Annual Report
2016

“"If you can dream it, you can do it."”
—Helen Keller
The mission of Helen Keller Services is to enable individuals who are blind, visually-impaired, deaf-blind or have combined hearing-vision loss to live, work and thrive in the communities of their choice. HKS offers services and programs through two divisions: Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults and Helen Keller Services for the Blind.

Helen Keller National Center is the only comprehensive national program that provides vocational and independent living skills training exclusively to youths and adults with combined vision and hearing loss.

Helen Keller Services for the Blind is a comprehensive rehabilitation program serving individuals of all ages who are blind or visually impaired, and who may have additional disabilities, living in the New York metropolitan area.
Contents

President's Letter ....................................................................................................................... 2
Helen Keller National Center ...................................................................................................... 4
Helen Keller Services for the Blind ............................................................................................. 8
Events ......................................................................................................................................... 12
In the Community ....................................................................................................................... 14
Special Visitors ........................................................................................................................... 16
Financial Statements .................................................................................................................. 18
Our Contributors ....................................................................................................................... 20
Board of Trustees ...................................................................................................................... 23
Locations ..................................................................................................................................... 24
How to Donate ............................................................................................................................ back cover
President’s Letter

As the new President and Chief Executive Officer of Helen Keller Services (HKS) and as a past member of the Board of Trustees for more than sixteen years, it is my pleasure to speak to those of you who are taking the time to read this Annual Report and to learn about this venerable and long serving organization.

At our 2016 Gala at the Garden City Hotel, I had the chance to speak out about why HKS is so important to those we serve. I noted that HKS enables individuals who are blind or deaf-blind to be independent, to pursue their educations to the level they can achieve or aspire, to live a life free of anxiety and limits, to work (nothing liberates more than providing for oneself) and to thrive in the communities of their choice.

HKS provides direct services to individuals in New York City, Nassau and Suffolk Counties and throughout the United States. We accomplish this truly awesome work through our local centers in Brooklyn, Hempstead, and Ronkonkoma, through our residences in Wantagh and Port Washington, through our National Center in Sands Point, and our regional offices throughout the United States—touching all 50 states.

I am a 45-year veteran of public service in New York City (NYC). Most recently I served as the Commissioner of the NYC Office of Emergency Management (OEM) (I was that guy standing by Mayor Bloomberg during every major emergency that befell our city—I did not smile that much for good reason). Before that, I served as NYC Fire Commissioner (FDNY) and in a number of other key positions in NYC government.

I mention my past to make a point. At both OEM and FDNY, we served the people in our city by keeping them safe or educating them on how they could protect themselves and their families. We were, in short, “boots on the ground” for our
constituents. At HKS I found a similar mission—directly serving people in need—and it fit my mind's eye.

Recently, I was asked to describe the type of staff that has made HKS so successful in serving its blind and deaf-blind clients. I responded that the people of HKS are true professionals—educated, patient, dedicated, caring, determined—helping those whom we serve to raise their spirits and hopes. HKS staff are our trainers of adaptive technology; job coaches; day-habilitation specialists; teachers in the Children's Learning Center; 24/7/365 caregivers at our consumer residences; doctors in our low vision clinics; interpreters at our National Center; facilities personnel; technology experts; fiscal and human resources specialists, all dedicated to one mission—serving our consumers and making their lives better.

For HKSB staff their rewards are the graduates from our preschool in Brooklyn; a job secured; a person trained; a successful interview; confidence built; a smile; and lots of hugs. For the staff at the National Center their reward is recognition throughout the country as the leader in enabling individuals who are deaf-blind to become whatever they aspire to be.

While my tenure as HKS' CEO has only recently begun, my aspirations for even greater success and achievements are looking to the long term for consistent accomplishments in bettering the lives of those who are served by us! What better wish could I have for 2017 as the New Year approaches.

Joe Bruno
Spotlight On: The Deaf-Blind Immersion Seminar

Comprehensive vocational rehabilitation programs for individuals who are deaf-blind are constantly evolving and HKNC is committed to remaining the national leader in developing new and innovative ways of providing training to our consumers. In addition to HKNC’s regular vocational and independent living skills training programs, we added a new component in 2016—the Deaf-Blind Immersion Seminar (DBIS).

The DBIS offers a consumer who is deaf-blind with intellectual disabilities and his/her support team a unique and individualized training experience for a five-day seminar. In 2016, two consumers participated in DBIS—the first was Kelly from New York with her job coach and the second was Randy, an older gentleman from Iowa with his sister, community residence supervisor and the director of a residential facility.

