

Blind Beginnings



Blind Beginnings Society
ANNUAL REPORT
2020



Our Mission

To inspire children and youth who are blind or partially sighted and their families, providing diverse programs, experiences, counselling, peer support, and opportunities for them to create fulfilling lives.

Blind Beginnings sees enormous possibilities in children and youth who are blind or partially sighted, and we passionately challenge any perspectives that limit what they are capable of achieving.

If they can dream it - we can help them do it.

Our Commitment

To Diversity & Inclusion

Diversity and Inclusion are and always have been integral parts of the core Blind Beginnings values. We recognize that there is always room for us to grow, listen, learn and participate in support of anti-racism. For this reason, we have formed a Diversity Committee that consists of board and staff members in order for us to take meaningful action in support of Black Lives Matter and other organizations that work against systemic racism against Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC).

Limitless Potential is all we see

Our Vision

Our vision includes a world where seeing things differently inspires limitless possibilities.

Our Values

- Build a diverse and inclusive community
- Value and respect all abilities
- Lead by example
- Empower through growth and learning
- Challenge the limits of possibility
- Adapt and persevere



Our journey of reconciliation is a long one, and we at Blind Beginnings are grateful to be learning more about the land on which we live, work, and play. As we expand and connect families around the province, we are fortunate to have access to land and space that can support our mission. Blind Beginnings acknowledges that we carry out our programs throughout the lands of Indigenous nations across the province. We would also like to acknowledge that our office is located on the unceded homelands of the Qiqéyt (Qayqayt) First Nation.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The first quarter of 2020 was a busy one with highlights being; a range of family Community Discovery outings in multiple regions of the province, our Vancouver Island Family Retreat, the launch of our monthly Baby Beginnings program in Metro-Vancouver, and our Trivia Night fundraiser at Moose's Down Under. Like most organizations, we had to abruptly stop face-to-face programming at the end of March, and within two weeks we went from 90 percent face-to-face programming to 100 percent virtual. Over the remainder of the year we have tried a wide range of virtual programming working hard to offer something for children and youth of all ages, as well as their families. One of our goals for 2020 was to do a better job of reaching our families living outside Metro-Vancouver, and thanks to the pandemic, we did achieve that goal. We have learned that we can provide support to our families virtually, and are committed to continuing to offer all BC families access to our programs in the future.

For the first time since 2010, we were not able to offer our annual Youth Leadership training weekend, but instead developed and implemented a virtual training program. We also offered new ways that youth can volunteer with the organization including writing for our new blog, co-hosting on our new podcast, helping to lead our Creating Connections nights and Kids Connect support groups, and being mentors to the new Youth Leaders entering the program. We also hired two of our Youth Mentors as part-time Program Assistants in the summer, and two other youth mentors on contract to facilitate our Teen Tech, and Independent Living Skills Creating Confidence Workshops as well as our very popular new Baking with

Blind Beginnings program. Youth who have benefited from the support of Blind Beginnings are giving back to the organization in meaningful ways while also demonstrating to younger children and youth the capabilities of people who are blind.

Covid-19 presented new challenges for everybody, but a positive consequence of that was that funders also recognized there was a need to fund counselling support. For the first time ever, Blind Beginnings received grant funds to offer counselling support to our members. This funding supports Blind Beginnings children, youth, and parents from across BC with individual counselling from registered clinical counsellors who live with a visual impairment.

Our team also grew and changed this year. We created a Communications Coordinator role with Rob Mineault joining the team in April, we said good-bye to our Program Coordinator Carrie Tse, and welcomed our new Program and Volunteer Coordinator Emily Burkholder in August. Onboarding new staff while working from home is challenging, but our Director of Operations Lia Dickey did a fabulous job to ensure that all members of the team felt supported and valued throughout the year. Our weekly virtual staff meetings became something our team looked forward to as a place to connect, share challenges, celebrate successes, and strengthen our cohesive unit.

We sadly had to cancel what would have been our 10th annual in-person Gala. Thanks to our committed Fundraising Committee of volunteers, we problem-solved our way through planning a virtual event and were thrilled

to host a profitable and successful virtual Gala in the fall.

Another highlight of 2020 was receiving our first year of support from Social Venture Partners in the form of a significant financial contribution and mentorship in many areas of capacity building. With the support of SVP, we were introduced to Steven Hill, a facilitator who led us through a virtual Strategic Planning process. This new Strategic Plan will help guide the organization over the next 3 years as we continue to adapt and grow.

Thank you to those donors who have continued to support us through these challenging times, to the Board and Fundraising volunteers who have remained committed to Blind Beginnings, and to our families and youth who have continued to attend programs and join us in making the best of a difficult situation. We have missed seeing you all in person, and hope to be able to do so in 2021.



Shawn Marsolais
Executive Director

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As I reflect upon the year 2020, there are many accomplishments and discoveries that come to mind. At the beginning of the year, it was business as usual. We were all looking forward to the normal activities and experiences, not knowing that a pandemic would change our lives.

We held a very successful Trivia Night in February. We were all looking forward to the community discovery activities, the in person Youth Leadership weekend, etc. But with the advent of the pandemic, most of our core business had to be modified or cancelled if there was no way to substitute in person experiences with virtual ones. But despite our concerns about the changes, some wonderful opportunities have opened up for the organization.

We have been able to encourage wider provincial participation in virtual events. We even had program assistants in different parts of the province leading hikes virtually. Virtual camping activities in the summer were fun and popular with the kids. There is a Baking program, Kids Connect, Story Time, career exploration and Parent support still happening. The Limitless podcast has a lot of fans. Most of our virtual programs will continue, even once the impact of the pandemic diminishes.

