



# When Life Changes Dramatically

*When you give to United Way, you are making a way better difference in the lives of people in our community. We are pleased to share highlights about one of the programs funded in part by United Way contributions: Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired.*

Seeing is believing. But what about when all that you're used to seeing suddenly stops?

It did one day for Jim Bonnema. In early 1981, Jim went to work as usual. He was in the middle of a daily routine. What happened next changed his entire life.

Jim had written a report earlier that day, and decided he should take another look at it. His eyes didn't cooperate with what we take for granted as a simple task. He couldn't focus. He tried everything that he thought was a way to read the words he knew were on those pages. He cleaned his glasses. He opened the shades in his office. After some time, he knew that something wasn't clear – his vision was nearly gone.

A doctor's appointment and several eye exams gave Jim the news that his vision was permanently impaired. He needed to prepare himself to living a life without seeing. His life now included the word "blind."

In the summer of 1981, Jim began working with the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI) to get ready to begin his new life. He imagined the worst, and now says that he received the very best care to adapt and enjoy all that life holds for

him. With your generous support to the Heart of West Michigan United Way, you help to build a stronger community and improve lives, like those of Jim Bonnema.

Jim is just one of many who are thriving because of the assistance ABVI is able to give. He now is a proud volunteer at ABVI and believes that vision awareness and assistance is a much needed program in our community. Jim says that "he sees people come in everyday that are down on life because of their vision problems," but after getting the proper help now have hope instead of despair.

Of these clients, Jim says that he is among their strongest supporters, and that over 25 years later, he is living a life with dignity and great reward. "I never would have figured things out without the help of ABVI," he says. For Jim Bonnema, and so many others like him, maybe seeing really is believing – in their special way.

*Special thanks to Jim Bonnema for his personal story and to Richard Stevens, Executive Director at Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired.*