Kelly participated in a work experience learning about the vending machine business. In addition, she delivered mail to staff in their offices and participated in meal preparation. Kelly learned how to sign “more work” and began initiating this and other signs for the first time. She also learned several touch signals that were used when waiting for the elevator and while grocery shopping. Kelly’s mother has now implemented several touch and object symbols at home. The staff in Kelly’s day program was receptive to setting up a manual snack machine at their site and will look into a work experience for her stocking the soda machines on their campus. In order to support Kelly in the community,
the HKNC team introduced communication cards which she was successfully able to use to order a donut and drink at Dunkin’ Donuts and other stores.

Randy had lived in a state institution for over thirty years and had no activities or ways to communicate to the staff. His sister became more and more frustrated by his situation. “I wanted to talk to him about fun things. I wanted to let him know where we were going.”

Using object cues and touch signals, the HKNC team began to see Randy responding to simple requests and, by the end of the week, independently finding his way from the HKNC cafeteria to his room by relearning how to use his white cane, trailing the wall and counting doors. A personalized book of object symbols was developed and the home team have now learned how to use it effectively with Randy and have developed around 30 signs to converse with him. As a result of the DBIS he is able to live in a group home and enjoy some leisure activities, such as gardening and macramé, as well as participate in some community activities. Now when Randy’s sister comes to visit, she is able to use the alternative communication methods she learned to tell him where they are going and know that he understands her.

We anticipate being able to provide more people, like the two above mentioned consumers, an opportunity to participate in this enriching program in the future.

HKNC Programs & Services

For the past 34 years, the Helen Keller National Center has spear-headed a national campaign in recognition of the achievements and capabilities of people who are deaf-blind. Although the last week in June is the official Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week (DBAW), the important message the week conveys goes on throughout the entire year. The 2016 DBAW reminds us that a productive life often includes a right many take for granted—the opportunity for gainful employment. The focus of this national campaign is to encourage employers to recognize that people who are deaf-blind have marketable skills and strategies to compete and succeed in the workplace.

“For nearly 50 years,” notes Sue Ruzenski, HKNC executive director, “HKNC has provided employment training experiences not only to deaf-blind individuals but also has worked closely with employers, providing education and ongoing support to ensure a successful outcome. Time and again business owners recognize the value of bringing onboard qualified deaf-blind employees who are a great addition to their workforce.”
Grey Healthcare Group in New York City, has generously created, pro bono, Deaf-Blind Awareness Week posters for more than 20 years. This year they developed two posters. The first poster features former student Marissa G. who returned to her job as a high school guidance counselor after her training at the Center. The second poster features David C., a former student and now a resident of Destiny Home who is successfully employed at Cozymel's Coastal Mex restaurant. In addition to the posters Grey Healthcare Group made two short videos of Marissa and David to be used to help spread the word to thousands of employers around the world via HKNC’s website and social media.

A New Initiative Launched at HKNC in 2016

This year, HKNC established the Deaf-Blind National Community of Practice (DB NCOP), a group of agencies who are committed to improving services and advocating for people who are deaf-blind. There are currently 36 agencies across the U.S., Canada and Puerto Rico represented in the DB NCOP and more are continuing to join.

The goal of the new DB NCOP is to create closer partnerships between these agencies in order to enhance services, advocate, and develop best practices in order to increase opportunities and supports with and for people who are deaf-blind. Partner agencies commit to sharing information through quarterly national phone calls, a DB NCOP Google Group and HKNC’s CONNECT! newsletter.

Three national phone calls were made this year. The prominent topics of discussion were transition services for young adults, Support Service Providers (SSPs) and braille training for deaf-blind adults. As a result of these phone calls, subcommittees were formed to support advocacy efforts for SSP funding and training and development of best practices in braille training.

Focus on Professional Training

The year, 2016, was a busy year for the Information, Research and Professional Development Department (IRPD) which was established to provide quality information, research, training and best practices for individuals who are deaf-blind, their families and professionals working to support them.

