



2019  
**American Foundation for the Blind  
Annual Report**  
A Constellation of Stars

# A Call to Be Climbers and Collaborators



**Dear friends,**

When we introduced our new strategic direction in 2017, we knew there were many challenges ahead—challenges that would require marrying our thought leadership and partners across the field of blindness. After all, changing the way society thinks about people who are blind or visually impaired is a tall order. Changing hearts and minds takes time, but we are confident we are headed in the right direction.

As we've sharpened our focus on societal and systemic change, we're grateful for everyone who shares our belief that we can create a world of no limits for people who are blind. As Erik Weihenmayer, our 2019 Helen Keller Achievement Awards master of ceremonies and AFB Leadership Conference (AFBLC) keynote speaker, noted, "There are universal processes we can apply to break through these barriers, especially when we unite to solve each other's problems."

By working together, we recognize that our partners have unique strengths and resources to contribute to our shared goal of improving the lives of blind and low-vision individuals. When we collaborate with an organization like AbilityOne to increase disability inclusion in the workplace, put together a research plan with a regional hospital to identify the best ways to serve blind and low-vision patients, or join with corporate, government, and nonprofit partners to host our employment summits, we're that much more empowered to move the needle on the biggest issues facing our community.

As we work diligently to advance in our strategic areas of employment, education, technology, and age-related vision loss, we are continually adapting and refining our process. And we are finding that, oftentimes, the lessons we learn during our "climbs" are just as important as reaching those summits.

"I think it's a good thing for all of us to remind ourselves to be climbers," Weihenmayer says. "It doesn't mean you're climbing mountains, it just means you're pushing yourself beyond what's comfortable. When you step outside your comfort zone, you'll find that most anything is possible."

We couldn't agree more. At AFB, we did a lot of climbing in the past year, and we have created a constellation of partners who have helped us on our journey. Turn the pages to learn more about the year we've had and the summits that lie ahead.

With warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kirk Adams".

**Kirk Adams**  
President and CEO, AFB

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell J. Shaffer".

**Russell Shaffer**  
Chair, AFB Board of Trustees

# A Constellation of Stars

Jane Wei-Skillern, the author of *The Networked Nonprofit* and keynote speaker at our 2019 Leadership Conference, champions what she calls the four leadership principles: 1) mission before organization; 2) governance through trust-based relationships rather than top-down controls; 3) promotion of others rather than oneself; and 4) building of constellations rather than stars.

At AFB, this philosophy has been taken to heart, with our many partners comprising a brilliant constellation that is working cooperatively to make a life of no limits a reality for blind and low-vision individuals.

Three such organizations are Comcast and Litton Entertainment, which have donated free airtime for a public service announcement (PSA), and Bridge Multimedia, which provided pro bono video description. The 30-second commercial provides a compelling snapshot of how AFB is building a stronger world for the millions of Americans living with vision loss. A longer version of the PSA that will be shared widely online focuses on AFB's vision and the work it is doing in conjunction with its many partners. One

of these partners is The Chicago Lighthouse, a social service organization for people with vision loss and other disabilities, which generously opened its doors to AFB to help film the PSA.

"We are delighted to partner with AFB to advance our shared mission of strongly encouraging more employers to open their doors to people who are blind and visually impaired," says Dr. Janet Szlyk, president and CEO of The Chicago Lighthouse.

"AFB and all of our partners are truly collaborators with a shared mission to improve the lives of people who are blind and visually impaired," Kirk Adams, AFB's president and CEO, says. "We couldn't be more grateful for our partners, who continue to provide direct services while we undertake a variety of research and policy initiatives that strengthen the work they're doing in the field to make sure the pursuit of happiness is attainable for everyone."

AFB's allies also include public- and private-sector partners, corporate sponsors, and individual supporters and donors, whose collaboration and funding are essential to AFB's ability to succeed.

