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Matilda Ziegler Magazine for the Blind

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[Contributor Jennifer Streisand – A ‘Top Ten List’ to Achieve a New, Normal Living With Vision Loss: Part One](#)

Posted by Matilda on November 9, 2012; This entry is filed under [Magazine Contributor](#).

As the baby boomer population ages, many more of them will be diagnosed with some kind of vision loss.

“75 million people are going to be turning old roughly around the same time, so as a society, we are going to have an epidemic of people experiencing vision loss,” says Dominic Calabrese, vice president of public relations at The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who are Blind or Visually Impaired. The Chicago Lighthouse was originally founded in 1906 on the West side of Chicago, and the agency is known worldwide as a holistic center to help visually impaired people with medical diagnoses and treatment, rehabilitation, employment, and daily living. The Chicago Lighthouse also helps veterans with vision loss by distributing a variety of low vision aids to veterans across the country. The Lighthouse serves private companies and governmental agencies by having several call centers set up in its main facility on West Roosevelt Road in Chicago, where the call center representatives who are employed there, are either blind or visually impaired.

It is the ubiquitous technology in our modern world that has brought down barriers and leveled the playing field for people who are blind or visually impaired, says Janet Szlyk, Ph.D., president and executive director of The Chicago Lighthouse. When it was once considered a handicap to use special technology, today any kind of technology is perceived as savvy.

Today in the United States, the leading cause of vision loss among older people—specifically people over 60—is age-related macular degeneration, (sometimes referred to as AMD) according to information posted on WebMD. And the information suggests that most people who have age-related macular degeneration, will not lose all of their vision, but will have to adjust to vision that is different than what it used to be.

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That means people experiencing the vision loss will have to ask themselves the question, “What can I no longer do that I need to do on a daily basis or want to do for recreation?”

This is precisely the question that Tom Perski, senior vice president of Rehabilitation Services asks people when they come to the Tools for Living Retail Store that he oversees at The Chicago Lighthouse for People who are Blind or Visually Impaired. The store stocks hundreds of different technological devices to help people who have compromised vision carry out daily tasks. You can shop at the Tools for Living Retail Store online by going to <http://chicagolighthouse.org/store>. For low vision patients going in-person to the store, Perski asks them to make “A Top 10 List” of the tasks and activities they are having the most trouble with, and then, once in the store, Perski and his staff can find the right products to help them do these tasks again with relative ease, once they practice using them. In this process of learning to do their routine tasks with the help of technology, the person experiencing low vision is able to do what they used to before their vision loss, but they do their routine tasks in a different way. Most importantly, they feel as though there is help for their vision loss.

“It’s something new for the person, of course, but I tell people, don’t buy this unless you are prepared to use this every day because it is like developing a new habit and learning to read,” Perski explains. “It’s going to be slow and a little bit frustrating at first, but if you do it for a short time every day, at the end of two weeks you are going to convince yourself that you can do it. We offer a 30-day money back guarantee for the products.”

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