A Welcomed Letter

Everyone likes getting mail. But there’s nothing quite like hearing from someone whose life has been changed through your efforts. When The Iris Network was recently awarded a contract to continue its 35-year legacy of delivering community-based blindness rehabilitation services and support, that was welcomed news. But it was the letters and messages of congratulation from clients and supporters that put the icing on the cake.

One such message was from retired aerospace engineer Ken Riddle. He wrote: “Please accept my congratulations and endorsement of your award. As I have stated in my past correspondence, my wife Joanne and I are now living in Florida full time. The help we received during the years I was a client with you was outstanding, and helped me gain the tools and skills to be independent and helpful in the home and community. Your work with me is key to extending my quality of life and confidence in my future. I recently celebrated my 82nd birthday, and my wife and I are celebrating our 60th anniversary in August. Our wishes and prayers are with your team in continued future success.”

Thanks to a referral from The Iris Network, Ken is continuing to improve on his skills through a local agency in Florida. He wrote, “Earlier this year, I completed a six-week, four-day-per-week program on being independent and hope to be a part of workshops on improving my legally blind computer skills with voice interaction.”

Looking back over his life thus far, Ken said, “I had good fortune, and the opportunity to have a good education. With the help of excellent medical care, the progression of my vision loss was slowed for 20 years. Now, I am legally blind, and the help I’ve received from The Iris Network and my local agency is invaluable. I am continuing to learn. Continuing awareness, continuing sensitivity, continuing education – those things are hard to get in a

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Portland, Maine - July 17, 2017: The Iris Network was notified that it is the successful bidder for Maine's 5-year contract for community-based blindness rehabilitation services. While The Iris Network has held this contract for over 35 years, the new contract award comes after an expensive, 16 month government procurement process.

Stephen J. Trabold, Acting Executive Director of The Iris Network said, "Congratulations to all of the members of our team who put this winning proposal together. This award validates the dedication and hard-work of our highly experienced professional staff who travel throughout the state to provide vision rehabilitation and low-vision services." Trabold continued "now that this costly process is behind us, we can focus on delivering world-class services so our clients can live independently and work in their communities."

David Joyce, Chair of The Iris Network's Board of Directors, added that "the long-standing collaborative relationship between The Iris Network and Maine's Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired is strong." He said that "while the award is conditioned on entry into a contract with DBVI, The Iris Network has done that many times in the past. I'm confident that a new contract starting October 1st will be successfully negotiated."

The contract will run for two years and is renewable for up to three more years. It supports the delivery of primary vision rehabilitation by up to 11 Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapists and highly qualified support staff. While most clients are seniors who want to continue to live independently and avoid unnecessary institutionalization at great taxpayer expense, an important element of the program provides vocational rehabilitation and job readiness training to transition-age youth and working-age adults who want to work regardless of significant vision loss or blindness.

We acknowledge with gratitude the sponsorship of a portion of the cost of production and distribution of this newsletter by Maine's Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

JOIN The Iris Network Giving Society

The Iris Network announces the creation of The Iris Network Giving Society. Society members are donors who realize that The Iris Network needs a steady, reliable stream of income to take the organization from good to great. Society members have agreed to have a set donation amount withdrawn from their bank account or charged to their credit card each month. For more information, please contact Regal Naseef at (207) 518-5016 or rnaseef@theiris.org or donate online at www.theiris.org/donate (and choose monthly donation and amount).

Use Voiceye app downloaded to a SMARTphone to have the page read audibly, scanning the code (upper right).

If you know someone who is being challenged by vision loss, call The Iris Network at (207) 774-6273 or (800) 715-0097. For more information, our website is www.theiris.org.

Like us on Facebook: The Iris Network
Dear Iris Network (continued from page 1)

15-30-minute session with a doctor. But those are the kinds of things organizations like The Iris Network offer. I now know I don’t have to fly on my own. They will be there to guide me.”

Ken’s message shows that a positive attitude is everything when it comes to meeting the everyday challenges of vision loss. The Iris Network tailors its rehabilitative services to match each individual’s needs, whether it be markings on appliances, brighter lighting, Braille, technology, or safe mobility. The Iris Network is a dependable resource for community and center-based rehabilitation, along with low vision services.

A Message for His Granddaughter

Ray Howard is one of 29 million Americans with diabetes. He’s been a diabetic for 68 of his 78 years, and began losing his vision 40 years ago. He’s among the roughly 36,000 Mainers who have lost their vision due to diabetic retinopathy.