# AFB's New Website Builds on a History of Accessibility

If you've never built a website, it's hard to appreciate the complexity of what goes on behind the scenes—all the moving parts that must work precisely so the website is as simple to use as possible for visitors. And for AFB, that usability has always included accessibility for people who are visually impaired, even before technology to support that functionality existed.

AFB's new website is not only more streamlined and easier to use for visitors of all visual abilities, but also more accessible for developers on the back end. To appreciate how important this accessibility is to AFB, it's worth a quick look back at the history of our website. As an early citizen of the Internet, AFB didn't have a lot of options for creating an accessible website. In fact, not one "out-of-the-box" option existed, so AFB built its own accessible content management system (a web-based tool to add and edit information on a website). But fast forward 20 years, and keeping up with modern technology and making necessary site updates had become quite a challenge.

With AFB's new strategic vision and priorities—and the stewardship transition of programs such as VisionAware™ to the American Printing House for the Blind—it was time to build a brand-new site from the ground up.

The new site has a fresh, clean look with high-contrast graphics. It also adheres to accessibility guidelines to ensure the site works as well for screen reader users as it does for people with low vision. To be sure the site is as user-friendly as possible, AFB Consulting conducted usability testing—just as it does for outside firms that want to be compliant with current accessibility standards—and found that the usability testing participants appreciated the chance to offer feedback and have their voices heard.

Regardless of visual ability, visitors to the new [afb.org](http://afb.org) will find that it's organized in a way that makes it much easier to find the information they're seeking, from details about AFB's focus areas to facts about vision loss and how to get involved with AFB.



# AFB's Work with AbilityOne Is a Significant Step Toward Greater Workforce Inclusion

AFB has made employment a priority area, and it's easy to see why. People with vision loss often face significant barriers to employment, and the woefully low employment rate for people who are blind or visually impaired hasn't budged in the last decade, hovering around 35% compared to 70% for people without disabilities.

But it doesn't have to be this way. AFB is taking a multipronged approach to improve the workplace participation rate for people who are blind or visually impaired. One vital aspect of this approach was AFB's designation as a Central Nonprofit Agency (CNA) under the AbilityOne Program, one of the country's largest sources of employment for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

As a CNA, AFB will partner with nonprofits, government agencies, and corporations to identify innovative ways to maximize one of the benefits of the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act, which requires federal agencies to purchase specified supplies and services from nonprofit agencies that employ people who are blind or have significant disabilities.

What's more, AFB wants to expand the potential of AbilityOne to create new career-development opportunities for people with visual impairments in the fast-growing industries of financial services, healthcare, and information technology. Ultimately, the goal is to create pathways to competitive, integrated employment in the public and private sectors.

"We know that through their lived experience, people who are blind are problem solvers, team builders, and great communicators—the same talents and skills 21st-century employers are looking for," explains Kirk Adams, president and CEO of AFB. "We want to create a model where people with vision loss who have talent, drive, and ambition can gain work experience at a nonprofit agency and develop the skills necessary to move into corporate America."

Research has already shown that once employers hire people with visual impairments, those employers are inclined to hire more, because they quickly recognize the workers' contributions. But many employers first need to learn about the relatively simple infrastructure and technology accommodations needed for people who are blind to perform successfully in the workplace.

"Once we prove this concept and have some significant numbers of people who are blind in workplaces, momentum will take care of itself," Adams says. "Employers will understand what a wonderful opportunity they have to move their organization forward by being inclusive and bringing this talent into their workplace."

# AFB Employment Summit Creates Connections, Ideas, and Action Plans

By all accounts, AFB's inaugural Employment Summit in May was a successful day for everyone involved. Held in conjunction with the New York State Commission for the Blind, the summit was generously hosted by Google at the company's New York City offices.

