

Massachusetts Reading Network

in association with the Talking Information Center Network December 2016

Monthly Impact Report

Director's Corner

"Radio-reading" as a service can stand on its own merits, providing a vital contact to the community for those compromised by vision loss. Access to a great variety of information, companionship for those limited in social interactions and an opportunity to provide a voice for those we serve are just a few of the obvious benefits. However, under the proper circumstances a reading service can do even more for the community. *Continued at [DIRECTOR](#)*

Affecting Lives for Good

Joe Leblanc arrived at LAB with his guitar. This is not easy, since Joe travels to LAB from Georgetown, MA. Joe's inherited eye disease is called retinitis pigmentosa. He has collapsed vision in his left eye and can see out of a pinhole from his right eye. It's like looking through a straw, only having a sliver of vision. But it is the time of the year to reconnect with friends and family, *Continued at [VOLUNTEERS](#)*



LAB Summer Interns at the Massachusetts State House MCB Closing Internship Ceremony – Maryanne Steen and Joe LeBlanc

State Funding for a Reading Network

For 38 years, the Massachusetts Reading Network has received state funding to support volunteers in a statewide charitable service that increases independence and quality of life for a great many people in need. Why then, can't we provide that funding more than one year at a time? With the Governor's budget due, this is a timely question. *Continued at [FUNDING](#)*

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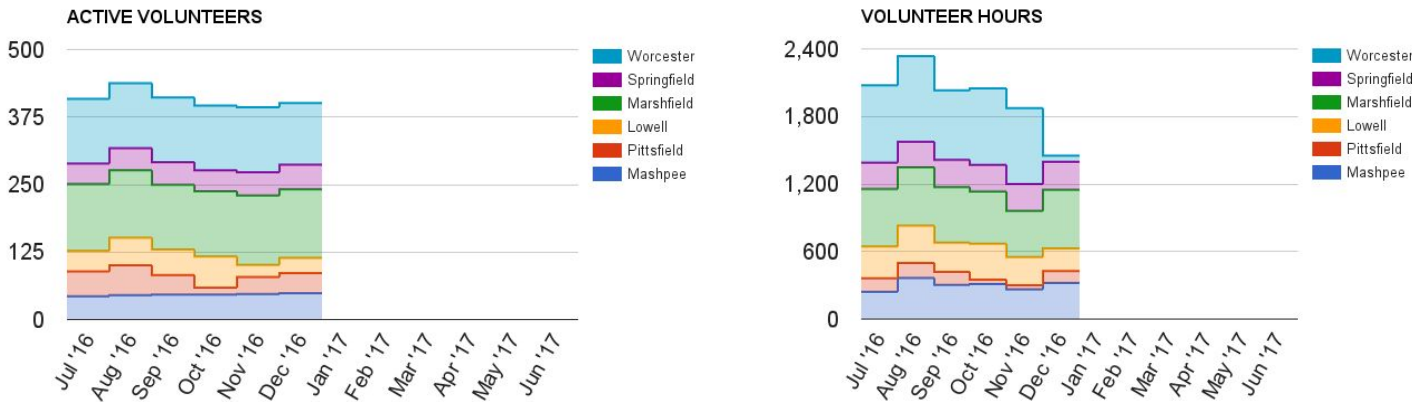
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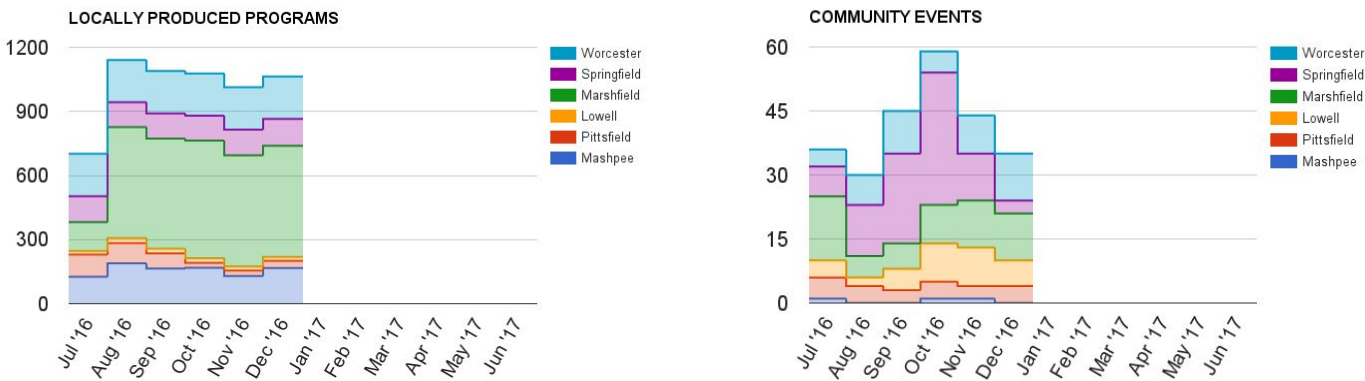
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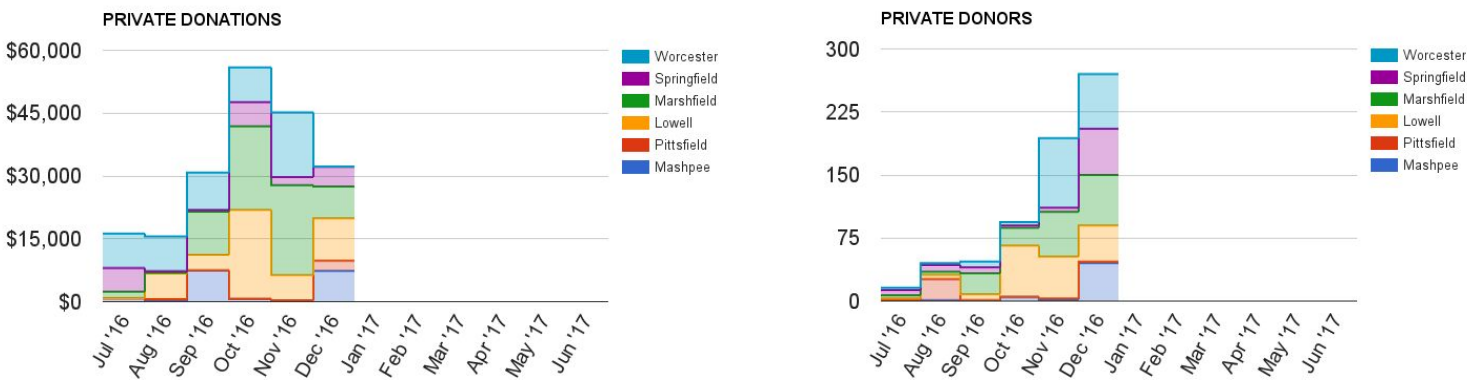
Volunteers Extend Funding and Mission



