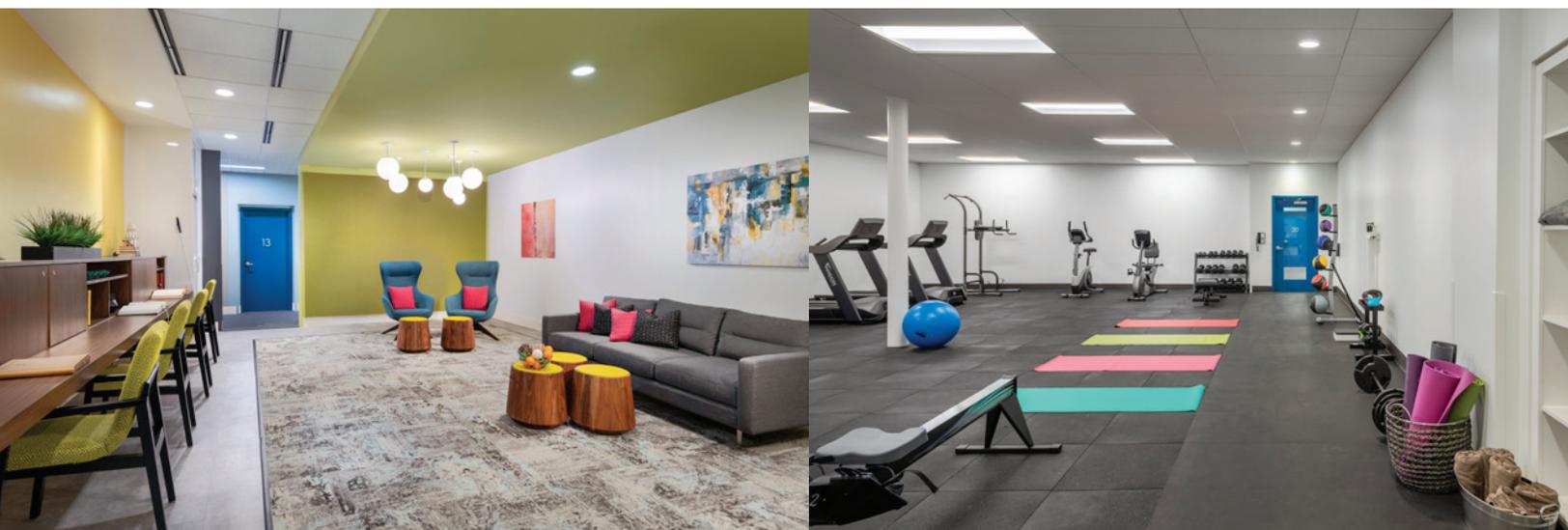
### DR. JACOB BOLOTIN AWARDS

Dr. Jacob Bolotin (1888-1924) was the first physician in history who was born blind. His passion and tireless advocacy for the rights and independence of blind people helped to change entrenched but incorrect attitudes toward blindness. Each year, the National Federation of the Blind awards individuals, initiatives, and innovations that are a positive force in the lives of blind people with a monetary award in his name. Winners of the prestigious award continue Dr. Bolotin's legacy by breaking down barriers, changing negative perceptions of blindness, and inspiring blind people to achieve new heights. In 2019, awards of \$5,000 were presented to a training center for adults losing vision in Las Vegas, a program to help seniors losing vision learn computer skills in Washington, DC, and a nationwide fitness program targeting the blind. An award of \$15,000 was presented to Michael Nye, a San Antonio-based artist and documentarian who created the book and art exhibit *My Heart Is Not Blind*, which educates the public about blindness through portraits, text, and audio interviews. The top award of \$20,000 was presented to

Bristol Braille Technology, the developer of the Canute 360—a 9-line, 360-cell Braille display using new technology that will make it less expensive than any 40-cell single-line Braille display on the market today. You can learn more about the awards and past recipients at [nfb.org/Bolotin](http://nfb.org/Bolotin).

## SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Our annual [scholarship program](#) is the largest of its kind in the nation. Every year, we award more than \$120,000 to blind scholars across the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico in recognition of their achievements and professional aspirations. In 2019, [these thirty outstanding scholars](#) were recognized.



## BLIND EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

The Blind Educator of the Year Award was established in 1991 by the National Organization of Blind Educators, a division of the NFB, to recognize outstanding blind teachers. The 2019 honoree was Allison Steven of Boise, Idaho.

## DISTINGUISHED EDUCATOR OF BLIND STUDENTS AWARD

Every year, the Distinguished Educator of Blind Students Award recognizes an outstanding teacher of blind students. The 2019 recipient was Adrienne Shoemaker of Concord, New Hampshire.



## HOW YOU CAN HELP

We could not do this critical work without our many generous supporters. [We are grateful for the contributions of our 2019 donors.](#) Here are some ways that you can help us continue to help blind people live the lives they want:

### DONATE ONLINE

Contributions by credit card may be given at one time or pledged over a period of time. A one-time credit card donation can be made online at [nfb.org/donate](http://nfb.org/donate). To make a recurring donation, please call our accounting department at 410-659-9314, extension 2213.