AFB plans to hold two to four summits each year over the next few years at locations across the United States. The goal is to increase hiring and career advancement opportunities for people who are visually impaired by fostering dialogue and learning, and by bringing together high-level stakeholders, including state vocational rehabilitation agencies, nonprofits involved in career training and placement, corporations with a commitment to disability inclusion, foundations that prioritize disability employment, and leaders with visual impairments. At the end of each daylong summit, key actions will be recommended to break down barriers, open recruiting channels, and create employment opportunities. AFB also intends to set up online communication channels, creating a forum for participants to continue sharing resources and solving problems after each summit.

"I believe we achieved the goal set by AFB President and CEO Kirk Adams to 'leave with a commitment to hire'—as well as a commitment to follow up, which will be key to achieving our goals," says Brian S. Daniels, director of the New York State Commission for the Blind.

Zak Turner, who is visually impaired and works as a healthcare consultant, sat on a discussion panel about recruitment and hiring with sighted human resources personnel—an example of how the summits will bring the voices of people with vision loss into the conversation.

"I do interviewing and hiring as part of my job, but I also shared my story of how I was able to continue to be successful after losing my vision," Turner says. "I thought it was a great summit because we need to bring awareness to companies to help people learn and grow in their careers."

AFB Chief Knowledge Advancement Officer George Abbott, who coordinated the summit, describes the inaugural event as "a launching pad," both for future summits and for the larger goal of improving employment opportunities for people who are blind or visually impaired.

"We built relationships and trust, and what's key now is to continue connecting the participants to collaborate and take action on the issues we've identified as barriers to hiring and career advancement," Abbott says. "It was really an exhilarating day."



# AFB Leadership Conference Sharpens Focus While Expanding Reach

Once again, the AFB Leadership Conference (AFBLC) attracted some of the best and brightest minds in the field of blindness—as well as a variety of other related fields—to help AFB build new connections in pursuit of our strategic objectives.

More than 400 people attended the 2019 AFBLC, which shifted its content significantly from previous years. In addition to practical guidance for direct service providers, the sessions were more aligned with AFB’s emphasis on thought leadership, collaboration, and higher levels of influence around our key priorities of employment, education, age-related vision loss, research, and technology.

“We want to promote AFB’s strategic direction and have an impact on those particular areas,” says Kirk Adams. “One of the ways we do that is by convening leaders in the blindness field, but also expertise from outside the field, who we collaborate with to advance our mission.”

For example, one of the most popular breakout sessions addressed aging, vision loss, and dementia, bringing together AFB’s emphasis on aging and vision loss with a significant health

issue facing older adults. Other speakers and attendees from outside the field of blindness included representatives from the corporate world, who are essential to helping AFB create a world of no limits.

In addition, AFB took full advantage of a one-time opportunity to have the National Research and Training Center (NRTC) on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University hold its State of the Science Conference on Employment for Individuals with Blindness and Other Visual Impairments during the 2019 AFBLC.

“This was a great fit because we really wanted an emphasis on research and employment issues at this year’s conference,” says George Abbott, AFB’s chief knowledge advancement officer, who coordinated the conference. “Six out of the seven breakout sessions in the employment track were on research conducted by the NRTC on employment-related issues.”

The 2020 AFBLC will again be held at the Crystal Gateway Marriott in Arlington, Virginia. The HKAA gala will be held on March 25, followed by the conference on March 26–27.

# Creating a Best Practices Guide for Hospitals

AFB, along with Cabell Huntington Hospital Foundation (based in Huntington, West Virginia), has received a \$77,000 grant from the James H. and Alice Teubert Charitable Trust to conduct research on access to quality care for hospital patients who are blind or visually impaired.

Under the grant, AFB will design, develop, and execute the program and develop best practices that can improve access and experiences for visually impaired patients in hospital settings. The results of the project will be made available to all 3,000 hospital staff and include tips on communicating with blind or visually impaired patients, providing community resources, helping patients access written materials, and assisting

patients with vision loss. Additionally, AFB will provide materials in alternative formats, including braille, large print, and e-text, so patients or hospital staff with vision loss can easily access them. The materials will also be available for other hospitals to purchase.

