Welcome to the print version of HKNC’s electronic newsletter - CONNECT! We’ll not only be keeping you “connected” to what’s happening at the Center, but we’ll also be telling you about things that are happening of interest to people who are deaf-blind. To read the electronic version, go to https://www.helenkeller.org/hknc/newsletters

TABLE OF CONTENTS
FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S DESK ...................................................... 2
INTRODUCING HELEN KELLER SERVICES NEW PRESIDENT AND CEO .............. 3
EXPANDING HKNC SERVICES IN THE WEST COAST .................................. 3
VISITORS OF SPECIAL NOTE ................................................................. 4
“FEELING THROUGH’S” CROSS COUNTRY JOURNEY ................................ 5
DEAF-BLIND AWARENESS WEEK ............................................................. 5
ASSISTING PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF-BLIND TO BECOME EMPLOYED .......... 6
TEAMWORK BRINGS ABOUT SUCCESS ................................................... 6
HELEN’S RUN/WALK BENEFITS SSP PROGRAM ...................................... 7
2020 SPRING/SUMMER EVENTS OF INTEREST ........................................ 8
FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S DESK

A new year is always an exciting time to anticipate all the opportunities that await us for the coming year. It is also a time to reflect on the previous year’s accomplishments and endeavors. This is my chance to share with you a few highlights from the past year and some of our plans for the future.

The year 2019 was a time of great momentum and synergy. The key to our success is teamwork. When the work of many comes together, the result becomes a new creation that is far beyond what one could imagine.

At HKNC, we remain committed to providing high quality services to consumers attending the Comprehensive Vocational Rehabilitation Program in Sands Point, New York, as well as others who receive services in their home communities. In addition, through our 12 regional representatives and 8 deaf-blind specialists (and growing), HKNC works collaboratively with state and local service partners, families and other organizations to increase service options and resources to build a national infrastructure responsive to the deaf-blind community.

In this issue of CONNECT! there are many articles about the exciting activities and initiatives that took place at HKNC this past year. There was the establishment of the National Employment & Business Relations Specialist (NEBRS) position funded by a very generous three-year grant offered to HKNC by the Lavelle Fund for the Blind. There was also a second Community Services Program (CSP) established in California replicating the very successful CSP which has been in the New York metropolitan area for over 20 years supported by the New York State Commission for the Blind.

A highlight of the year was HKNC’s collaboration with the very creative and talented filmmaker and director, Doug Roland, whose film “Feeling Through” features, for the first time, a deaf-blind actor in a co-leading role. Other highlights of the year include national and international visitors who enriched us with their spirit, interest and perspective including the wife of the Prime Minister of Japan.

I am pleased to take this opportunity to announce that HKNC’s federal appropriation of $2.5 million for FY 2020 has been approved by Congress and signed by the President. These additional monies will be used for the following specific initiatives:

- Continued deployment of deaf-blind specialists across the country;
- Establishment of two additional Community Service Programs across the country;
- Establishment of a Technology Research and Innovation Center at HKNC headquarters;
- Establishment of an SSP program for consumers participating in the on-campus program and for staff who are deaf-blind.

Our success was the direct result of a strong letter writing campaign with the support of many of you, our stakeholders, partners and former students. We appreciate the ongoing collaboration and together will continue to strive toward our mission of assisting people who are deaf-blind with the tools to live, work and thrive in the community of their choice. I would also like to express special thanks to our Congressman Tom Suozzi for his continued support. Representative Suozzi has championed our
request for greater resources and has advocated on our behalf to ensure that HKNC can continue to
grow capacity with and among state and local partners and expand service options across the United
States.

I invite you to continue reading this issue of CONNECT! for articles expanding on the above
topics and how HKNC is continuing to work to increase options, build capacity and improve the
quality of services for people who are deaf-blind. The HKNC team and I look forward to 2020 with
many exciting goals for continued growth, collaboration and expansion!! We hope your new year
includes connections inclusive of the deaf-blind community and HKNC.

~ Dr. Susan Ruzenski, MA, EdD.