Programming and Outreach Support Independence



Diversified Development Amplifies Impact

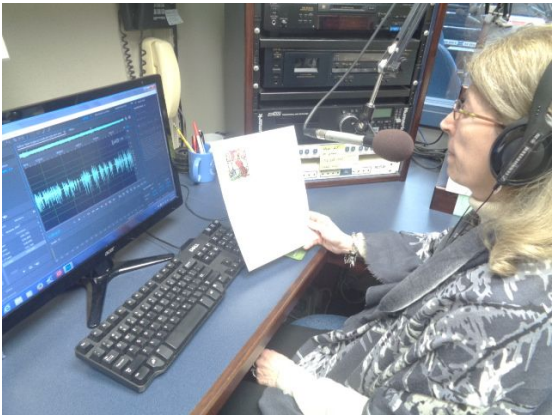


DIRECTOR - [continued from page 1] The ideal circumstances include funding, manpower, talent and desire. Additional services can include employment education through internships for individuals who are vision impaired, participation in advocacy efforts, and providing related services like audio description. Audio Journal, the Central Massachusetts affiliate of the Talking Information Center, has been in the fortunate position to engage in each of these examples.

The most recent venture was receiving the commission from the Worcester Art Museum to provide audio services for their newly opened Medieval Galleries. This involved providing the voices for audio descriptions of certain exhibits in the galleries. It also involved consulting with them on the nature of successful descriptions, including orientation from a blind patron’s perspective, a consistent order of describing, and the technical aspects of getting the information delivered to the end user.

With assistance from Audio Journal, WAM curator of the exhibit, Jeffrey Forgeng, composed the scripts for 18 different displays in the galleries. At Audio Journal, Valerie Clapham (Volunteer Coordinator, Administrator & Programmer) and I recorded, edited and formatted the audio files. With my background in audio description and Valerie’s lovely British accent, our team was ready for the task at hand. After a few text revisions and help with some pronunciations, the project was completed and delivered in time for the grand opening of the Medieval Galleries. Patrons access the descriptions via an audio wand, provided by the museum. A keypad on the device corresponds to a numbered placard by the exhibited piece. Punching in the appropriate number triggers the audio.