“What a great partnership to promote inclusion and awareness for those we serve,” says Bradley Burck, vice president of the Cabell Huntington Hospital Foundation. “The driving idea behind this is that we could create a national model for other health care institutions to follow to improve the patient experience.”



## Honoring Those Creating a World of No Limits

Since 1994, AFB has recognized exceptional individuals and organizations that are making the world a more welcoming and inclusive place for people who are blind or visually impaired. This is certainly true for the recipients of the 2019 Helen Keller Achievement Award: Amazon, Northrop Grumman, and Washington State Lieutenant Governor Cyrus Habib.

Amazon was recognized for developing innovative products and services that benefit people of all abilities. Just a few examples include integrating its VoiceView screen reader into Kindle and Fire TV devices (plus integrating VoiceView with braille input and output support in Fire tablets), bringing audio description to hundreds of Prime Video titles, and pioneering audio interfaces with Alexa and the growing family of Echo devices.

Northrop Grumman was honored for its efforts to foster an environment that values diversity.

The global security company has earned numerous awards for its commitment to inclusion, which involves a concerted effort to recruit and develop diverse talent—and encouraging those employees to pursue leadership positions, ensuring an inclusive mindset at every level of the organization.

Lieutenant Governor Cyrus Habib of Washington State lost his sight as a child but has gone on to build an impressive résumé, including graduating from Yale Law School and working as a lawyer at Perkins Coie. Since beginning his career in public service in the Washington State House of Representatives and State Senate, Lt. Gov. Habib has dedicated his work to creating enriching environments for people with disabilities, with an emphasis on expanding higher education options to all students through greater accessibility.

# AFB Scholarship Recipients Reach for the Stars

Each year, AFB awards scholarships to outstanding students who are blind or have low vision. These rising stars prove visual impairment is not a barrier to success.

## The Delta Gamma Foundation Florence Margaret Harvey Memorial Scholarship

Samantha Smolka is studying special education with a focus on visual impairments at Northern Illinois University. In high school, Samantha was a member of the U.S. Paralympics All-American Track and Field Team. She was also the first woman with a visual impairment to compete in track and field at her university.

## The Rudolph Dillman Memorial Scholarship

- Amber Robinson will be pursuing her Master of Education degree in rehabilitation counseling at George Washington University. During her undergraduate work, Amber was a member of several honors societies and completed an honors research thesis.
- Amy Hatten is currently pursuing her Master of Science degree in rehabilitation counseling at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Amy is highly active in the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), holding the position of second vice president for the state board of South Dakota.
- Anastasia DeGuzman is currently completing her Master of Science degree in vision rehabilitation therapy at Western Michigan University. Previously, Anastasia was the first student with a severe disability to graduate from Florida SouthWestern State College’s School of Education program for elementary education teaching. During her undergraduate studies, she was also the longest-serving officer in the Kappa Delta Epsilon honors fraternity.
- Rebecca Weber is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in visual impairment and early elementary education at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania.

During high school, she was the chair of events on the student council, a member of the National Honors Society, and active in her school’s ministry program.

## The Paul and Ellen Ruckes Scholarship

- Gabe Stanforth is studying biomedical engineering at the University of Iowa. He earned the rank of Eagle Scout from the Boy Scouts of America and was named an Illinois State Scholar for his outstanding academic achievement, including a 4.3 GPA and an overall ACT score of 33. He hopes to develop innovative biomedical technologies to help others once he earns his degree.
- Jack Duffy-Protentis is pursuing an engineering degree from Worcester Polytechnic Institute. He was selected to present at the International Sustainable Engineering Conference in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2017 and was chosen in 2015 by the Congress of Future Scientists and Technologists as a top student who aspires to be a scientist or technologist.