This past year the IRPD launched three online, multimedia learning courses for professionals: The “Confident Living” course is for people supporting older adults with combined vision and hearing loss; “Working with Individuals who are Deaf-Blind” provides vocational rehabilitation counselors and other related professionals with information and resources that will help them support individuals who are deaf-blind to find and maintain fulfilling employment; the “VRS Training” course is designed to increase the awareness and knowledge of Video Relay Service interpreters on how to most effectively meet the needs of consumers who are deaf-blind.
During the past year, the IRPD conducted 12 training seminars on the following topics: Touch signals to enhance communication with a person who is deaf-blind; a confident living program for senior citizens who are losing their vision and hearing and want to remain independent; and whole life planning seminar for staff in group homes to learn skills to work with their deaf-blind consumers.

The department also publishes a tri-annual online international newsletter, CONNECT! The newsletter not only reports the activities at HKNC but also reports about new technologies and other topics of interest to people who are deaf-blind.

Preparing for Work

While students are attending the HKNC training program, they have an opportunity to experience employment in real world settings. Working with staff in the Vocational Services Department, they explore different work experiences in fields that interest them. These work experiences enable students to obtain marketable skills and learn firsthand what it takes to work in that field on a day-to-day basis. In some cases, they have resulted in full time work for the students.

In 2016, there were 64 work experiences at 21 different work sites in diverse fields, such as assembly, computer repair, stock associate, floral arranging, teacher’s assistant, food preparation, law clerk and more. Jacqueline G.'s story below is just one example of positive interaction between employer and employee.

Jackie on the Job

"She peels, she chops, she works with the cooks; she loads the dishwasher; she is always eager to do whatever task we ask of her!" This is how Maura Dillon, director of the Food Services Department at St. Francis Hospital in Roslyn, New York, described student Jacqueline G., a young woman from Texas who has been doing a work experience at the hospital for several months. Anthony Baffo, operations manager, said, "The good thing about Jackie is that she sees what has to be done and takes the initiative to do things without prompting." The first cook, Michael McCabe, thought so highly of Jackie's skills that he presented her with her own knife and took her aside to find a special place to keep it.

Ms. Dillon was so pleased with Jackie’s capabilities and work ethic. "If she lived here in New York, she would definitely be a hire. I am already thinking about the letter of recommendation I will write for Jackie."
Since 1893, Helen Keller Services for the Blind (HKSB) has been a pioneer in the field of blindness rehabilitation and education. HKSB has offices in Kings, Nassau and Suffolk Counties, from which we also serve Queens and Richmond Counties.

Spotlight On: ExploreAbility

Amy had never travelled independently before. Born blind, Amy at times relied on the assistance of others for daily activities that are often taken for granted. Amy was an active young adult striving to reach her highest level of independence. As a solution to the needs of Amy and other teens who are legally blind with other disabilities, Helen Keller Services for the Blind, with support from the New York State Commission for the Blind, created a new program.

“ExploreAbility” is a month-long initiative that assesses the vocational potential of young people ages 15 to 21. An intensive schedule of daily training in orientation and mobility, vision rehabilitation, social work and pre-vocational skills are offered along with team building and social experiences, such as bowling and restaurant dining.

Amy is a great success story. She developed independence in travelling and cooking. The first thing Amy did after the program ended was host a party for her friends, cooking for them from the recipes she learned during the program.
1. Amy learns to board a train safely.
2. Mikael and Leo learn about safe travelling at the MTA's Transit Museum.
3. Amy presents her finished dinner after a cooking lesson as Dan looks on.
4. Jesus learns to use a knife safely when preparing a meal.
5. After a lesson in how to dress for success, Leo pays for his “professional” clothing at TJ Maxx.
HKSB Programs & Services

Much of HKSB's rehabilitation training takes place in clients' homes and workplaces. The following are brief descriptions of HKSB's programs and services:

**Children's Learning Center**—Early Intervention, Preschool and a Parent Resource Center. In 2016, 10 children graduated from the preschool program.

**Services for Students**—Includes pre-vocational training and Camp Helen Keller—a free summer day camp for children 5 to 15 years of age. In 2016, 43 children attended Camp.

**Rehabilitation Services**—Training in safe travel and daily living skills, including social services. Under Vocational Rehabilitation Training, 152 individuals received assessments, most of which received services in 2016. Under Orientation and Mobility, 180 individuals received assessments, most of which received services in 2016. HKSB's Social Worker conducted 130 assessments with 100 individuals successfully achieving their goals which were established during assessment ("outcomes").

**Employment Services**—Includes vocational assessment and training; assessment and training in the use of adaptive software for computers; work-experience internships and job placement. The placement team conducted 55 pre-vocational assessments with 50 successful outcomes. Nine individuals received vocational skills training; 48 individuals were assessed for work-readiness with 45 work readiness outcomes. Under the Work Experience Training program, 60 individuals participated. 14 individuals were placed successfully in competitive jobs. The Assistive Technology Department conducted 101 assessments and successfully trained 46 individuals.