INTRODUCING HELEN KELLER SERVICES’ NEW CEO

This past June, Helen Keller Services (HKS) welcomed a new president and chief executive officer. Kimberly (Kim) Zimmer, formerly chief marketing officer & senior vice president, international development of Goodwill Industries International, Kim succeeds Joseph Bruno who retired. Bruno served as HKS president and CEO for three years and will continue at the organization as a consultant.

Ms. Zimmer brings more than 15 years leadership to her new CEO post in the social enterprise and not-for-profit sectors. Prior to Goodwill, Zimmer’s career was focused on organizations that provide programs and services to people who are blind. She served as vice president of Corporate Communications at National Industries for the Blind (NIB). She also served as vice president of Communications and later chief operating officer at Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind (CLB) in Washington, DC. In her communications capacity, she increased local, regional and national awareness of CLB and blindness related issues. “I am honored to serve Helen Keller Services as president and CEO,” she said. “My career has been devoted to human service organizations that make a meaningful difference and I look forward to carrying on that tradition at Helen Keller Services.”

EXPANDING HKNC SERVICES IN THE WEST COAST

A welcome addition to HKNC’s array of national services is the establishment of a Community Services Program (CSP) in Southern California. This new program replicates HKNC’s successful New York Community Services Program.

With a high number of identified individuals who have combined hearing and vision loss, the California-CSP, in collaboration with the California Department of Rehabilitation, provides assessment and training to consumers in their homes, communities and at work. The transdisciplinary team offers job development and short-term support, job placement, skills of daily living, orientation and mobility, and adaptive technology. The staff includes specialists in the fields of blindness and deafness who are proficient in alternative communication methods used by people who are deaf-blind. For more information, contact: Ilona.Mulvey@hknc.org 858-578-1600 Voice or Chad Metcalf 951-208-6548 Videophone
This past October, HKNC had the distinct honor and privilege to welcome Mrs. Akie Abe, the wife of Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, and Mrs. Yukiko Yamanouchi, the wife of the Ambassador to the U.S., Kanji Yamanouchi, to its headquarters in New York.

During the visit, hosted by Sue Ruzenski and Kim Zimmer, Mrs. Abe and Mrs. Yamanouchi were acquainted with the programs and services offered at the Center and had an opportunity to chat with several students about their aspirations. They toured the Training Building and observed some classes in action.

While in the Communications Learning Center, Mrs. Abe talked with staff member, Adriana Reali, who is deaf-blind, and got a quick lesson in Haptics. In the Independent Living Department the visitors learned about adaptive equipment during a tour of the kitchen with Maricar Marquez, supervisor. Maricar talked about her life experiences as a person who is deaf-blind, and gave examples of how she maintains her independence. In the Technology Department, the visitors met with deaf-blind students and learned about adaptive technology. And finally, a stop in the Creative Arts Department where a student proudly showed Mrs. Abe and Mrs. Yamanouchi the clay print and braille alphabet squares he was working on. On hand also were Mocha, HKNC’s specially trained facility dog and puppy Raphael, guide dog in training.

As a remembrance of their visit, Sue Ruzenski presented the visitors with handmade macramé “I Love You” hands. It was a lovely visit and, as Sue said, “Nothing could have prepared us for how warm, caring and engaging Mrs. Abe was with the students and staff. We all came away with the feeling that we had made new friends.”

Among the many other visitors to HKNC headquarters, we also were delighted to welcome Kate Macrae, CEO of ABLE Australia. Kate toured the Training Building, met with staff and then had an opportunity to acquaint them with the services of ABLE Australia.

We are especially thankful to the many consumers and family members who come to visit HKNC headquarters each year to learn about our services. Thank you for including us on your journey; we welcome others to do the same!
Inspired by a chance encounter with a deaf-blind man on the streets of Manhattan, writer/director Doug Roland wrote the script for a short film entitled “Feeling Through.” The film is the first ever to cast a deaf-blind person in a co-leading role. Doug partnered with HKNC in the making of this film and ultimately cast Robert Tarango, a former HKNC student and current employee, in the role of the deaf-blind man. “Feeling Through” tells the story of the unlikely connection between a teen without a home and a deaf-blind man. It is about the powerful experiences and meaningful relationships we can have, and demonstrates that our capacity to connect transcends our differences.