Feedback has been positive, and we hope the exposure will translate to additional opportunities and funding. In a subtle way this type of activity, in addition to providing “Access to the Knights,” can increase awareness of and sensitivity to the blindness community. It might even lead to a discussion concerning why a blind person would ever want to visit a museum or attend live theatre. A discussion which can truly “do more” to help the entire community. *Vincent dePaul Lombardi, Director, Audio Journal, Inc.*



Clockwise from upper left -
Valerie Clapham in the studio, Armour displayed, Instructions for the audio wand and Using the audio wand.

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**VOLUNTEERS** [continued from page 1] so Joe made the journey, guitar in hand, to help entertain at this year's Holiday Party. At the party I was able to catch up with Joe, one of our summer interns. Lowell Association for the Blind (LAB) has hosted student interns through the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind for over 15 years. Early on, he took his diagnosis well because he could still see well. Blindness seemed so far away. However, vision loss started to set in, and he had to withdraw from North Shore Community College in his late 20s.

He entered rehab training, spending eight weeks blindfolded to prepare for when he'd lose the rest of his vision. LeBlanc learned braille, mobility techniques, and how to cook and eat without sight.

"I started looking at blindness a lot differently," he said. "I was taking it head-on."

Even though he was losing vision every day, he got into building and repairing guitars. In his 30s, he studied under a luthier, a maker of stringed instruments such as violins or guitars, who walked him through building his first one. Joe's vision continued to decline and could only see what he described as whatever was in the end of the "straw," and he learned by feel.

While working full time as a benefits administrator, he was building guitars as a hobby. But then as his vision declined, he had to quit his day job. He became a full-time guitar builder, and began teaching people how to perfect the craft.

Then the low of lows came five years ago when he had collapsed vision in his left eye. He was in severe depression, and stopped building guitars. His wife, Becky, found the Lowell Association for the Blind, which provided critical emotional support for LeBlanc. "Being around people with vision loss and with people looking out for me, it's been great," he said. "I love coming here."

As an intern, he produced shows for the radio reading program; he conducted interviews and inserted music into the half-hour show that aired once a month. While conducting interviews, he would listen to the questions in his ear before asking them. It also takes him a lot of time to edit the program. "I like to share interesting stories," he said. "I hope these topics will give hope to the people diagnosed with visual impairments."

Joe returned to North Shore Community College about three years ago. His goal is to be a drug and alcohol counselor; he once had mentors who helped him overcome his depression and anxiety. "As a counselor, I can affect people's lives for good," LeBlanc said.

At the Holiday Party Joe announced that he has completed the requirements for his Associate Degree from North Shore Community College. Joe will take some time over the holidays and then decide his next steps. More education? A Job? No Matter what Joe choses I am sure he will be a success! *Elizabeth M. Cannon, Executive Director for Lowell Association for the Blind*

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FUNDING - [continued from page 1] The Massachusetts Reading Network enhances the dignity and independence of Massachusetts residents. Human voice broadcasts of local news, articles and items of interest provide comfort and enrich the quality of life for all ages, both those in need and their caregivers.

Chasing funding every year means less time for improving outcomes for those served. After 38 years of service to the residents of the Commonwealth, the network would rather focus on improving programming and enhancing delivery than lobbying for funding every year. Since 1978, the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) has been the state sponsor for monies that enable volunteers to produce programs that air 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Last year MCB passed sponsorship to the Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA) so TIC is now searching for state sponsorship in the new fiscal year. The Governor's budget is due at the end of January 2017 and TIC wants to be included in that budget and additional years to come.

TIC continues to work diligently to find additional funding sources, beyond the state budget. TIC seeks Underwriting Sponsorships, Foundations & Grants, Subscriptions (out of State listeners and streamers), Collaborations with service agencies (Hospitals, Senior Living), New Programs (such as Vocational training for individuals with disabilities, "on demand" reading services). It will take time to develop these into substantial and sustained sources for funding. The work of TIC volunteers directly supports the mission of the state toward TIC's audience and TIC

spends 100% of state dollars directly on reaching its audience with the daily information they need to live independently. Because of this tight link to the mission of the state and the enormous efficiency 1000 volunteers provide, state support makes sense.

Massachusetts has a growing need for the services TIC provides

**TIC's technology and volunteers will allow TIC to meet that growing need
- at 97% efficiency and without an increase in state funding**

Talking Information Network, which funds affiliates to reach a wider audience, is requesting level state funding in the 2018 budget. With conservative projections and an enhanced delivery system, the statewide audience is seen growing to over 250,000 which brings cost to under 1 cent per day per person!

The most vulnerable state residents - newly disabled, the poor and those living alone - are best reached by the human voiced broadcast reading done by more than 1000 volunteers statewide. Those broadcasts are available to everyone, through radio, a toll free phone number, internet streaming, podcasts, a smartphone app and other devices.