**Low Vision Services**—Staffed by doctors who teach clients how to maximize residual vision with lenses, magnifiers, and electronic visual aids. 913 individuals received low vision examinations.

**Services for Individuals with Multiple Impairments**—Services for developmentally-disabled adults who are blind, visually impaired and/or are deaf-blind, including a day and community habilitation program, Respite Program, residential services and Medicaid Service Coordination. There are 86 consumers in the Day Habilitation programs in both Hempstead and Ronkonkoma.

**Services for Senior Citizens**—Includes rehabilitation services, low vision and social services.

**Helen Keller Gifts**—Special occasion and holiday gift bags and baskets designed, assembled and packaged for sale by legally blind individuals.
1. Clients employed in the Helen Keller Gifts Program fulfill an order.
2. Luau Day at Camp Helen Keller.
3. A volunteer from Love on a Leash provides pet therapy for a consumer in HKSB’s Day Habilitation Program.
4. Graduation Day for the Children’s Learning Center at National Grid’s auditorium in Brooklyn.
Events

1 and 2. Our biggest year yet! 637 registrants participated in this year’s Helen’s Run/Walk at Sands Point with the assistance of over 140 volunteers! What many might not know is the story of Elsie. Many missed Elsie crossing the finish line two and a half hours after it began. Accompanied by her friend Arlene, the “95-ish” Elsie, a frequent participant in the annual event, pushed her walker throughout the course and made it to the finish line. Congratulations Elsie!

3. It’s a first! HKNC has been holding an annual Helen’s Run/Walk at its headquarters in Sands Point since 1994. In 2016, we kicked it up a notch and co-sponsored a national Helen’s Run/Walk in North Carolina! HKNC joined the North Carolina Deaf-Blind Associates in coordinating this event which attracted 105 participants and dozens of individuals who lined the streets in their support. The HKNC regional representative, Marilyn Trader, worked closely with local agencies to make this event a great success. In addition to either running or walking, the participants were able to learn more about people who are deaf-blind at various information booths located at the finish line.

4. HKSB Employment Specialists Russell Martello and Krystle Lynch (back of photo) host the first Employer Appreciation Breakfast at the HKSB Brooklyn office.
5. (Left to right) 2016 Gala Honorees Peter Meyer and Ken Daly stand with Bob Catell.

6. Enjoying the 2016 Gala are (left to right) Joe Bruno, Bob Catell and Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce president Carlo Scissura.

7. HKS Board Trustee Larry Kinitsky (second from right) with his foursome at the annual Golf Outing at Wheatley Hills.

8. Former HKS Board Trustee Joseph Mancino (second from left) with his foursome at the annual Golf Outing.

9. Children from Camp Helen Keller enjoy a train ride in Eisenhower Park during the annual day hosted by the New York State Grand Lodge Foundation, Order Sons of Italy in America.

10. HKNC students and friends gather for a group picture at HKNC’s annual Helen’s Run/Walk, held in Sands Point, New York.
In the Community

1. Students from Helen Keller National Center gather in front of one of the reflecting pools at One World Trade Center during their visit to New York City.

2. During HKSB’s Career Exploration Week for youths, participant Jorge learned to decorate cupcakes under the supervision of the Marriott Brooklyn’s head pastry chef.

3. HKSB’s Day Habilitation consumers visit a pumpkin farm.
4. Former HKSB client and Enterprise employee Luis Quintero (center) is being prepped with a microphone for an interview on HKSB’s employment services program on the Live It Up with Donna Drake show.

5. HKSB’s Job Coach/Trainer Heather Pfaff (complete with bunny ears) selling Helen Keller Gifts program baskets in the lobby of HKS’ headquarters in Brooklyn.

6. HKSB client and artist Tamara Fogel held an exhibit of her works of art in Brooklyn this summer. With help from her friends—and HKSB—Tamara has learned to live with her vision loss and continues to create works of art. All of the paintings on display were created after Tamara became legally blind.
1. HKNC’s Monica Godfrey (right) guides Ken Daly, President of National Grid as he wears sleep shades on his tour of the National Center.

2. New York State Assembly Member Ed Ra visits with the children at Camp Helen Keller.

3. At the Camp Helen Keller annual show, left to right: New York State Assembly Member Michael Montesano and HKS President Joe Bruno.