In September, the organization took part in a very beneficial strategic planning process which will allow Blind Beginnings to continue to grow and evolve. Because of this process, we will learn how to evaluate our programs, grow our donor base, add to our counselling work, and much much more. We are indebted to Social Venture Partners for helping our organization to become even better in the future.

This past year, we also held a virtual gala. While it was not the same as being able to meet in person, this was a very successful event and provided much needed funds for the organization. Unlike other similar charities, we did not struggle as much financially because we had a wonderful bequest from the Nancy Yeadon estate which has given us some financial security as we plan for the future.

I want to thank our donors, granters, parents and partners. Without all of you, Blind Beginnings would not be as effective and thriving as it currently is today. I would also like to thank all of our staff for their hard work, dedication, flexibility and commitment.



Betty Nobel
President of the Board 2020

MESSAGE FROM THE YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE

This year has been a challenging one overall due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Despite this, however, the organization has continued to carry on during this time. Many of our youth committees such as the Craft Making one have been put on hold, but this also allowed for many youth programs to be moved online and new committees to emerge.

For instance, the Annual Youth Leadership Workshop is a youth program that was converted to an online format. Even though this meant that the youth could not gather in person to bond, experience the city, etc, they were able to not only join from their homes, but we had more access to youth in various parts of the province which has always been one of the organization's goals. This was a case for most of our programs as we began to spread our reach through the virtual world.

Additionally, new projects and programs were launched within the pandemic. For instance, the Blind Beginnings Limitless Podcast was a youth-led project that had been put on the backburner for many years. However, last June we successfully launched the Limitless Podcast and Blog as we had time to devote to it. New programs such as Exploring Work Wednesdays were also created for youth and children to come and learn about different jobs and employment by listening to blind individuals talk about their jobs.

Overall, although there were some challenges due to the current global situation, this year allowed for new beginnings and changes in how we approach our programs to not only meet the needs of our kids, but to keep up our work during a time when it is even more prevalent.



Harjinder Saran (Jinnie)
Youth Representative 2020



Growing Through COVID-19

Prior to COVID-19, the majority of our programs were face-to-face, allowing for life skill instruction and hands-on learning for children and youth who are blind or partially sighted. These face-to-face programs also allowed parents to see positive blind role models actively participating and volunteering in our programs which in turn may have provided them a sense of hope for their child's future. Families had many opportunities to meet each other, feel less isolated and alone, feel like part of a community, and communities were introduced to our positive perspective of blindness.

Realizing face-to-face programming had to be halted due to the pandemic, last April we pivoted dramatically and began offering as many of our face-to-face programs virtually as we could, while creating new online programming that could fill the gaps left by not being able to run programs in person.

We got creative! We invited blind role models to lead many of our virtual programs, and we offered programming frequently enough for families to develop that community of support. We found that suddenly we were able to reach and service families in remote parts of the Province that we previously were unable to. Having to create programming that ran exclusively online limited us in terms of the types of programs we could offer, however, the silver lining of this was that it extended our reach well beyond the Lower Mainland.

We created a wide variety of workshops, activities and programs. We offered individual counselling and support groups, yoga and fitness classes, a Harry Potter Book Club, Summer Camp Nights, Independent Living Skills workshops, Baking workshops, Assistive Technology workshops, and even managed to hold a successful virtual version of our Annual Gala. Despite the limitations and stressors that COVID-19 brought, 2020 was still a successful year in which the organization grew and was busier and more productive than ever.

COVID-19 Program Goals

- Reduce feelings of isolation and anxiety
- Provide emotional support
- Suggest coping strategies
- Build a community
- Provide resources
- Create opportunities for social interaction
- Provide opportunities for physical activity
- Build connections and friendships

The screenshot shows the Blind Beginnings website interface. At the top right is a yellow 'DONATE' button. The navigation menu includes 'ABOUT', 'PROGRAMS', 'NEWS', 'EVENTS', 'GET INVOLVED', 'LIMITLESS', 'RESOURCES', and 'CONTACT'. The main content area is titled 'CONNECTING THROUGH COVID-19' and features a blue banner with the same title. Below the banner, there is a 'LATEST NEWS' section with several news items, including 'Now Accepting Applications for the 2021 Lori Sheppard Memorial Fund Bursaries', 'We're Hiring - Donor Relations and Administrative Assistant', and 'We're hiring Program Assistants!'. There is also an 'UPCOMING EVENTS' section with dates like 'June 19, 2021' and 'June 22, 2021'.

An example of what our website looked like during the height of COVID-19, featuring our "Connecting Through COVID-19" set of programming.

Blind Beginnings

Theory of Change

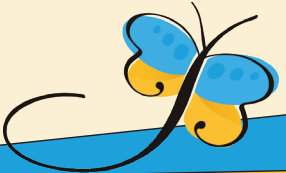
Our theory of change requires parents, children, teachers and society to adopt a **positive perspective of blindness**. When this happens, children and youth who are blind or partially sighted will **live a more fulfilling life**. Blind Beginnings, through its programs and services, is working toward a world where **seeing things differently inspires limitless possibilities**, where children can **reach their potential**, without being held back by perceived limitations.

Changing Perspectives

Historically, people have negative stereotypes of blindness, lacking the understanding of the abilities of people who are blind. Even parents of a child who is blind or partially sighted can have these negative stereotypes and doubts that their child can grow up to be independent, capable and employable, resulting in feelings of hopelessness.

Blind Beginnings shifts these negative perceptions of blindness from the past by **supporting** the child/youth who is blind and their immediate family, as well as **working to change society's perceptions of blindness**.

This greater understanding will result in parents being more likely to already know a positive blind role model when their child is born, resulting in parents' views of blindness being more accurate, less negative and deficit based. They will assume their child who is blind will be able to achieve the same things as a sighted child. With these **raised expectations**, they will **encourage and support** their child to pursue their **dreams and goals**.



