

The Center's News



February is Low Vision Awareness Month, a time that is dedicated to raising awareness about vision impairment, its impact, and the importance of early detection and support. Millions of Americans live with low vision, which can make everyday tasks challenging and reduce independence. Understanding low vision and knowing when to seek help can make a significant difference in managing the condition.

Low vision is a long-term visual impairment that cannot be fully corrected with glasses, contact lenses, or surgery. Low vision does not mean complete blindness, as some vision remains but it can interfere with daily activities like reading, driving, recognizing faces or navigating surroundings. People with low vision may experience blurred or distorted vision, blind spots, or difficulty seeing in low light.

Low vision is typically diagnosed when a person's vision is 20/70 or worse in their better eye, even with corrective lenses. It can be caused by various eye conditions such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD), glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy or cataracts.

According to the 2022 National Health Interview Survey, approximately 50.2 million American adults aged 18 and older reported experiencing some degree of vision loss. This number is expected to rise as the population ages. A study funded by the National Institutes of Health projects that the number of Americans with legal blindness will increase 21% each decade, reaching 2 million by 2050. Similarly, visual impairment is expected to grow by 25% per decade, approaching 7 million by 2050. Early detection and treatment can help slow vision loss and improve quality of life. Many individuals with low vision can benefit from vision rehabilitation services and assistive technologies such as magnifiers and screen readers.

You should schedule an eye exam if you notice any of the following:

- Difficulty seeing in low light
- Blurred or distorted vision
- Trouble recognizing faces
- Increased sensitivity to glare
- A decrease in peripheral vision

Regular comprehensive eye exams are recommended, especially for adults over 40 or those with risk factors like diabetes or a family history of eye disease.



Low vision can significantly impact a person's independence, mental well-being and overall quality of life. However, early intervention, adaptive tools and rehabilitation programs can help individuals make the most of their remaining vision.

By spreading awareness and encouraging regular eye exams, Low Vision Awareness Month serves as a vital reminder to prioritize eye health and support those affected by vision impairment.

Independent Living Program

How Are Students with Disabilities Supported in Schools?

Jared Price – Certified Benefits Liaison/Independent Living Coordinator

Congress has attempted to answer this question for us in 20 US Code Chapter 33 (uscode.house.gov). They openly state that disability is a natural part of human life. Students with disabilities should not encounter barriers to being able to participate fully within society.

Congress states that it is essential for educational standards to rise for youth with disabilities. Once this becomes a priority, youth with disabilities will have full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency.

By now you are probably wondering what you can do to accomplish this goal?

Parents and family members play a crucial role in supporting youth with disabilities. They can work with Centers of Independent Living, (CIL) to become educated on their rights and responsibilities as a parent of a child with disabilities. Parents and schools both need to have high expectations.



The school also has a role to play as well. They will want to use a research-based curriculum to ensure the student is in the least restrictive learning environment. The school must also comply with Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). The school must also provide the student with a disability specially designed education and related services to meet the unique needs of the student.

Everyone has a role to play in the success of students with disabilities. After exploring this topic, Congress

provided not only the argument but also gave solutions that can help students with disabilities thrive if barriers are removed, and Special Education and related services are put in place along with a good family support system.

Medicare Advantage Enrollment Periods

Gloria Stamper – Assistant Director

As a reminder, you can only join, switch or drop a Medicare Advantage Plan during certain times, called enrollment periods. Special enrollment periods are allowed when certain events happen in your life, if you move or you lose other coverage. The Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period will allow you to drop your current Medicare Advantage Plan and return to original Medicare (with or without drug coverage), switch to another Medicare Advantage Plan (with or without drug coverage), or join a Medicare Drug Plan if you are on original Medicare. This enrollment period runs from January 1st to March 31st, 2025. Knowing how your Medicare benefits work for you is important. If you have any questions or concerns with your insurance coverage, please contact The WILL Center at (812) 298-9455 where a SHIP Counselor is available to help you.