The “Feeling Through Experience” is a unique and engaging event which includes the screening of a short film and an accompanying documentary about the making of the film and the search for the deaf-blind man who inspired it. The “Experience” also includes a “talk-back” with the audience including Doug, Robert and others from the community including people who are deaf-blind. Thus far the “Feeling Through Experience” has reached over 1300 participants with fully accessible screenings in 12 different cities from Honolulu, Hawaii, to downtown Manhattan, NY. We look forward to continue to make connections with new audiences to spread the message of inclusivity and accessibility! Go to the “Feeling Through Experience” on Facebook for news about future events and check out a video on YouTube from Fox 5 in New York.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zXR68XeXhQ&feature=youtu.be

Last year’s Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week was celebrated both here at HKNC and across the country. The theme was MAKING CONNECTIONS WITH THE DEAF-BLIND COMMUNITY to tie into the theme of the movie “Feeling Through.” Mutually life-changing moments can become reality when you reach out to members of the deaf-blind community. Sometimes when you least expect it, you experience an interaction that can change your life forever. We want to inspire people to look for those moments and consciously create mutually awe-inspiring connections inclusive of members of the deaf-blind community.

In addition to the main Deaf-Blind Awareness Week poster, the professionals at Wunderman Thompson Health made two other posters depicting people making that chance connection with a deaf-blind person. These alternate versions are on the HKNC website carousel. Wunderman took over from Grey Health Group which had produced our DBAW posters pro bono for over 30 years. We are most grateful to Wunderman for continuing that tradition and for all the time and effort they spent to help bring awareness about people who are deaf-blind.
ASSISTING PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF-BLIND TO BECOME EMPLOYED

Thanks to a very generous three-year grant from the Lavell Fund for the Blind, this past year saw the establishment of the National Employment and Business Relations Specialist (NEBRS) at HKNC. The national business specialist has several directives including:

- Establish relationships with national and regional line management and/or human resources professionals in order to streamline and fast track HKNC candidates for interviews and take the mystery out of hiring individuals who are deaf-blind;
- Collaborate with the HKNC vocational and field services teams to inspire, motivate and prepare HKNC candidates for interviews and employment;
- Raise awareness, provide market intelligence and collaborate with the vocational services community;
- Place HKNC job candidates in positions of employment and environments that they enjoy and are able to thrive;

The results thus far have been very positive! Joseph Melillo, the national employment and business relations specialist, has worked to establish relationships with 29 companies that are getting to know HKNC and the talents and abilities deaf-blind employees can bring to their workforce.

Here’s an example of how the NEBRS goes about creating a hiring environment with a national company. NEBRS and the HKNC NY Community Services Program referred a job candidate to CVS for a retail store associate position. The representative from CVS’ disability hiring program, Abilities in Abundance, and the store manager interviewed the candidate and a 3-month work experience/internship was established.

Guided and encouraged by Elaina Gasparino, HKNC employment specialist, the deaf-blind candidate learned quickly and thrived. The manager of the store was impressed with her work, dedication and focus and she was hired. HKNC and CVS are in the process of formally establishing a national agreement with the goal of CVS hiring other motivated deaf-blind job candidates.

See the next article for another NEBRS success story.

TEAMWORK BRINGS ABOUT SUCCESS

Teamwork is about cooperation and collaboration between different members of an organization. It is a crucial part of a business, as it is important for colleagues to work well together to bring about successful outcomes.

The following article is about how the teamwork between the staff in HKNC’s Community Services Program (CSP) in New York and HKNC’s Joe Melillo, national employment and business relations specialist were able to effect a successful outcome.