Children and youth are empowered and confident in their abilities. Society has a greater acceptance and understanding which leads to inclusivity and people who are blind being integrated into a wide range of jobs and all aspects of society.

Community Discovery

Through educational workshops, recreational clubs and community outings, blind or partially sighted children are exposed to skill-building activities, experiences, and hands-on learning that support cognitive and motor development, communication, independent travel, and social networking. While children increase independence and self-esteem, parents access resources to help their child discover and develop their true capacities.

While COVID-19 did have an impact on our ability to take groups out into the community and do a variety of activities and experiential learning experiences, we were able to participate in a few outings before the COVID-19 restrictions in March. This included a ski trip at Grouse Mountain in partnership with Vancouver Adaptive Snow Sports in the Lower Mainland, as well as a Snowshoe Excursion in Kamloops, in conjunction with Discover Sun Peaks.

During the summer of 2020, we also were able to hold several small outdoor hikes at various locations around BC that adhered to the current Provincial Health mandates and that were socially distanced.



On January 25, 2020, in partnership with The Vancouver Adaptive Snow Sports, we discovered skiing on Grouse Mountain.



On August 22, 2020 we discovered the Song Bird and Boardwalk Loop within the Creston Wildlife Management Area.



Community Discovery Outings 2020

- Skiing on Grouse Mountain
- Snowshoeing at Sun Peaks
- Summer Hike at Rocky Point Park
- Summer Hike at Kokanee Creek Canyon
- Summer Hike at Pacific Spirit Park



ADAPTED FOR COVID

BAKING WITH BLIND BEGINNINGS

COVID-19 placed much of our Community Discovery program in jeopardy and required us to ask some very challenging questions. How would we deliver programming that was fun, skill building, and helped connect families together, but in an online environment? The answer came in the form of a brand new program that we aptly named, Baking with Blind Beginnings.

One of our Youth Alumni, Jillian Sloane, agreed to help us run this series which was designed to give families a chance to network by creating a family friendly program that encouraged the whole family to participate, but also would help children who were blind or partially sighted to begin to build confidence in the kitchen and create a foundation for much needed independent living skills.

Using the Zoom Networking Platform, we have gathered families together online and baked everything from cookies to cake, and even zucchini loaf!



Community Discovery Outcomes

- Children increase self confidence & skills development
- Children improve motor skills and are motivated to try new activities
- Parents increase expectations
- Families strengthen bonds and build networks



Adventure & Active Camps & Lifestyle

No set of programs was hit as hard by COVID-19 as our Adventure Camps & Active Lifestyles Programs. COVID-19 restrictions required us to cancel all overnight camps or offerings that involved gathering together.

However, as we were all locked down at home and restricted from gathering with friends, we knew that exercise was still an important component of physical and mental wellness, especially during stressful times such as the Spring and Summer of 2020.

For children and youth who are blind or partially sighted, being stuck inside during lockdown not only made it harder to socialize, but also to get the much needed exercise that they would normally get by being outside. We knew we needed to adapt and provide an option for our children and youth, so we created several different online physical activity based workshop offerings that we formed under the banner of **Active Beginnings**. These ran from April to September of 2020 and included Fitness Fridays, Beginning and Intermediate Yoga and Pilates, and Sporty Saturdays.

These offerings were run by a Yoga Alliance Certified Fitness Instructor who was partially sighted and were tailored for all levels of experience and fitness and were all heavily described in order to allow everyone to follow along.



ADAPTED FOR COVID

ONLINE FITNESS

Physical fitness and regular exercise is vitally important for youth at all times, but this is especially true during periods of lockdown, where being outdoors or participating in regular activities isn't possible. From April through September of 2020 we offered various workshop and exercise classes remotely on the Zoom Meeting Platform and led by an alliance certified fitness instructor. These classes and workshops were offered at several different levels, from Beginner to Intermediate, and focused on fitness activities such as Yoga and Pilates, which don't require a great deal of workout space and that were able to be adapted and described for participants that were blind or partially sighted. The goals of these programs were to encourage the development of regular exercise schedules as well as the knowledge and confidence to attend a fitness class in their community post-COVID.



Active Beginnings Offerings

- Fitness Fridays
- Sporty Saturdays
- Foundations of Yoga and Fitness



ADAPTED FOR COVID

SUMMER CAMP NIGHTS

By the summer of 2020, restrictions had begun to lift slightly, but any indoor gathering of more than 10 people or overnight camps were still prohibited. Once again we pivoted our regular Summer programming and partnered with CNIB BC to provide online versions of some classic Camp activities for our Youth and their families!

One might think that typical Camp-related activities done virtually over Zoom would not be possible. However, if the year 2020 taught us anything, it was that a bit of willpower, innovation, and imagination -- along with a broadband connection -- and anything is possible.

These activities were offered through Zoom and ran weekly on Wednesday nights through the majority of July and August.

The activities included Hang Out sessions which provided the children and youth valuable social time together, Movie Nights, virtual "Campfire" sing-a-longs, games such as Disney-themed Music Bingo and even an online Talent Show.

Family Adventure Camps and Summer Camp Nights
in partnership with



The Importance of an Active Lifestyle

When children who are blind or partially sighted are not given the opportunity to challenge themselves physically at a young age, they often grow up hesitant to try new activities, thus impacting their self-confidence. And as this cycle continues, these children feel left out of group activities and feelings of loneliness and isolation can build. When they become adults they might not feel comfortable to attend a class in their community, even if it is accessible, because of their inexperience, feelings of inadequacy and lower level of physical fitness.