Qualifying for a Special Enrollment Period

CHANGES IN RESIDENCE

- Moved to a new home
- Moved to the U.S.
- Student moving to school
- Seasonal Worker

CHANGES IN HOUSEHOLD

- Marriage
- Birth, Adoption, Foster Child
- Divorce or Legal Separation
- Death of Family member

LOSS OF HEALTH INSURANCE

- Lose Employer Coverage
- Losing Medicaid or CHIP
- Losing through Family Plan
- Plan Ending

The infographic is divided into three horizontal sections. The top section, 'CHANGES IN RESIDENCE', features a white cross icon with a hand, a grey building, a pink house, and green buildings. The middle section, 'CHANGES IN HOUSEHOLD', features two gold wedding rings and a baby illustration. The bottom section, 'LOSS OF HEALTH INSURANCE', features an illustration of a man in a suit holding a newspaper and a Medicare card icon.

Empowerment in Action – How to be Your Own Advocate

Krista Smith – Independent Living/Transition Coordinator

Navigating life with a disability can come with unique challenges. Self-advocacy is an essential skill for anyone but even more important in this case. By advocating for yourself, you can ensure your voice is heard, you get appropriate medical care, your needs are met, and your rights are respected. It's important to build skills that will help you be a better advocate for yourself.

1. Understand Your Rights

Being aware of your legal rights is the first step towards self-advocacy. Familiarize yourself with laws and regulations that protect individuals with disabilities, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Knowing your rights empowers you to stand up for yourself.

2. Know Your Needs

Identify your specific needs and accommodations. What are the barriers you face, and what solutions work best for you? Having a clear understanding of your needs allows you to communicate them effectively and help others better understand what you need.

3. Communication

Effective communication is very important to self-advocacy. Practice expressing your needs and desires with trusted people in your circle. Being able to communicate confidently and clearly is important when advocating for yourself. If needed you can use tools like communication boards or apps. Writing bullet points or important info in advance of these conversations can be helpful as well.

4. Confidence

Believing in yourself is a cornerstone of self-advocacy. Highlight your strengths and accomplishments to build confidence. Make a list of these strengths and ask others in your circle what they see as your strengths.

5. Create a Support Network

Surround yourself with a supportive network of family, friends, mentors, and advocates. These individuals can provide encouragement, advice, and assistance. A good support network can help you build confidence and provide additional support and advocacy when needed.

6. Stay Informed

Knowledge is power. Stay informed about available resources, support services, and organizations that can assist you. Many communities have advocacy groups that can offer valuable information and support.

7. Set Realistic Goals

Setting achievable goals provides direction and motivation. Outline your short-term and long-term goals. Then create a plan to achieve them. When setting a goal try to make sure it is specific, measurable, achievable, and has clear timelines in which to accomplish each goal.

8. Be Persistent

Advocacy often requires persistence. You may encounter obstacles or resistance, but it's crucial to remain determined. Keep pushing for what you need and deserve. Do not give up easily.

9. Assertiveness

Assertiveness involves standing up for yourself while respecting others. It's about being firm and direct without being confrontational. Practice assertiveness techniques, such as using "I" statements and setting boundaries.

10. Seek Assistance When Needed

Don't hesitate to seek assistance from professionals, such as counselors, therapists, or advocacy organizations. They can provide guidance and support in navigating complex situations.

11. Stay Positive

Maintaining a positive attitude can make a big difference. Focus on what you can control and celebrate your achievements, no matter how small. A positive mindset can help you overcome challenges and stay motivated.



*There are several agencies in our local area that provide support and advocacy, including The WILL Center. If you would like additional support in building skills related to self-advocacy you can contact a coordinator at 812-299-9455.

Black History Month: Honoring the Past, Impacting the Present and Shaping the Future

Bianca Nosek – Independent Living/Transition Supervisor

Black History Month is observed every February in the United States as it is a time dedicated to recognizing the contributions, achievements, and resilience of Black individuals throughout history. Today, Black History Month serves as a celebration but also as a reminder of the ongoing journey toward racial equity and justice.

Black History Month shines a light on the essential role Black Americans have played in shaping history, from the fight

against slavery, to the Civil Rights Movement and beyond. This month aims to educate, reflect and acknowledge both the struggles and successes of Black communities. It also ensures that Black history- often marginalized or omitted from mainstream narratives- is recognized as an integral part of American and global history.

By shining a light on Black history and culture, it fosters a deeper understanding of historical injustices while celebrating the resilience and brilliance of Black leaders, artists, scientists, and activists. From Harriet Tubman and Martin Luther King Jr. to more contemporary figures like Barack Obama, Laverne Cox or Kamala Harris, that have shaped and continue to influence politics, literature, business and more.

While Black History Month celebrates achievements, it also serves as a reminder that racial inequalities persist today. Systemic issues such as disparities in education, healthcare, housing and criminal justice continue to disproportionately affect Black communities. The Black Lives Matter movement, voter suppression efforts and economic inequality are all modern-day struggles rooted in historical injustices. Recognizing these challenges is crucial in the fight for true racial equity.

Black History Month is not just about remembrance – its about action. Individuals and communities can take part in various ways. Educating yourself and others, supporting Black-owned businesses, attending cultural events and exhibits are meaningful ways to participate and show support for the Black community. Additionally, advocating for policies that promote



racial justice and engaging in conversations about race and history can help break barriers and foster understanding.

Representation and education are both important for progress. Black History Month serves as a reminder that Black history is American history – and should also be recognized beyond February. It encourages ongoing efforts to create a more just and equitable society where Black voices, stories and contributions are seen and heard. By honoring the past, recognizing present struggles, and taking action for the future, we are ensuring that Black history continues to shape a more inclusive and equal world.



The 2025 Black History Month theme is “African Americans and Labor”, which focuses on the various and profound ways that work and working of all kinds- free and unfree, skilled and unskilled, vocational and voluntary- intersect with the collective experiences of Black people as stated by ASALH The Founders of Black History Month.

A Year of Disability Awareness

Jared Price – Certified Benefits Liaison/Independent Living Coordinator

According to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control, during the Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey (BRFSS) in 2022, 1 in 4 U.S. adults had reported having disability. An estimated 70 million people or 25% of the population reported having a disability.

Looking back on Disability History, this community of people has not always been treated favorably. From the abuse and neglect caused to those who were placed in the asylums of the 1800's and the experiments conducted on people with disabilities by Nazi Germany including gassing and forced sterilization prior to the Holocaust

As a Center for Independent Living, (CIL) our foundation rests upon being a beacon of hope where all people with disabilities are welcomed, included and respected. CILs are uniquely positioned because they have a strong foundation in grassroots consumers exercise their consumer-control and consumer choice along with dignity of risk. CILs are also cross-disability which means all disabilities are served. The board and staff of a CIL are both comprised of at least 51 percent of people with disabilities and that is by design. CILs believe that the best people equipped to teach people with disabilities are their peers with disabilities.

It is our aim that these 70 million plus people be recognized and celebrated. It should not be a source of shame. It is a natural part of the human experience. Join us in celebrating a year of disabilities.

Month	Disability or Special Event
January	Glaucoma and Braille literacy month
February	Age related Macular Degeneration and Low Vision
March	Cerebral palsy and Developmental Disability
April	Autism and Parkinson's
May	Mental Health and Arthritis
June	Alzheimer's and Brain
July	Disability Pride
August	Spinal Muscular Atrophy
September	Deaf
October	Disability Employment
November	Epilepsy
December	International Day of Disability December 3rd

The Crucial Role of DEI in Supporting the Disabled Community

Krista Smith – Independent Living/Transition Coordinator

For the disabled community, DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) creates an environment where everyone has equal opportunities. Diversity is recognizing the unique experiences, perspectives, and abilities that individuals with disabilities bring to the table. Equity helps ensure fair treatment, opportunities, and access to resources for all people. It helps to address barriers that they face. Inclusion supports a culture where people with disabilities are included and engaged in all aspects of society.

One of the major benefits of DEI initiatives for the disabled community is improved accessibility. Organizations committed to DEI are more likely to implement policies and practices that ensure environments are accessible to all. Accessibility measures enable people with disabilities to participate fully in workplaces and public spaces.

The Americans with Disabilities Act was put in place in 1990. This act was a significant step towards prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities. It promotes accessibility and equal opportunities. While the ADA is a critical piece of civil rights legislation, the shift from DEI initiatives could lead to weaker enforcement and compliance with ADA guidelines. By terminating DEI programs, the focus on making workplaces more accessible could diminish. The representation of disabled people could suffer, making it harder to ensure inclusivity and equity.

