

## **LION WORLD SERVICES FOR THE BLIND**

At a Lions International Convention in Cedar Creek, Ohio, in 1925 Helen Keller challenged our Lion forefathers to take up the cause of blindness and become "knights of the blind." They accepted and service to the blind became the Lions major service activity, and has been ever since.

They did the right thing. Even today we are the only service organization devoted to serving the blind. In fact there are too few people looking after the interests of the blind. The responsibility is almost totally ours. The blind need us and they depend on our support.

The need was great in 1925, but the challenge is far greater today – opportunities to serve are even greater. At least 1.5 million Americans are blind or suffer severe visual impairment. 1.3 million are of employable age and 75 percent are unemployed or underemployed. Just as many live in total dependence on others to provide for their needs, because they lack the skills to live independently.

In spite of medical advancements and new sight saving techniques, over 50,000 Americans annually suffer severe loss of vision. The fastest growing group of those suffering blindness is the elderly, and without the skills necessary for independent living, many will be institutionalized. Only 10-15 percent of the blind or visually impaired were born that way. 85 percent or more experienced sight for at least a portion of their lives and are forced to adjust to blindness.

For many their lives become shattered – life as they formerly knew it – and as we know it – becomes lost to them. They become dependent on others – family, government, institutions – some of it good care, some of it poor. If the need is far greater today, so are the opportunities to serve the blind. With improved civil rights legislation and vast changes and improvements in technology, the ingredients are there to vastly improve the lives of the blind.

Lions World Services for the Blind (LWSB), formerly Arkansas Enterprises for the Blind, a project of the Lions of Arkansas, and supported by Lions in the surrounding states including Texas, has all that it takes to rebuild those lives, and provide a new life for the blind and visually impaired. LWSB is a comprehensive rehabilitation center for blind and visually impaired adults. It is leader in the field, with 53 years of experience it is the largest, most complete, rehabilitation

center for the blind in the world. It is the only one that does all that they do, and its programs have been copied all over the world.

The mission of LWSB is "to enable people who are blind or visually impaired to function independently and to live full, productive lives with dignity and self-respect, as well as to promote a positive public awareness of blindness."

LWSB literally works miracles of "new life" – people come to the center afraid, frustrated, angry and depressed – but almost always with hope and enthusiasm. They gradually grow in confidence and skill and eventually leave as different people – self-assured, confident people ready to take their place in the mainstream of society, which they so desperately want to do, and are capable of doing.

LWSB has served over 8,000 in 53 years from all 50 states and 56 other countries, 944 from Texas and 20 in the past year. The number of Texans being trained by LWSB has grown dramatically and in a few years LWSB will be training more Texans than people from Arkansas.

It costs an average of \$15,000 to provide complete rehabilitation services for a trainee. It has been determined that it costs approximately \$1,000,000 to support for life through public assistance someone disabled by blindness.

While 57% of LWSB funding comes from state and federal rehabilitation funds the Lions provide most of the remaining budget needs. With current federal budget cuts, rehab funds are drying up and LWSB is struggling to make up the rest. More than ever they need the help of fellow Lions in the other states that LWSB serves. They need our help to pay for the training of Texans. Texas Lions are fortunate for the opportunity to join Arkansas in this very unique yet critical way to serve the blind – our people who are blind. We ask for your continued support in helping LWSB help the blind people of Texas. Let's show that we are truly "knights of the Blind" and give them our best support, help make your Club a 100% donor.

Lions are always welcome to visit LWSB when they are in the Little Rock area, make a visit, you will be rewarded by what you can see and feel from the students.