Once, when a rehabilitation specialist from The Iris Network came to visit, she brought along a recording device for him to try. To demonstrate how it worked, she encouraged him to begin by recording something, and then she’d show him how to erase it. But when he began to speak, she knew right away that this message was a keeper. It was a message to his granddaughter. He wanted her to hear it someday in the future, perhaps when he was no longer around.

“I wanted my granddaughter to know that I love her very much; she’ll never know how much,” he said. “Mia came to live with us when she was 8 years old, after her mother died. She’s 14 now.”

Ray is currently living in a nursing home in Bingham. “When I had to have my leg removed, it made me awful mad,” he said, but added that he bolsters his spirits through nightly prayer. “I pray that I’ll be able to live long enough to see my two grandchildren grow up. I want to spend more time with my family.”

For Ray, family is everything. “I grew up in a family with 15 kids” he said. “One of my brothers lived to be 93, and I want to make it to 100!” He’s proud of his younger daughter’s son, who just graduated high school and is working in Bangor: “He’s earning as he’s learning. That’s how it should be.”

The Iris Network is grateful to be part of Ray’s extended family and will continue to offer him assistance as his needs change. When he began losing feeling in his fingers, he had returned the equipment that helped him learn Braille. But lately, he’s eager to refresh the Braille he learned so he can play cribbage again. He is looking forward to his next visit from The Iris Network so that he can continue to interact and stay in touch with those whom he loves so dearly.

QUICK FACTS ABOUT DIABETIC EYE DISEASE

According to the National Eye Institute, diabetic eye disease comprises a group of eye conditions that affect people with diabetes. These include: diabetic retinopathy, diabetic macular edema (swelling), cataract (clouding), and glaucoma, all of which have the potential to cause severe vision loss and blindness.

• Diabetic retinopathy is the leading cause of vision loss among working-age adults. It often goes unnoticed until vision loss occurs. People with diabetes should get a comprehensive dilated eye exam at least once a year.

• Early detection, timely treatment, and appropriate follow-up care can protect against vision loss.
A Lesson in Independence

Suzanne Crawford

“I’ve always been an independent person,” said Suzanne Crawford, “and The Iris Network has helped me maintain my independence. They’ve done very well in providing services all around our county.” Suzanne and her husband Paul are perched on the easternmost edge of Maine.

Suzanne was the Dean of Continuing Education, International and Summer Programs for Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio. When she moved to Maine, she began teaching psychology and sociology at Washington County Community College in Calais. She encouraged her students to develop a curiosity for life just beyond the border – across the St. Croix River to New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia, Canada – and to never stop learning.

It was only when macular degeneration began to blur her central vision that she considered retiring from the teaching profession she loves. “I began losing my vision a couple of years ago,” she said. “I knew it was coming, because both my mother and grandmother had it. My mother lived to the age of 94, and taught herself Braille at 80! When my vision began to deteriorate, I thought: Well, it’s happening. But if I can’t see my students’ faces, I’m in trouble. I need to be able to interact with them.”

The Iris Network helped her explore various technological solutions, such as projecting the classroom on a whiteboard behind her. They introduced her to high intensity lights for her home which she really loves, and got her access to talking books.

Now retired, Suzanne continues to stay active. She serves on hospital and library boards, and is a founding board member of the Maine Chapter of the Fulbright Association. She is also one of the founders of The Commons Eastport, a condominium rental and gallery featuring the work of 120 artisans. She enjoys greeting visitors and giving them tours of the art on display.

She no longer drives, but depends on her husband and friends to get where she needs to go. “First, I stopped driving at night. Then for a time, I only drove on roads I knew. Now, I don’t drive even in the daytime, except occasionally to my mailbox,” she said.

Independence coupled with interdependence and self-advocacy are the keys to living a full life -- for everyone -- but especially for those with impaired vision. Suzanne often travels to the national and international conventions of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership, which works in rural areas on water and wastewater developments. “The Iris Network taught me how to use a white cane, and I use it when I’m in airports. I always ask for someone to help me read the gates.”

She and her husband are planning to move soon to Bozeman, Montana. “We’ll be near our grandchildren. I’ll be able to walk to downtown, to the University and the senior center,” she said. She’s grateful for the mobility training she received from The Iris Network, and will be spreading the word about the services available. “The Iris Network has been a Godsend to me,” she said.