4. Also taking in the Camp Helen Keller annual show was New York State Assembly Member Tom McKevitt (on right), with Joe Bruno.
5. HKSB’s Low Vision Specialist Dr. Robert Messinger teaches New York State Assembly Member Felix Ortiz how to use a Closed Circuit Television (CCTV).

6. New York City Council Member Stephen Levin delivers words of inspiration at HKSB’s annual Children’s Learning Center preschool graduation.

7. New York City Office of Emergency Management representative Matthew Puvogel (and his dog guide Cliff!) held a workshop at HKS’ headquarters in Brooklyn on how to prepare for disasters.

8. Gala honoree Peter Meyer of TD Bank has a play date with the children of HKSB’s Children’s Learning Center.

9. (Left to right) Cashelle McLean and Chantelle Jonker of the Nkosinathi Foundation of and for Blind and Partially Sighted People in South Africa visited HKS headquarters in Brooklyn and spent a great deal of time visiting the classrooms and interacting with the teachers and children of the Children’s Learning Center.
## Financial Statements

### Helen Keller Services

**Summarized Statement of Financial Position**

**June 30, 2016**

(with comparative for 2015)

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<th>ASSETS</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2015</th>
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<td>Pledges receivable, net</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Supporting Services</strong></td>
<td>$5,397,721</td>
<td>$5,303,042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Expenses</strong></td>
<td>$29,640,197</td>
<td>$29,367,342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Net Assets before (Increase) Decrease</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in Unfunded pension obligation</td>
<td>($5,822,054)</td>
<td>($921,742)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Increase) Decrease in Unfunded pension obligation</td>
<td>($5,467,526)</td>
<td>($2,748,228)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in net assets</td>
<td>($11,289,580)</td>
<td>($3,669,971)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net assets, beginning of year</td>
<td>$32,506,207</td>
<td>$36,176,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net Assets, End of Year</strong></td>
<td>$21,216,627</td>
<td>$32,506,207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Top: HKS Grant Writer Melissa Mueller (center) showing off her thank you from the campers with Dan Gerstman of the Lisa Beth Gerstman Foundation (on left) and HKS President Joe Bruno (right) at Camp Helen Keller’s annual show.

Above, from left to right, HKSB Children’s Learning Center Principal Garth White, Michael Stalonas from the Joseph Leroy and Ann C. Warner Fund and teacher Melanie Garcia with one of her students (who found Garth’s colorful tie very interesting). The mission of the fund is to provide grants for the benefit of children with disabilities and children in foster care.
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HKNC student and resident of Destiny Home Tanisha uses a braille notetaker to communicate. HKNC thanks the Community Chest of Port Washington for supporting Destiny Home throughout the years.
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Above: HKS Board Trustee Haben Girma visited with the children in HKSB’s Children’s Learning Center this summer. From left to right: Interpreter Sandra, who is seated next to Haben on a swing in the children’s gym, communicating via a braille notetaker. At their feet is Keller, one of our students (and yes, he was named after Helen Keller!) who is face to face with Haben’s dog guide Maxine.

Below: The HKS Board of Trustees were in attendance and fully supportive of the 2016 Annual Gala. Below left: Board Trustee Al Adelman and Gala Mistress of Ceremonies, WABC-TV’s Meteorologist Amy Freeze. Middle, from left to right, HKS President Joseph F. Bruno, Romana Siracusa and Board Trustee Frank Siracusa. Below right, from left to right, TD Bank’s Adam Alshawish and Board Trustees Phil Stenger and Larry Kinitsky.
Locations

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HKSB New York City
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Brooklyn, NY 11201
718-522-2122

HKSB Nassau County
One Helen Keller Way
Hempstead, NY 11550
516-485-1234

HKSB Suffolk County
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631-424-0022

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Below: At HKNC’s headquarters in Sands Point, a senior citizen learns how to use a magnification program.
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Right: former HKNC student Marissa Gold, who was featured in the 2016 Deaf-Blind Awareness Week campaign.

Design: Anne Garland
You can change the life of someone who is blind, visually impaired or deaf-blind.

Your donation will go directly into programs that benefit people with vision loss or combined vision and hearing loss who rely on Helen Keller Services.

Please visit helenkeller.org to make a gift online.

For information on planned gifts or other ways to support Helen Keller Services, please contact the Development Department at 718-522-2122, extension 2204 or email info@helenkeller.org.