Despite progress, recent executive orders aim to curtail DEI programs within the federal government. These changes are expected to pose new challenges for disabled workers, potentially limiting needed support. The recent executive orders put in place by our president are likely to have significant impacts on DEI and people with disabilities. President Trump has signed orders to end DEI programs within the federal government, which includes placing federal DEI staff on paid leave and eventually laying them off. This move is part of a broader effort to shift focus from promoting diversity to merit-based hiring. Disability advocates are concerned that these changes could negatively affect opportunities for people with disabilities. With DEI efforts under siege, there is a fear that employment opportunities for people with disabilities could be further limited.

Advocating for DEI as a disabled person is incredibly powerful. Your personal experiences can be very impactful. Share your journey and challenges, whether through social media, blogs, or public speaking, to raise awareness. Join or start advocacy groups focused on disability rights. Active participation in these groups can help connect you with others who share your mission and help you to be heard. Advocate for policies and practices that promote DEI within your workplace, school, or local government. Every action, no matter how small, helps create a more inclusive society for everyone.

L.I.V.E Program

When your Eyes and Ears Start Playing Tricks on You: Strategies to Maximize Your Senses

Holly Neil – Independent Living/Transition Coordinator

Are menus and road signs looking a little fuzzy? Do your friends seem to be mumbling more than usual? Changes in vision and hearing are common, but knowing how to manage them can make a big difference in your daily life.

Protecting Your Vision

Get Regular Eye Exams

A new prescription for glasses might be all you need, but sometimes, vision changes signal a more serious issue. According to Bhavani Iyer, O.D., a low vision diplomate and clinical associate professor at the University of Texas McGovern Medical School, eye diseases can be sneaky. You might not notice symptoms early on, or you may assume you just need stronger glasses. That's why regular eye exams are crucial.

Let your eye health provider know if you've noticed any of the following:

- **Blind spots in your side vision** (possible glaucoma)
- **Cloudy patches in your vision** (potential cataracts)
- **A blurry or empty space in the center of your vision** (a sign of age-related macular degeneration, or AMD)
- **Straight lines appearing wavy** (another AMD warning sign)

Monitor Your Eye Health if You Have Diabetes

If you have diabetes, make sure your eye doctor knows. Both type 1 and type 2 diabetes increase the risk of diabetic retinopathy, a condition that damages the retina's blood vessels and can lead to vision loss. High blood sugar is the main culprit.

Diabetic retinopathy often has no early symptoms, but as it progresses, you may notice "floaters"—dark spots or streaks in your vision. If these appear, seek treatment right away.

Maximizing Low Vision: 6 Simple Strategies

Even if your vision can't be fully restored, you can still optimize what you have. Vision rehabilitation teaches people how to make the most of their remaining eyesight. Here are some tips from Dr. Iyer:

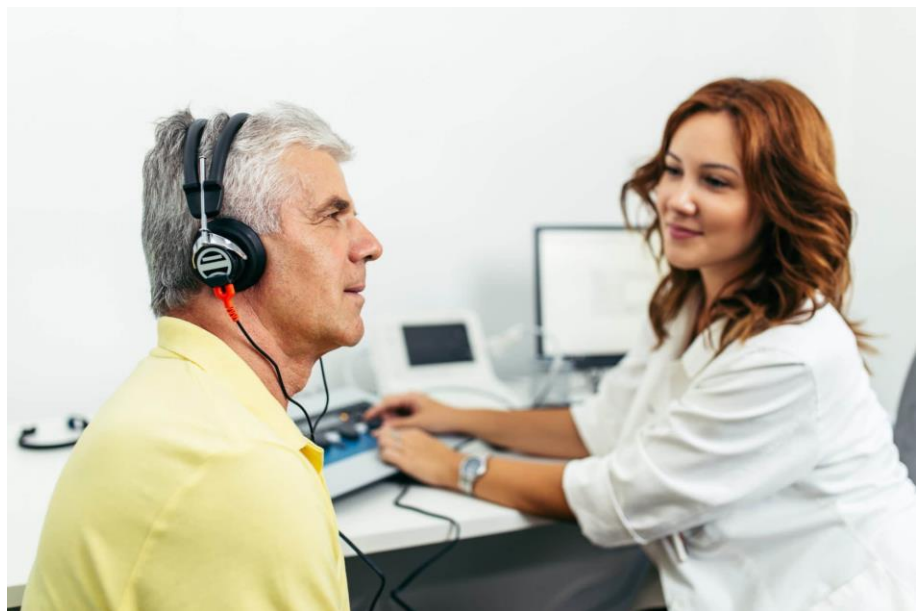
1. **Use contrasting colors** – Add colored tape to stair edges to improve depth perception and reduce fall risks.
2. **Rotate your tableware** – Use dark plates for light-colored foods and light plates for darker foods to improve visibility.
3. **Adjust font settings** – Increase text size and boldness on your devices; try a white font on a black background for better readability.
4. **Try voice-activated technology** – Smart home assistants and screen readers can help with everyday tasks.
5. **Use magnifiers** – Handheld magnifiers or computer video magnifiers can enlarge text on books, newspapers, and screens.
6. **Modify lighting** – Experiment with brighter lights, dimming settings, or anti-glare filters to find what works best for you.

Protecting Your Hearing

Get Regular Hearing Screenings

Hearing health is just as important as vision health. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) recommends adults over 50 get a hearing screening every three years, even if they don't notice problems.

Unchecked hearing loss can also impact social well-being. "People who struggle to hear often withdraw from conversations, which can lead to loneliness and even depression," explains audiologist DeMari.



4 Ways to Adjust to Hearing Loss

1. **Get fitted for a hearing aid** – Hearing aids can amplify sounds and improve clarity, but only about 1 in 5 people who need one actually use one, according to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD). A trained audiologist can help you find the right fit.
2. **Use captions for videos and TV** – Look for the CC (closed captioning) icon when watching shows on your computer or TV.
3. **Try captioned phones** – These display the caller’s words on a screen, making conversations easier to follow.
4. **Avoid excessive volume** – Turning up the sound isn’t always the solution. Loud noise can further damage your hearing, so seek adaptive strategies instead.

Take Charge of Your Senses

Vision and hearing changes don’t have to limit your life. By being proactive with screenings, seeking expert guidance, and using adaptive tools, you can continue to navigate the world with confidence.

Eye care Providers in Terre Haute

MyEyeDr.

Phone: (812) 232-0073

Address: 506 Wabash Ave

Judson Family Vision Care

Phone: (812) 232-1000

Address: 643 Ohio St

Eye-Mart

Phone: (812) 234-6500

Address: 114 W Honey Creek

Dr. Tavel Family Eye Care

Phone: (812) 234-4434

Address: 3013 US Hwy 41 South

Pearle Vision

Phone: (812) 234-6500

Address: 114 W Honey Creek Pkwy

Visionworks Doctors of Optometry

Phone: (812) 232-2988

Address: 4440 S US Hwy 41

Valley Vision Eye Care

Phone: (812) 872-2020

Address: 26 North Brown Avenue

Union Medical Group (UAP Clinic) Eye Center

Phone: (812) 242-3700

Address: 422 Poplar St

LensCrafters

Phone: (812) 232-3999

Address: 3401 U.S. 41 Suite A1

Hearing Screening and Testing in Terre Haute

Beltone

Phone: (812) 232-8172

Address: 4142 S 7th St

Online Hearing Test:

beltone.com

Union Health

Phone: (812) 234-3788

Phone: (812) 242-3170

Help U Hear

Phone: (812) 237-009

Address: 500 E Springhill Dr
Suite C**Connect Hearing by AudioNova**

Phone: (812) 232-4700

Address: 629 E Springhill Dr

Invitation to Dining in the Dark



2ND ANNUAL **DINING IN THE**

Join The WILL Center's L.I.V.E. Program for a night of food & entertainment, featuring a blindfolded dining experience to raise awareness for vision impairment.



Event Information

March 13th, 2025

5:30pm - 9:00pm

Forsythe Community Center
1100 Girl Scout Ln, Terre Haute, IN
47807

Comedians

Tannah McDonald
Max Wampler
Patrick Eaton
Justin Seymour

Meal Prepared by

Butta's Better BBQ

Sponsored by

FUSON
AUTOMOTIVE

DARK

All proceeds will benefit The WILL Center and its programs, helping to sustain and expand our services for the community.

- \$60 per person
- \$400 for a table of 8
- 50/50 Raffle
- Auction
- Cash Bar by Tree House Bar & Grill

Tickets Purchased Thru:



or scan the QR code