Active Lifestyle Outcomes

- Improves physical strength, endurance and balance
- Reduces stress, anxiety, fatigue, and depression
- Increases likelihood of maintaining an active lifestyle
- Strengthens social connections with peers
- Demonstrates to parents that yoga, pilates, and fitness are accessible activities for youth who are blind



Youth Leadership

& Pre-Employment Program



ADAPTED FOR COVID

ONLINE YOUTH LEADERSHIP

In 2020 our in-person training weekend had to be canceled because of COVID-19. Instead, we offered a 6-week online training program via Zoom which proved to be very successful.

We covered six major topics which included:

- Team Building/What makes a good leader
- Communication: Empathy & Active Listening
- Self-advocacy: How to Ask for What You Need
- Public Speaking & Presentation Skills
- Professionalism & Attitude
- Benefits of Volunteering and Youth Leader Opportunities Within Blind Beginnings

A first-of-its-kind in BC, the Youth Leadership & Pre-employment Program prepares youth who are blind or partially sighted for their future transition to work and adult life. While the youth build employment and life skills, they also learn to see their true abilities and not be held back by limits set by others.



ADAPTED FOR COVID

EXPLORING WORK WEDNESDAYS

Exploring Work Wednesday consists of one or more interviews with various working professionals who are blind or partially sighted. We have interviewed a wide range of professionals over the year, including a Registered Massage therapist, Occupational Therapist, Recreational Therapist, Social Worker, Registered Clinical Counselor, published Author, Server at the Dark Table restaurant, PR Consultant, Martial Arts Instructor, Accessibility Coordinator, and many others! Shawn additionally asks about challenges, training, education and accommodations in their jobs during the interview and each session ends with a Question and Answer period, which gives the attending youth a chance to ask their own questions about the discussed job fields. We have had participation from youth, youth leaders, parents and volunteers.



ADAPTED FOR COVID

MEET A MENTOR

For 6 weeks, every Monday between April and May, Shawn Marsolais hosted "Meet a Mentor Monday" where she interviewed a different Blind Beginnings Youth Leader. Youth talked about their visual impairments, their interests, their accomplishments and their goals for the future. Each session had a Question and Answer period at the end.

“

I really enjoyed meeting all of these people and hearing other people's experiences, a lot of which I could relate to. I think I gained confidence in advocating for myself, as well as some tips on public speaking and it was nice to be reminded that there are a lot of other people like me.

- Participant from 2020
Online Youth Leadership Program

”

After completion of the Leadership Training, youth participate in a 12-month Volunteer Practicum, which includes Blind Beginnings volunteer opportunities. Youth are expected to volunteer a minimum of 45 hours and assist with a minimum of 2 youth-led projects.



Youth Volunteer Opportunities

- Holiday Party 2020
- Park Royal White Cane Week Event
- Early Intervention Family Retreat
- Testing Apps and Forms for Accessibility
- Creating Connections Workshops
- Harry Potter Book Club
- Limitless Podcast
- Limitless Blog



Youth Leadership & Pre-Employment Outcomes

- Develops and enhances employable skills
- Expands personal boundaries and increases confidence
- Increases independence
- Helps prepare youth for employment searches
- Increases public understanding of blindness, resulting in greater inclusivity

Early Intervention

Today in British Columbia, there are approximately 800 families raising children who are blind or partially sighted and an additional 50 each year with children who are newly diagnosed. Our Early Intervention Program offers workshops, activities, and support groups for children, and parents, as well as early intervention retreats for families with preschoolers. Information, resources, and emotional support are provided to families by registered clinical counsellors, blindness professionals and by other parents.



ADAPTED FOR COVID

ONLINE BABY BEGINNINGS

Baby Beginnings was designed for parents raising babies who are blind or partially sighted under 2 years of age to begin to socialize babies and introduce them to songs and stories, to connect with other parents also raising a baby with a vision impairment, and to receive support and ask questions of professionals who understand the impact of visual impairment. During COVID-19, it moved online, we increased the age limit to include families with children under five years, and we paired it with Accessible Story Time. Every two weeks families could check-in with Margaret Hanke, Early Child Intervention Specialist from Vision Loss Rehabilitation – BC, to ask specific questions about their child's development or vision prior to enjoying story-time.



ADAPTED FOR COVID

ADAM'S ACCESSIBLE STORY TIME

Adam is a volunteer reader who would join us in our Zoom Room to read various stories to the children and families every other Saturday morning. We dubbed this offering Accessible Story Time because all the pictures and concepts are carefully described. While the children enjoy the stories, the parents also learn how to make story time meaningful for their child who is blind or partially sighted.



Accessible Story Time was in partnership with

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Early Intervention Retreat March 6th - 8th 2020 Kiwi Cove Lodge - Vancouver Island

From March 6-8th 2020 we held an Early Intervention Retreat on Vancouver Island at the Kiwi Cove Lodge. We were able to welcome 6 families with children aged 11 months to 8 years old. Throughout the retreat families participated in activities such as sensory walks, music therapy and making mobility fun.

Early Intervention Retreat held in partnership with

**VISION LOSS
REHABILITATION**
CANADA



Early Intervention Outcomes

- Provides support and resources for Parents
- Builds connection between families as well as much needed support networks
- Decreases feelings of isolation
- Parents feel more equipped to support and encourage their child who is blind or partially sighted
- Children gain confidence and grow to live more fulfilling lives

“ We are so grateful for the opportunity to connect with other parents who are sharing this journey with us. It was incredible to find common ground with other families from across the Lower Mainland. I don't feel so alone now.

- **Shawna, Mom of a baby who is partially sighted** ”

We are grateful to the community partners who attend our retreats to provide information and resources to Blind Beginnings families. **BC Blind Sports**, Recreation Therapist from **Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children**, **Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired**, **CNIB**, **Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada – BC**, and **Teachers of the Visually Impaired** attended our 2020 retreat.