The staff of the HKNC CSP started working with Isatuo S., when she participated in HKNC’s annual Summer Youth Vocational Program (SYVP) – a six-week vocational program for deaf-blind high school transition-age students. As part of the SYVP, Isatuo had an internship with Applebees where she developed a passion for working in food services. With the support of HKNC’s CSP, Isatuo entered a 4-month culinary training program funded by the New York State Commission for the Blind. When she
completed the training program, Isatuo began to search for a job but became frustrated when she couldn’t find any work. She took a subminimum wage job working temporarily until a better opportunity arose. Joseph Melillo became involved and an internship with Whitson’s Culinary Group, a food services company, was secured for Isatuo in the kitchen of a residential health care facility.

CSP employment specialist, Tammie Christian, states, “I have seen Isatuo grow in independence and in skills gained. She has become part of the team at Whitson’s. Her confidence continues to grow and all indications and feedback are that she will be hired at the end of her internship.”

Isatou’s supervisor at Whitson’s says that Isatou “is very independent and will be a good team player for us in the future. She is quick to learn and we are able to depend on her. She is efficient and pleasant to the residents.” Isatuo states: “I travel to work via bus independently. I enjoy working at Whitson’s, communicating with the residents and preparing their food.” This job is a dream come true for Isatuo and everyone involved is looking forward to her growth in the position.

**NOW ON HKNC’S WEBSITE**

The Business Guide for Working with Individuals Who Are Deaf-Blind

Meeting the employment needs of businesses with candidates who are trained and qualified is one of HKNC’s major goals. This Business Guide is designed to avoid obstacles when hiring and managing individuals who are deaf-blind. The website also discusses the role of HKNC’s national employment & business relations specialist in partnering with businesses to introduce candidates and HKNC’s support services.

**Check it out at** [https://www.helenkeller.org/hknc/NEBRS](https://www.helenkeller.org/hknc/NEBRS)

To contact Joe Melillo, please call 516-393-8014 or email at: joseph.melillo@hknc.org

**HELEN’S RUN/WALK BENEFITS SSP PROGRAM**

What's a little rain? Not enough to deter close to 400 participants in last year’s Helen's Run/Walk. Wearing ponchos, rain coats, and plastic garbage bags - all had a wet and wonderful time. We were very happy to welcome NY State Senator Anna M. Kaplan (D - 7th Senate District) and NY State Assemblyman, Anthony D’Urso (D – 16th Assembly District).

Across the country in California, staff members of HKNC’s new Community Services Program supported the event by doing a “virtual” walk in Riverside where they made it to the top of Mount Rubidoux!

In the true spirit of HKNC, numerous staff members (including HKNC’s regional representatives from across the country) worked together to make this event successful raising over $48,000. This money has been allocated to providing essential Support Service Provider assistance for the staff and students at the Center who are deaf-blind.
This year’s Helen’s Run/Walk will take place on Sunday, April 26, 2020, with beautiful weather requested!! The Run/Walk is a USATF certified 5K/3.1 miles – Rain or Shine – and promises to be the biggest and best ever!! For more information and registration, please visit our website at www.helenkeller.org/hknc or call 516-883-8310.

ANNUAL REPORT AVAILABLE
The Helen Keller Services 2019 Annual report can be viewed in your web browser or by phone by clicking on the link below.

https://www.helenkeller.org/hks/annual-report-and-financials

Helen Keller National Center is a division of Helen Keller Services

2020 SPRING/SUMMER EVENTS OF INTEREST

March 9 – 20 Support Service Providers Training (Part 1 – Online). Participation is required for course completion
Postponed-new TBD

March 24 Support Service Providers Training 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (Part 2 – Onsite Postponed-new TBD

April 26 Helen’s Run/Walk 2020 POSTPONED-new date TBD

May 10 – 23 Orientation and Mobility Training (Part 1 – Online) Participation is required for course completion

May 18 – 22 Confident Living Program

May 26 – 29 Orientation and Mobility Training (Part 2 Onsite)

June 22 HKS Golf Outing at the Lake Success Country Club

Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week
June 21 – 27, 2020

If you are interested in more information about HKNC’s specialized training programs, please contact your HKNC regional representative.

https://www.helenkeller.org/hknc/nationwide-services

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HKNC's mission is to enable each person who is deaf-blind to live, work and thrive in the community of his or her choice.