## The R. L. Gillette, Gladys C. Anderson, and Karen D. Carsel Memorial Scholarship

Elizabeth Dunn is pursuing a degree in music and psychology at Alma College. She received the Distinguished Performance Award for Instrumental Music at Alma College and was accepted into the Sigma Alpha Iota Women’s Music Fraternity. She also received the NFB’s Community Award in 2012. Elizabeth’s lifelong interest in music, and her interest more recently in the human mind, led her to pursue a career in music therapy.

**The Julia Sweeney Fund**, named after the long-time Center on Vision Loss board member, donor, and prominent Dallas-area columnist who focused on women’s issues and empowerment, presented awards to Jennifer Bennet and Melva Henderson.

Jennifer has had limited vision her entire life. Following her participation in the Employment Services Program at East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in 2016, she was employed at Centene Corporation in Tyler, Texas, where she currently serves as an advanced claims analyst. She holds master’s degrees in both history and library science.

Melva works as a program specialist at the Dallas Lighthouse for the Blind, where she advocates, educates, and refers blind and visually impaired clients to services and programs that can help

them live more independent and rewarding lives. Melva is a 2016 graduate of Texas A&M University of Commerce with a master’s degree in social work. She is currently enrolled in the National Industries for the Blind’s Business Management Training program and is excited to combine her passion for helping others with her growing business acumen.

As Julia Sweeney Fund recipients, Jennifer and Melva were guests at the 2019 AFB Leadership Conference and Helen Keller Achievement Awards gala.



# 2019 Financials



## American Foundation for the Blind, Inc. and AFB Special Fund, Inc. Consolidated Statements of Financial Position

As of June 30, 2019 and 2018 (amounts expressed in thousands)

Assets	2019	2018
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$1,502	\$1,273
Accounts receivable, net	217	477
Pledges and grants receivable, net	120	100
Other receivables	60	24
Prepaid expenses and other assets	214	189
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>2,113</b>	<b>2,063</b>
<b>Noncurrent Assets</b>		
Long term pledge receivables	886	962
Investments, at fair value	20,703	23,154
Property and equipment, net	62	818
<b>Total Noncurrent Assets</b>	<b>21,651</b>	<b>24,934</b>
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$23,764</b>	<b>\$26,997</b>
<b>Liabilities and Net Assets</b>		
<b>Current Liabilities</b>		
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$832	\$840
Deferred revenue	74	120
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>906</b>	<b>960</b>
<b>Noncurrent Liabilities</b>		
Deferred rent obligation	115	202
Accrued postretirement benefit liability	139	138
<b>Total Noncurrent Liabilities</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>340</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>		
Without donor restrictions	12,748	14,379
With donor restrictions	9,856	11,318
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>22,604</b>	<b>25,697</b>
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>\$23,764</b>	<b>\$26,997</b>

# American Foundation for the Blind, Inc. and AFB Special Fund, Inc. Consolidated Statements of Activities and Changes in Net Assets

For the years ended June 30, 2019 and 2018 (amounts expressed in thousands)

## Revenues, Gains, and Other Support

### Public support

Direct public support	\$3,418	\$ -	\$510	\$ -	\$3,928	\$2,007
Legacies and bequests	1,930	-	1	-	1,931	1,661
Grants from government agencies	-	-	163	-	163	224

### Total public support

**5,348**

### Other revenue

Sales	855	-	5	-	860	1,306
Investment activity	563	263	156	-	982	1,906
Royalty and other income	7	-	-	-	7	-
Micellaneous revenue	1,139	-	(543)	-	596	108

### Total other revenue

**2,564**

### Net assets released from restrictions

**1,756**

## Total Revenues, Gains, and Other Support

**\$9,668**

## Expenses

### Program services

Knowledge building and information dissemination	\$4,076	-	-	-	\$4,076	\$3,562
Technology solutions	2,113	-	-	-	2,113	1,708
Advocacy and public policy	1,547	-	-	-	1,547	1,192