Counselling & Support



When a parent learns that their child has little or no vision, they can experience a range of challenging emotions such as; fear, hopelessness, sadness, depression, anger, shame, guilt, grief, and loss. Being able to process these complicated feelings with a registered counsellor who understands blindness will increase the speed and likelihood that the parent will come to a place of acceptance around their child's vision. For children and teens who are blind or partially sighted, they too benefit from support from a counsellor who understands blindness.



Counselling & Support Outcomes

- Children develop a higher self-concept, set more challenging goals, and enjoy greater success
- Parents are more proactive in seeking resources and opportunities to maximize their child's success
- Parents learn to advocate for their child to ensure they reached full potential
- Reduces feelings of isolation
- Builds acceptance and develops hope for the future



We don't have a lot of opportunities for our child to connect with people who have visual impairments in Northern BC. He loved his calls!

- Parent of a school aged child



In April of 2020, we created a collection of support groups and workshops that we called "Connecting through COVID-19". It offered online workshops and support groups 6 days a week for children and youth who are blind or partially sighted and their families including Kids Connect, Parents Support Groups, Baby Beginnings and individual counselling.



Support Groups

- Kids Connect
- Creating Connections
- Virtual Parent's Night Out
- Individual Counselling Sessions

We offer Virtual Parent's Night Out as part of a contract for service with

**VISION LOSS
REHABILITATION**
CANADA

with funds provided by the Ministry of Children and Families.



Creating Confidence

The Creating Confidence Program was launched in 2009 to help children and youth who are blind or partially sighted build self-confidence, self-acceptance and independence. Over a series of workshop sessions, both in person, online, and in the community, children learn to develop skills and confidence. Some of the topics covered are Independent Living Skills, technology use, how to use and understand body language, facial expressions, gestures, and personal space. They also learn how to prepare their look according to the social situation, how to help others feel at ease with their visual impairment, and how to behave in a variety of social and professional settings.

Creating Confidence has typically been offered in two formats: Summer Intensive and Monthly Workshops. Due to Covid 19, we adapted all 2020 offerings to be online. We offered a 6 week **Independent Living Skills workshop** in the summer and in the fall we began a 4 week online session called **Teen Tech** where we covered topics surrounding assistive technology.



Creating Confidence Workshops

- Teen Tech Workshop
- Creating Confidence Summer Workshop
- Creating Confidence – Monthly Workshop
- Independent Living Skills Workshop



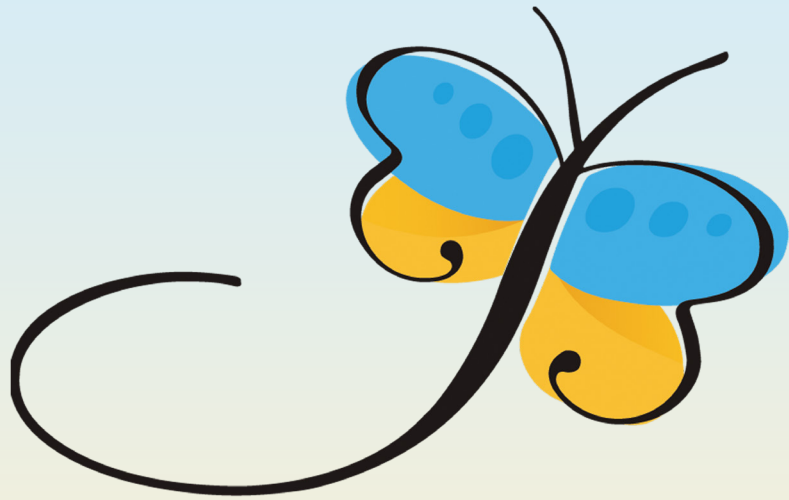
I really love how everyone is just laughing with bits of humour in the lessons and learning. I especially love the facilitators also because of their senses of humour and just how they are so kind and compassionate to everyone.

– Independent Living Skills Workshop Participant



Creating Confidence Outcomes

- Equips youth with skills they need to live independently
- Boosts self-acceptance and confidence
- Develops friendships with peers who are blind or partially sighted, reducing loneliness and feelings of isolation
- Gains self-advocacy skills



LIMITLESS PODCAST

In June of 2020, Shawn Marsolais, the Executive Director of Blind Beginnings, and a collection of past and present youth leaders gathered online in a Zoom Room and recorded the inaugural episode of the Blind Beginnings Limitless Podcast.

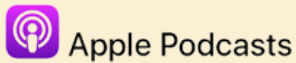
The Podcast was an idea that had been percolating for some time, but scheduling and staff capacity limitations made it challenging to get it off the ground. 2020 saw an increase in staff capacity while COVID-19 and the subsequent restrictions opened up people's schedules. It was a perfect storm of opportunity, and on that warm summer evening in June, the Limitless Podcast was born with an aptly named episode entitled, "Episode 1 - Why We Made A Podcast".

The Podcast releases once per week, and is anchored by Shawn Marsolais who performs hosting duties, with a rotation of regular co-hosts that consist of program youth and alumni. Monthly Limitless Committee meetings see both staff and youth volunteers coming together to plan content for both the Limitless Podcast as well as the Limitless Blog. Topics for the show are pitched by both staff as well as youth, giving both the organization as well as the youth we serve a voice for issues and topics that help shift the perspective on blindness.

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LIMITLESS

Blind Beginnings **PODCAST**



LIMITLESS BLOG

Along with the development and creation of the Limitless Podcast came the Limitless Blog. We wanted to give our youth another medium in which to express themselves and give voice to topics and discussions that are important to them and that could help educate those outside of the blind or partially sighted community. Youth that have graduated from our Youth Leadership Program are eligible for co-hosting duties on the Limitless Podcast as well as being able to submit written articles for the Blog.