### DONATE BY MAIL

Checks should be made out to the “National Federation of the Blind” and mailed to the National Federation of the Blind, attention Outreach, at 200 East Wells Street *at Jernigan Place*, Baltimore, MD 21230.

### DONATE A VEHICLE

You can donate a vehicle to the National Federation of the Blind by calling 855-659-9314 or by visiting [nfb.org/vehicledonations](http://nfb.org/vehicledonations).

### DONATE CLOTHING

If you live in Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, or Virginia, you can donate clothing and other household items to the NFB. You may take your items to a GreenDrop collection site or call 888-610-4632 for home pickup. Learn more by visiting [Gogreendrop.com/nfb](http://Gogreendrop.com/nfb).

### PLANNED GIVING

Including the National Federation of the Blind in your estate plans is a thoughtful way to transform dreams into reality for the next generation. Learn more at [nfb.org/planned-giving](http://nfb.org/planned-giving).

[The Dream Makers Circle](#) honors friends of the National Federation of the Blind who are helping build a successful future through their commitment of a legacy gift to the organization.

# FINANCIAL STATEMENT

## STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES

Year Ended December 31, 2019

### REVENUE AND GAINS AND OTHER SUPPORT

Public Support	
Contributions	\$15,784,919
Donated Services	5,919,966
Government Grants and Contracted Services	1,978,976
 Total Public Support	 23,683,861
 Revenue	
Sales - Independence Products and Publications	533,061
Net Investment Income (loss)	3,465,659
 Total Revenue	 3,998,720
 <b>Total Revenue and Gains and Other Support</b>	 <b>\$27,682,581</b>

### EXPENSES

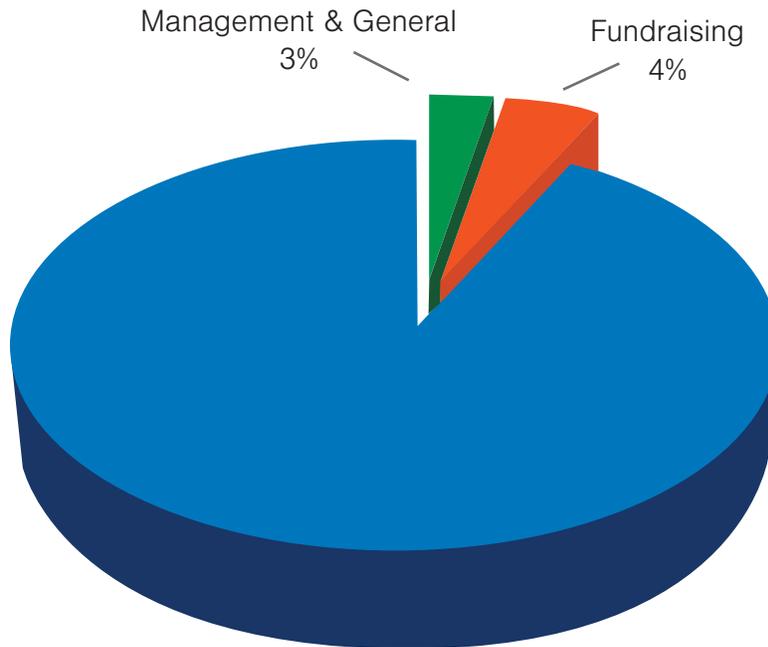
Program Services	
Blindness Integration	\$11,834,004
Civil Rights, Advocacy, and Self-Organization	4,459,131
Nonvisual Access Technology, Methods and Systems	5,674,393
 Total Program Services	 21,967,528
 Supporting Services	
Management and General	674,616
Fundraising	1,001,325
 Total Supporting Services	 1,675,941
 <b>Total Expenses</b>	 <b>\$23,643,469</b>

Changes in Net Assets	\$4,039,112
Net Assets - Beginning of Year	\$25,081,111
Net Assets - End of Year	\$29,120,223



The National Federation of the Blind meets the rigorous Standards for Charity Accountability set forth by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance. The NFB maintains a GuideStar Exchange Gold Participant status and is an approved charity participant in the Combined Federal Campaign.

## MANAGEMENT & GENERAL AND FUNDRAISING EXPENSES AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL PUBLIC SUPPORT



Financial statements presented have been audited by Rosen, Sapperstein and Friedlander, LLC. Complete audited statements with accompanying notes for the National Federation of the Blind can be obtained by contacting the offices of the National Federation of the Blind, 200 East Wells Street at Jernigan Place, Baltimore, Maryland 21230, 410-659-9314.

The National Federation of the Blind, a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, is eligible to receive contributions that are deductible for computing income and estate taxes. Donors should consult their attorney or financial advisor to discuss the tax implications of any donation they make or contemplate making to the National Federation of the Blind.