### Total program services

**7,736**

### Supporting services

Management and general	1,699	88	-	-	1,787	2,569
Fundraising	1,961	-	-	-	1,961	1,439
Cost of direct benefits to donors	49	-	-	-	49	24

### Total supporting services

**3,709**

## Total Expenses

**\$11,445**

## Net Assets

Change in net assets before postretirement-related changes	\$(1,777)	\$175	\$(1,464)	-	\$(3,066)	\$(3,282)
Postretirement-related changes other than net periodic costs	(27)	-	-	-	(27)	-

### Change in net assets

**\$(1,804)**

### Net assets, beginning of the year

**\$13,322**

### Net Assets, End of Year

**\$11,518**

Without Donor Restrictions		With Donor Restrictions		Totals	
AFB	AFBSF	AFB	AFBSF	2019	2018
\$3,418	\$ -	\$510	\$ -	\$3,928	\$2,007
1,930	-	1	-	1,931	1,661
-	-	163	-	163	224
<b>5,348</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>674</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>6,022</b>	<b>3,892</b>
855	-	5	-	860	1,306
563	263	156	-	982	1,906
7	-	-	-	7	-
1,139	-	(543)	-	596	108
<b>2,564</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>(382)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2,445</b>	<b>3,320</b>
<b>1,756</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>(1,756)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>\$9,668</b>	<b>\$263</b>	<b>\$(1,464)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$8,467</b>	<b>\$7,212</b>
\$4,076	-	-	-	\$4,076	\$3,562
2,113	-	-	-	2,113	1,708
1,547	-	-	-	1,547	1,192
<b>7,736</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>7,736</b>	<b>6,462</b>
1,699	88	-	-	1,787	2,569
1,961	-	-	-	1,961	1,439
49	-	-	-	49	24
<b>3,709</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3,797</b>	<b>4,032</b>
<b>\$11,445</b>	<b>\$88</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$11,533</b>	<b>\$10,494</b>
\$(1,777)	\$175	\$(1,464)	-	\$(3,066)	\$(3,282)
(27)	-	-	-	(27)	-
<b>\$(1,804)</b>	<b>\$175</b>	<b>\$(1,464)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$(3,093)</b>	<b>\$(3,282)</b>
<b>\$13,322</b>	<b>\$1,055</b>	<b>\$11,293</b>	<b>\$27</b>	<b>\$25,697</b>	<b>\$28,979</b>
<b>\$11,518</b>	<b>\$1,230</b>	<b>\$9,829</b>	<b>\$27</b>	<b>\$22,604</b>	<b>\$25,697</b>

# Our Donors



We thank our generous donors, who enable us to strengthen our programs and extend critical resources to people with vision loss and their families. Your continuing support means more children and adults with vision loss can reach their full potential. To learn how you can become an AFB donor, please visit [www.afb.org/donate](http://www.afb.org/donate) or contact our Resource Development team at (212) 502-7621. The following lists comprise donors who made contributions between July 1, 2018, and June 30, 2019.

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### Contributions of \$50,000+

Joan Weisberg

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### Contributions of \$10,000+

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### \$100,000+

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The Winston Foundation, Inc.

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## \$5,000+

Anonymous  
Comcast Corporation  
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Community Foundation  
for Greater New Haven

## \$1,000+

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Travis Association for the Blind

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The following organizations matched  
gifts their employees made to AFB.

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American Family Insurance  
Dreams Foundation  
Apple  
Chevron  
CSX Corporate Citizenship  
Exelon Corporation  
Google  
Hewlett Packard Enterprise  
Johnson & Johnson  
Key Bank Foundation  
Pfizer, Inc.  
Shell Oil Company  
The Carolyn W. & Charles T. Beaird  
Family Foundation  
Verizon

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We would like to express our  
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The Helen Keller Achievement  
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We are grateful for our sponsors,  
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The Helen Keller Society was  
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good work of Ms. Keller for future  
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Through bequests and other  
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