*A screenshot of the embedded played player of the Limitless Podcast.
[Click to check out our full library of episodes!](#)*



 *Blind Beginnings*
HARVESTING
HOPE **ONLINE GALA**
2020



The theme we chose for the 2020 Blind Beginnings Gala was "Harvesting Hope". We wanted to choose a fall theme that expressed a sense of optimism since at the time we all had been dealing with COVID-19 for over 7 months.

Despite the fact that this was our first attempt at holding a virtual event like this, the evening was a huge success, with a night of speeches, video presentations, musical performances, a virtual wine tasting, Silent Auction, 50/50 Draw, and a Raffle. Thanks to our many sponsors, volunteers, and donors, we were able to raise over \$33,000!



2020 Gala Supporters

Our **Harvesting Hope Online Gala 2020** could not have been as much of a success as it was without the generous donations and support provided by many individuals, companies, and organizations. We are truly grateful for their support!

Acuity Advocate Sponsors



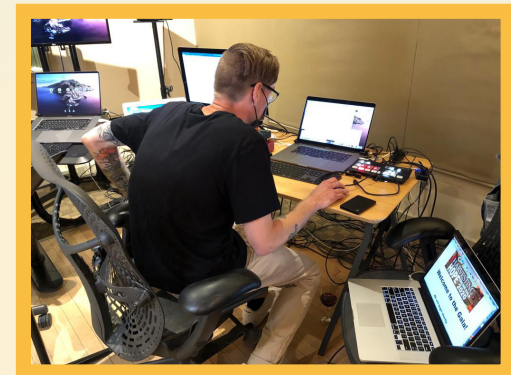
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Fundraising Committee

Blind Beginnings Supporters



We are very grateful for the support we receive from our Community of Supporters which includes individuals, corporations, foundations and government grants. It is with this financial support and belief in our mission that we are able to provide programs and services for children and youth who are blind or partially sighted and their families so that these young people can grow to realize their full potential.

We value and appreciate every donation we receive!

Major Supporters

We acknowledge the financial support of the Province of British Columbia



**Social
Venture
Partners**

**The Estate of Nancy Yeadon
The Walsh Foundation**

\$10,001 - \$25,000

Dorothy Ryan Estate Fund held at

vancoover
foundation

The Jules Foundation

\$5,001 - \$10,000



vancoover
foundation

\$1,001 - \$5,000

**Al Roadburg Foundation
Chris Spencer Foundation
Edith Lando Charitable
Foundation
F.K. Morrow Foundation
The Hamber Foundation
Margie Ellis**

**Mamida Holding Inc.
Maureen Boyd
Maxwell and Gaylene Munday
Michael Marsolais
Sean Gercsak
Ventana Construction**



Lori Sheppard Memorial Fund held at

vancoover
foundation



\$500 - \$1,000

**Andrea Moyan
Betty Nobel
Don Safnuk
Fidelity Investments
John Healy
John Moyan**

**John Polano
Ken and Marilyn
Rushton
Rose-Marie Marsolais
Roberto Valente
Wawanesa Insurance**

We also want to acknowledge and offer our gratitude to the **21 monthly donors** who contributed over **\$5300** in 2020! Thank you also to everyone who made a donation in support of our **Trivia Night and our Gala** in 2020!

Blind Beginnings Volunteers



The National Volunteer Week theme for 2021 was "The Value of One, The Power of Many". It reflected on the awe-inspiring acts of kindness by millions of individuals and the magic that happens when we work together towards a common purpose.

The theme really resonated with us when looking back at 2020. Each and every volunteer means so much to us, and every one of their contributions, no matter how small they may seem, collectively allows Blind Beginnings to continue to help change the lives of children and youth who are blind or partially sighted and their families.

2020 was obviously a challenging year for all of us, which makes the time, effort and dedication that was given to us by our volunteers even more precious. Words can not express what their commitments have meant, not only to Blind Beginnings as an organization, but to every single child, youth, and parent that we serve.

Their hard work in supporting our events and programs has made the past year a successful one. During a year where we had to pivot and adapt to the new realities of COVID-19, our volunteers were right there with us, ready to provide support, guidance, and their voices wherever we needed. From special events such as Trivia Night 2020 (which we managed to hold in person at Moose's Down Under just prior to the beginning of the pandemic) and the online version of our Annual Gala, to the continued support of programs and even valuable guidance to help our organization continue to grow and evolve, our volunteers selflessly sacrificed their time and energy to our cause.

COVID-19 restrictions meant that the need for volunteers to help with face to face programming was greatly reduced. However, the volunteers that contributed to our various committees were the fundamental reason we were able to not only adapt our organization and programming during a Global Pandemic, but actually grow and thrive. Committees such as our Finance Committee, Fundraising Committee, Governance Committee and the newly formed Diversity Committee were predominantly made up of volunteers and vital to help us do everything from fundraise and plan events to helping develop organizational policies. We can't thank our Committee members enough for the donation of their time, skills, and invaluable knowledge that helped us through a very difficult year.

