

the
Iris
network
Vision with no limits.



FY'23 Annual REPORT

October 01, 2022 - September 30, 2023



David Barnwell, DBA, MBA

A Message from the President & Executive Director

Looking back on the successes of FY23, it is evident that The Iris Network has demonstrated exceptional collaboration, dedication, and innovation in supporting individuals with vision impairment or blindness. This year marks a significant chapter in our journey towards becoming a comprehensive and compassionate network for those in need.

One of the major highlights of the year was the addition of two Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialists (CATIS) to our team, which increased our capacity to bring innovative assistive technology to individuals with vision impairment. This certification represents our unwavering commitment to provide comprehensive training and support to our community members.

In addition, the opening of our new dorm space on the Portland campus has provided a nurturing environment for program participants to learn, grow, and gain new experiences. This initiative aligns with our mission to create a robust support system for the visually impaired community.

In FY24, we are thrilled to launch our new Community Development Corporation project, which aims to drive opportunities for upward mobility and economic independence for persons with vision impairment or blindness. This signifies our commitment to fostering resilience, empowerment, and hope in the lives of every person we serve.

None of these achievements would have been possible without the steadfast support of our partners, donors, and dedicated team members. Your contributions enable us to create an inclusive world where individuals with vision impairment can reach their full potential.

At The Iris Network, we are more than just service providers. We are advocates for change, and we strive to create a world that fosters the dreams and aspirations of all individuals. Together, let us persist in our collective efforts to brighten the way for those whose lives are impacted by visual impairment.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership in this meaningful endeavor.

With warmest regards,

Volunteer Feature: Marie



Marie is a remarkable member of our community and a dedicated volunteer whose contributions have blossomed into an oasis of beauty and sustainability.

Marie channeled her passion for gardening into an extraordinary project last year which benefited our assisted living facility. With her hands in the soil from dawn till dusk, she tirelessly weeded, pruned, and planted, transforming our outdoor spaces into picturesque landscapes. Her efforts have not only beautified our surroundings but have also created a serene and inviting haven for residents, staff, and visitors alike.

“When COVID restrictions lifted, I noticed residents maintained the daily habits of spending time in their rooms and venturing to the dining room. I know that I enjoy the outdoors...the birds, the smells, the sounds so I thought I may be able to break the trend that had been formed by creating an area for others to experience this as well.”

Marie’s vision extended beyond mere aesthetics; she crafted an environment that celebrates and supports local biodiversity. By choosing plants that attract essential pollinators, like bees and butterflies, Marie has played a crucial role in nurturing the local ecosystem. Her initiative to hang bird feeders brought the delightful melodies of songbirds to our back courtyard, adding a layer of tranquil auditory beauty to the entire campus that houses both our assisted living facility and Rehabilitation Training Center.

“The garden has been a passion - creating a pleasant outdoor experience with the bird feeders, herbs, and other plants - because I wanted to see the residents get outside.”

Marie’s contribution has been far-reaching, creating not just a garden but a sanctuary where nature thrives. Further proof of the safe and inviting habitat that she created, The Iris Network Campus now has cotton-tail rabbits residing on its grounds. This space has become a source of joy, relaxation, and connection to nature for everyone.

“I do this for the clients and bringing the community together.”

The Iris Network is immensely grateful for Marie’s dedication and hard work. Her volunteerism exemplifies the profound difference one person can make in enriching the lives of many.

Through her efforts, Marie has laid down roots that will continue to grow, inspire, and impact the Iris Park Apartments community and our main campus for years to come. We are proud to have Marie as a volunteer and extend our deepest thanks for her invaluable contribution.

Staff Spotlight: Aisha

Aisha, a Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (CVRT) who recently completed her Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist (CATIS) courses in 2023, works in communities within Lincoln, Knox, and Waldo county. She also lends her expertise at the Rehabilitation Training Center in Portland.

Aisha's journey with The Iris Network began in 2010, bringing a unique mix of personal experience and passion to the field. Her grandfather, who was a significant part of her life, experienced vision loss due to macular degeneration and diabetes.

While at The Iris Network, in addition to becoming one of our senior CVRT's, Aisha has reached many milestones. From learning and achieving CATIS, to presenting with peers and serving on boards related to certification. Aisha also serves as the Lead for our Vision Rehabilitation Therapy Assistants (VRTA's), which she enjoys greatly.

Every interaction is a learning experience for Aisha. She gains great satisfaction from engaging with people from all walks of life, using her knowledge to help people live their everyday lives. From home maintenance to technology use and adaptive cooking or crafting, Aisha finds the teaching aspect of her work exceptionally rewarding.

The primary aim of Aisha's work is to simplify tasks for those affected by vision loss. With a fondness for solving complex challenges, she continually discovers and shares new resources to promote independence among her clients.

In her career at The Iris Network, Aisha finds the "light-bulb moments" of independence to be especially memorable. Be it learning to access print independently or using an assistive device to call a family member without mis-dialing. Every little



accomplishment that brings her clients closer to independence counts. She values building lasting professional relationships where clients are not just taught but also feel comfortable reaching out for assistance or sharing resources they discover.

We are incredibly fortunate to have a dedicated professional like Aisha as a part of our network, always pushing boundaries to facilitate independence and learning in the lives of the people she serves. We can't wait to see what she'll achieve next at The Iris Network.

FY'23 in Review

We were honored to assist 578 clients, providing them with personalized services. Our dedication translated to 12,454 service hours directly benefiting clients, and we journeyed more than 64,016 miles to provide services.



Our committed kitchen staff served a total of 5,607 meals to the residents of Iris Park Apartments and campus dorm students, not only providing essential nourishment but also a sense of community.

We acquired a new wheelchair-accessible van, enhancing our capacity to offer more flexible and comfortable transportation options for those we serve, underscoring our dedication to improving mobility and accessibility.



For the third consecutive year, we successfully hosted the Life Camp summer program at The Iris Network, in collaboration with the Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Catholic Charities, providing an enriching and empowering experience for participants.

Staff member Sara Nappi, was featured in the short film Picnic and A Little Mutiny. This film explored the lives of four individuals navigating life with vision impairment or blindness. Sara's involvement played a critical role in illuminating the everyday challenges and achievements of our community.



Mike Elovitz, cook at Iris Park Apartments, was recognized as the Employee of the Year. Mike's exceptional dedication, including taking on additional responsibilities such as snow removal and Resident Support shifts, exemplifies the spirit of our organization.

Our volunteers, generously donated nearly 800 hours of their time. Their dedication and effort were instrumental in our accomplishments.



Thank you for your continuous dedication to our mission and work.



the
Iris
network
Vision with no limits.

Helping people with vision impairment or blindness attain independence and community integration.

Follow us on social!



In partnership with

MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF
LABOR

Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired