



# Impact Report



2023



**ON BEHALF OF THE MORE THAN 200 EMPLOYEES WORKING  
AT LIONS SERVICES, I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR  
SUPPORTING OUR ORGANIZATION AS A CUSTOMER,  
VENDOR, DONOR AND COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER.  
- PHILIP MURPH**



Dear Friends,

For 88 years, Lions Services, Inc, has been serving the blind and visually impaired community of Charlotte and surrounding counties with employment opportunities through our Workforce Development Program. Through our programs we are giving blind and visually impaired individuals hope and empowering them to live a normal life after vision loss to become independent and confident.

Because of the generous support of our community, Lions Services has grown over the years- including rebranding with a new logo.

We also updated our mission to “Empowering people who are blind to achieve personal and economic independence by providing them with vocational rehabilitation and employment opportunities.” Since then, we have become more strategic about ensuring the work we do upholds our mission.

By investing in Lions Services, you are helping to ensure we will continue to provide employment opportunities for the blind and visually impaired and be a source of hope and empowerment for many decades to come. As you read through the following pages, we hope you find this report be informative, and leave you feeling that your investment changes lives. Get involved, Stay connected. We could not do the good we do without the generosity and support from friends like you!

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philip Murph". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Philip Murph  
President and CEO

# Who we are

Our Mission: Empowering people who are blind to achieve personal and economic independence by providing them with vocational rehabilitation and employment opportunities.

**Workforce Development Program:** We employ people who are blind and visually impaired offering job training and support to learn and increase work skills helping the blind to succeed and have gainful employment. We employ a full-time trainer who conducts training for all employees. In our production processes, we incorporate mechanical devices to ensure that jobs are accessible and accommodating for individuals who are blind.



There are over 16,000 people living in Charlotte with vision loss.

The unemployment rate for working adults who are blind and visually impaired is 70%, so finding a job is extremely difficult. We provide competitive wages and benefits for all employees.



1 out of 4 Blind/Visually impaired students do not graduate college.

**Employment Programs for blind and visually impaired students.** Following high school graduation, we offer employment opportunities to blind and visually impaired students to cover a wide range of sectors, including administration and production. By engaging in this program, students have the chance to acquire essential work experience, aiding in their college preparation and helping them make informed decisions about their future careers.



# Proud to have Veterans Working at Lions Services



Air force Veteran Thomas Hoban is a Machine Operator at Lions Services. Thomas's dedication to excellence extends back to his 4-year service in the Air Force, where he specialized in maintaining airplanes. His versatility involved fueling planes and preparing them for rescue missions, speaks volumes about his innate problem-solving abilities. Despite the challenges brought on by peripheral vision loss, Thomas Hoban continues to make a meaningful contribution to the military by skillfully assembling high-quality equipment for U.S. troops. We take immense pride in having him as part of the Lions Services team, where his talents are in a constant state of growth and evolution. **"I enjoy working here as a visually impaired person, learning skills I never knew I had."** – Thomas Hoban



Army Veteran Alfred Gardner is a Machine Operator at Lions Services. Alfred's dedication to excellence extends back to his 4 year service in the United States Army, where he was an Artillery Gunner. A pistol injury took the vision in his left eye, and shortly after glaucoma, took the vision in his right, rendering him blind. Despite these adversities, Alfred remains a beacon of positivity. Since 2008, His journey has transformed him into a responsible and positive individual, leading him to achieve his life goal of being a productive member of society and supporter to his family. Lions Services helped Alfred navigate the difficult and uncertain transition of going from mostly blind to fully blind, bringing him out of his depression and letting him lead a happy and loving life. Alfred's advice? **"Life is not over. You can still live and be happy without your vision, it just looks different."**- Alfred Gardner

## Employee Testimonials



**Starkey Hill**

Starkey's life took a dramatic turn when he lost his eyesight at the age of 25 due to diabetes-related complications. Overcoming countless challenges and 28 surgeries, he eventually received a kidney and pancreas transplant at 39, eliminating his diabetes. Since 2015, Starkey has been folding and rolling chin straps at Lions Services, while finding fulfillment and newfound sociability. Lions Services not only gave Starkey a purpose but also enabled him to become a provider for his family, proving that with determination and the right support, one can conquer any obstacle on the path to independence.



**Barney Flemming**

Barney was born with Retinitis Pigmentosa, a progressive retinal disease that eventually led to his vision loss. While Barney acknowledges the daily challenges of navigating a sighted world without the gift of sight, he exudes positivity and laughter. Since 1981, Barney has been a dedicated member of Lions Services. He started as a janitor when he could still see but transitioned to various machine operations before settling into assembling roles. Lions Services has played a significant role in his life, allowing him to continue working, maintain his independence, and connect with people who understand the challenges of blindness.



**Gladys Douglas**

Gladys has confronted the challenges of glaucoma and retinal detachment since her teenage years. Introduced to Lions Services in 2004. Lions Services has been instrumental in Gladys's life, offering her a sense of belonging and family. She appreciates the diverse and compassionate community it provides, emphasizing that it encourages everyone to learn and grow together, regardless of their backgrounds or languages. Gladys views Lions Services as a safe haven for those with vision impairments, where they can learn, feel understood, and find support.

# Assistive Technology

Assistive technology are powerful tools in performing every day tasks for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Devices such as Video Magnifiers and text to speech (CCTV) assist in the completion of daily tasks in the workplace include reading the mail, work documents, writing, and connectivity to a computer. These devices increase the opportunity for advancement in the workplace, increased personal and technological literacy.



Accessible devices, such as the Eschenbach Max detail glasses provide independence to individuals with vision loss. These hands-free, head-mounted glasses provide 2x magnification and can be adjusted so that each eye lens can be focused separately. The glasses will focus on near objects with working distances of 16 inches and are perfect for any near viewing activity where a magnified image is helpful.



# Accessibility at Lions Services



Our Engineer designs and purchases fixture guides that mechanics install on every machine helping to automate the work processes and providing blind and visually impaired employees the critical tools to safely and successfully operate sewing machines.

# Accessible Environment

Converted an outdoor space to the "Accessible Patio for the Blind Employees" funded by generous sponsors and donations. This is a space employees can sit and enjoy their lunch in the sunshine. We have new mural raising awareness for the blind and visually impaired community of Charlotte located at Lions Services and funded by the Charlotte Urban Design Center Placemaking grant with tactile and audio elements.



# Sustainability

Lions Services is dedicated to fostering a sustainable future through the introduction of four new product lines, aiming to sustain employment opportunities for individuals who are blind and visually impaired. During 2023, Lions has launched Hand Soap, Air Force PT Pants, Space Force PT Pants, and the Molle 4000 Rucksack, that will result in 75 additional jobs being created during the next 12 months that will contribute to long-term sustainability.

## Lions Clean Foaming Hand Soap

Lions Services is committed to finding new ways to reduce the 70% unemployment rate by the blind community. One of those new ways is Lion's Clean Hand Soap. We developed our soap creating accessible equipment from scratch, painstakingly testing, and adjusting until people with visual impairments are able to do the work. Our product is high quality, with a coconut oil and aloe vera base that won't leave your hands dry. We are sure that you will enjoy using it, and your purchase supports our incredible mission!



Since 1935, Lions Services has provided job opportunities to the Blind Community. Your purchase of our products supports this great cause.



**Airforce/Space Force Pants for the US Military**

**MOLLE 4000 Rucksack Backpack for the US Army**



# Community Engagement *Starts with Community*

Your support is critical for the success of our mission and programs. Agatha Bisbikis, our Development Director, is constantly creating enjoyable ways for the community to contribute to our cause throughout the year. The following list highlights some of these initiatives that we believe will capture your interest. Stay tuned for exciting events planned for 2024 and stay informed by following Lions Services on our social media channels or subscribing to our newsletter.

**Breakfast And Coffee In The Dark:** In 2023, we hosted our 'first' series of Breakfast in the Dark, guests had the option to wear a blindfold to experience the perspective of individuals with vision loss to wear a blindfold while enjoying their breakfast and coffee. Each Breakfast in the Dark was full of inspirational stories from blind employees including our President about living with vision loss and employment at Lions Services. Each breakfast ended with guests taking a tour of the facility.



These breakfast fundraisers help us to support services for individuals who are losing their eyesight to have meaningful employment that promotes independence. Stay tuned for Breakfast in the Dark in 2024, or to schedule your organizations private breakfast in the dark please contact Agatha by email [Agathab@lionservices.org](mailto:Agathab@lionservices.org)

# Community Engagement

*Starts with Community*

**Walk For Blind Independence: Every Step We Take, Every Dollar We Raise, puts People with Vision Loss Further on the Path to Independence! We had a great time bringing everyone together at our First Annual Walk for Blind Independence on September 23, 2023, at the US National Whitewater Center! We had 200 participants, including volunteers in attendance. With the money raised, Lion Services will be able to continue to raise awareness, increase our impact, and further our mission – empowering people who are blind to achieve personal and economic independence by providing them with vocational rehabilitation and employment opportunities through the maintenance of specialized machinery that empowers our employees to carry out intricate tasks.**



**CEENTA Cares- Classic Golf Tournament. On September 29, 2023, Charlotte Eye Ear Nose & Throat Associates held their annual golf tournament benefiting their selected 2023 nonprofit partner, Lions Services. Over 60 golfers were in attendance for the tournament, including Lions Services blind golfers to raise money supporting our Workforce Development Program for the Blind and Visually Impaired Community.**



**On May 6, 2023, we partnered with the Davidson-Huntersville Lions Club to help provide free vision & hearing screenings to the community in Davidson at the Davidson Town Square. Lions Services shared information about employment opportunities for people with vision loss, and blindness and how they can commute to Charlotte. We sold raffle tickets to help purchase critical devices needed for the creation of jobs for the blind.**



**Lions Services had a wonderful time being featured as the nonprofit at the Community Corner during the Knights baseball game on May 31st. The staff enjoyed interacting with the fans and sharing the good work our nonprofit organization does to help create jobs and empower the low vision and blind community. We even got a photo with the fun mascot Homer!**



**For more information on how to volunteer and or attend upcoming events as guests please visit our website at: [www.lionservices.org/events](http://www.lionservices.org/events) or [www.lionservices.org/volunteer](http://www.lionservices.org/volunteer)**



# Our Impact

## Volunteers and Outreach

Our dedicated group of volunteers contribute their time to help complete many tasks around our facility. Just a few hours of your time means so much to those we serve.

**137 Volunteers contributed 431 hours**

**Philanthropic Giving & Fundraising: \$48,617.22**

**Grants: \$148,883.60**

**Total: \$197,500.82**

The generosity of donors, foundations, and friends has shaped Lions Services and will profoundly influence our future. Your gifts support essential programs and operations that impact the Lions Services experience for every blind and visually impaired employee, every day. Gifts of all sizes allow us to continue supporting our mission.

THANK YOU for investing in this special place—you are making a difference in our ability to transform lives and build promising futures for the blind and visually impaired community.

## Employee Statistics 2023

**211** Employees employed

**100+** Employees are blind or visually impaired

**11** Blind/Visually impaired veterans

### Created New Jobs

**22+** Hired blind or visually impaired

### 2023 Upward Mobility

**6** Blind/Visually impaired who were promoted to Administrative positions or held Executive positions

## Simple ways to Support Lions Services:

Make a one-time or monthly gift online at [LionsServices.org/GIVE](https://LionsServices.org/GIVE) or scan



70% of working age adults are unemployed.

70%

Mail a check to Lions Services Inc., to:  
4600 North Tryon St. Charlotte NC 28213

# **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**THANK YOU FOR SERVING ON OUR BOARD**

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4600 North Tryon Street.  
Charlotte, N.C. 28213  
704-921-1527  
[www.Lionservices.org](http://www.Lionservices.org)