Founding Board of Directors

Shawn Marsolais **Fraser Loch** **Sharon Disanto**
Peter Moroney **Bridie Cotter**

Board of Directors 2020



Betty Nobel
President



Maria Zeldis
Vice President



Kim Zebehazy
Secretary



Richard Marion
Treasurer



Victoria Levy
Member at Large



Sofeya Devji
Member at Large



Candice Mah
Member at Large



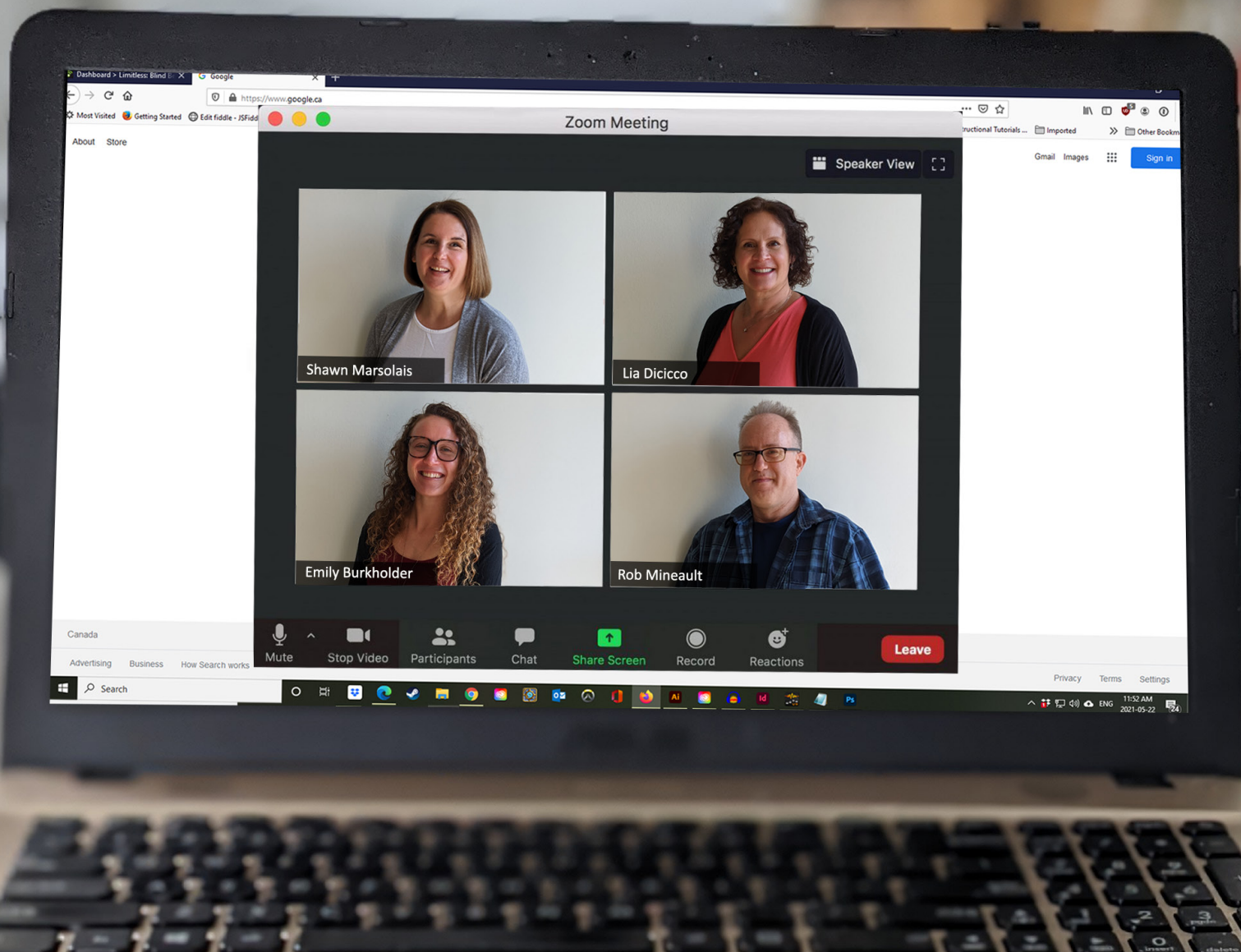
Grant Hardy
Member at Large



Kathie Johnson
Member at Large



Harjinder Saran
Youth Representative



Blind Beginnings

Staff

Shawn Marsolais
Lia Diccico
Emily Burkholder
Rob Mineault

Executive Director
Director of Operations
Program & Volunteer Coordinator
Communications Coordinator

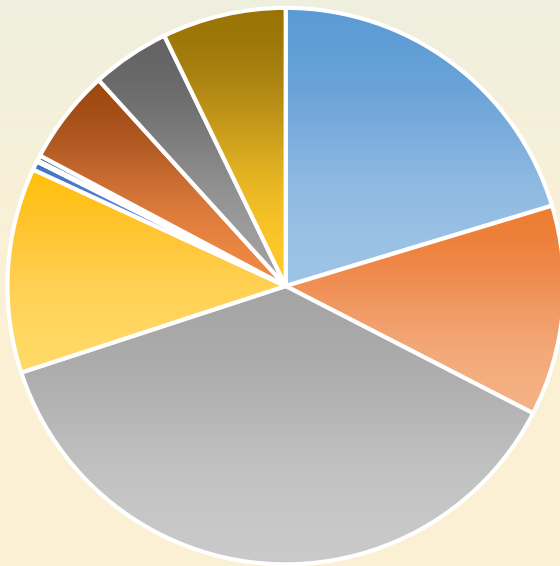
Blind Beginnings Financial Summary

Blind Beginnings' financial position remained strong during 2020. We are grateful to have continued to receive a sustained level of funding and financial support during the pandemic. In addition, we were particularly grateful to receive a bequest from the Estate of Nancy Yeadon which the Board of Directors has decided to defer for future office space or facility requirements. Blind Beginnings earns income for service as a subcontractor as part of a contract between Vision Loss Rehab BC and the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Blind Beginnings also earns revenue from membership fees and through a variety of fundraising events.

Blind Beginnings saw a decrease in overall expenses in 2020 from 2019 due to the cancellation of most in person programs.