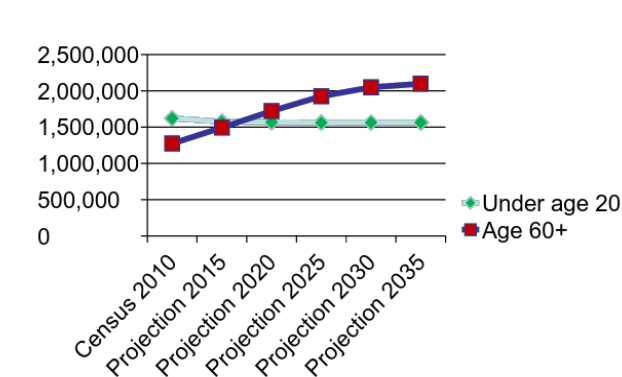


A small staff and large number of TIC volunteers allows current state funding to deliver 24/7 programming to 26,000 state residents for under 7 cents per/day. By delivering 97 cents of total dollars, 100% of state funding, directly to those who benefit from the mission, TIC does the most good AND magnifies the impact of EOEa spending.

TIC Efficiency and Accountability		
Source	FY17 Funding	% To Programming
Private Donations	\$100,000	60%
State Funding	\$650,000	100%
Volunteer Hours	\$600,000	100%
Total	\$1,350,000	97%



TIC supports an age friendly Massachusetts through communication, social inclusion, social participation and civic participation from volunteers. Listeners include the elderly, veterans, blind, disabled and others. The need in Massachusetts is growing. As the population ages, more people develop disabilities and need the news, information and comfort a reading network delivers everyday for a tiny cost.



TIC will work with EOEa, DTC, MCB and other state agencies to continue to deliver pertinent information to the over 1 million older adults, individuals with disabilities and veterans around the state to help them maintain their independence and stay informed on important state-provided resources such as MassOptions. Trained specialists from MassOptions give fast, personalized attention about services available to help people live independently.

TIC is working with the state today to solicit corporate support to reach many more Massachusetts residents and helping those most in need lower the barriers to listening . Today, individuals can listen to TIC online, via app, by phone, through radio receivers, and Victor readers. In the future, TIC will expand listening

“easy access” through a dedicated app with cable providers around the state. Listeners will access TIC programming through a “voice request” program on cable subscribers’ TVs. TIC will also work to obtain underwriting revenue from cable corporations within the state. TIC can quickly and efficiently deliver any State agency message in real time to seniors and/or otherwise disabled listeners to inform them of emergencies or important services provided by the State that can enhance their lives.

Please support our request for level state funding in Fiscal 2018 and for continued funding beyond 2018. That way our volunteers can continue to reach those in need and help them remain independent, learn about resources available to help and lift their spirits. If you have questions, please call the station at 781-834-4400 or email at

general@ticnetwork.org. Please talk to your local state legislator or contact the Governor at <http://www.mass.gov/governor/constituent-services/contact-governor-office/>.

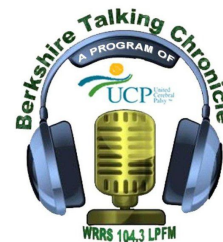




Audible Local Ledger

Listen to Audible Local Ledger

Director: Sherry Bergeron, 681 Falmouth Rd., Mashpee
MA 02649, phone: 508-539-2030,
Email: info@audiblelocalledger.org
Website: www.audiblelocalledger.org



Listen to Berkshire Talking Chronicle

Director: Beverly Prentice, 208 West Street, Pittsfield,
MA 01201, phone: 413-442-1562,
E-mail: bprentice@ucpberkshire.org,
Website: www.ucpberkshire.org



AUDIO JOURNAL

Listen to Audio Journal

Director: Vince Lombardi, 799 W. Boylston St.,
Worcester, MA 01606, phone: 508-797-1117,
Email: info@audiojournal.org,
Website: www.audiojournal.org



Listen to Lowell Association for the Blind

Director: Elizabeth Cannon, 169 Merrimack St., Lowell,
MA 01852, Phone: 978-454-5704
Email: labinfo@lowellassociationfortheblind.org
Website: www.lowellassociationfortheblind.org



Listen to Valley Eye Radio

Director: Barbara Loh, 44 Hampden St., Springfield, MA
01103, Phone: 413-747-7337
Email: bplohvrrs@gmail.com
Website: www.valleyeyeradio.org



Listen to TIC National Service

Director: Jim Bunnell, 130 Enterprise Drive, Marshfield,
MA 02050, Phone: 781-834-4400,
Email: jbunnell@ticnetwork.org,
Website: www.ticnetwork.org