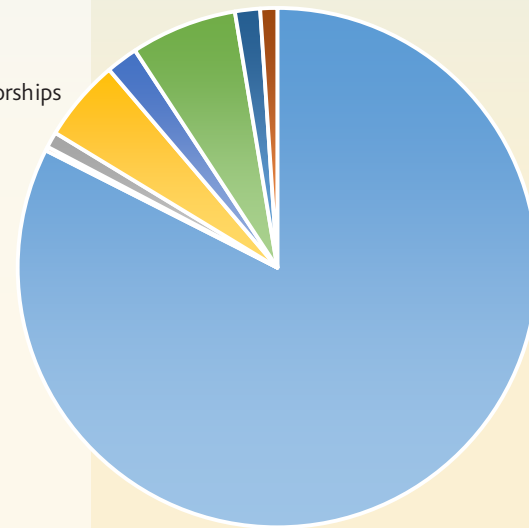
The total revenue for 2020 was **\$368,814** and the total expenses were **\$340,035** which left us with an excess of revenue over expenses of **\$28,779**.

Revenue



- Contract services
- Individual Donations & In Kind
- Foundation Grants and Donations
- Corporate Donations, Grants & Sponsorships
- Memberships
- Program Registration fees
- Interest & Miscellaneous income
- Fundraisers - Gala & Trivia Night
- Government Wage Subsidies
- BC Gaming Grant

Expenses



- Salaries & Contractors & Professional Fees
- Program Travel
- Outreach & Advertising
- Office & Administrative Expenses
- Program Supplies
- Facility Rentals
- Program Event Services & Fees
- Bursaries & Scholarships

REVENUE	
Contract Services	\$75,000
Individual Donations & In Kind	\$45,067
Foundation Grants and Donations	\$137,984
Corporate Donations, Grants & Sponsorships	\$43,927
Memberships	\$1,870
Program registration fees	\$300
Interest & Miscellaneous income	\$1,118
Fundraisers -Gala & Trivia Night	\$20,277
Government Wage Subsidies	\$16,770
BC Gaming Grant	\$26,500

EXPENSES	
Salaries and Contractors & Professional Fees	\$280,377
Program Travel	\$848
Outreach and Advertising	\$3,328
Office & administrative expenses	\$17,349
Program Supplies	\$6,727
Facility Rentals	\$22,500
Program Event Services & Fees	\$5,306
Bursaries & Scholarships	\$3,600

Epilogue

2020 was both a year of substantial challenges as well as great successes. It also saw Blind Beginnings Staff and Board members create a Strategic Plan with the generous support and a facilitator provided by Social Venture Partners that will guide the organization for the next three years.

This collaborative document has informed our Operational Plan for 2021 and will continue to be the foundation for a variety of capacity building initiatives and program growth into the future. It has provided the structure needed to build organizational capacity and increase our reach.

With the help of this Strategic Plan and support from SVP Vancouver, 2021 continues to see the organization grow and improve in a variety of ways, from building effective infrastructure to creating more powerful evaluation methods to help us measure our impact and create more robust and impactful programming.

As 2021 continues to shift back into a state that more closely resembles pre-pandemic life, Blind Beginnings continues to develop new strategies to evolve into the future. As we follow our operational path, projects such as an improved Communications strategy and a more dynamic website are beginning to take form, slated to be rolled out later in the year.

The team also has continued to grow, with a fifth team member being added in the early summer of 2021. As our team grows so do our organizational needs, and in 2021 we will be exploring the possibility of a new expanded space to meet our requirements. Our Programs team is also working hard on developing a post-COVID-19 strategy which will allow us to return to being able to offer face to face programming within the Lower Mainland while continuing to provide dynamic and impactful programming remotely to those outside.

It only seems fitting that our 2019 Annual Report ended with a paragraph about COVID-19 and its implications while our 2020 ends with the excitement and optimism of building a stronger and more dynamic organization in a post-COVID-19 world. Once again, we would like to thank every single participant, member, sponsor, donor, and volunteer that helped see Blind Beginnings through the tempest that was 2020 and we look forward to continuing to serve children and youth who are blind or partially sighted and their families all over British Columbia.



How You Can Be Involved!

Encourage your friends or family to **sign up as monthly donors**. These ongoing donations will help us build sustainable funding into the future.

Share with your networks that Blind Beginnings is available and excited to provide workshops and presentations on blindness to schools, community programs, or businesses. Help us work to shift the perspective of what it means to be blind or partially sighted!

Join our volunteer committees such as the Fundraising Committee. Help us plan fun and profitable fundraising events. Can't help us plan our events? Attend instead!

Follow us on **Facebook**, **Instagram** and **Twitter** and share our posts with your friends and followers often and encourage them to do the same. This will help us reach more families, raise awareness, and increase funding.

Subscribe, listen, and share our weekly "Blind Beginnings Limitless Podcast" and weekly Limitless Blog. You can find both on our website at www.blindbeginnings.ca.

Host a fundraising event to raise funds on behalf of Blind Beginnings. Contact lia@blindbeginnings.ca for approval, guidelines, and information on how we can help support your event.

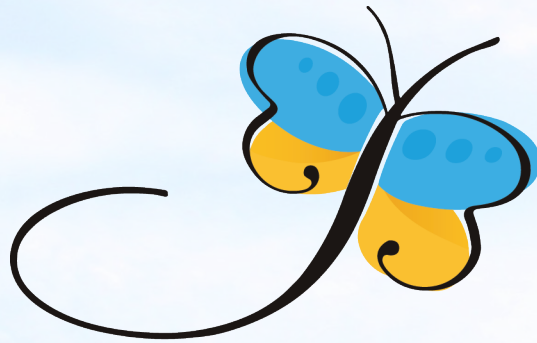
Sign up to our email list and keep up to date on all Blind Beginnings events and news.

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info@blindbeginnings.ca
www.blindbeginnings.ca

Charitable Registration #: 81329-0616-RR0001



Blind Beginnings



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Listen to the **Limitless Podcast** at <https://www.blindbeginnings.ca/limitless>

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