



***BEHIND HADLEY'S HISTORIC WINNETKA EXTERIOR IS THE EPICENTER OF TECHNOLOGY AND DISTANCE LEARNING FOR ADULTS FACING VISION LOSS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND AROUND THE WORLD***

For more than 100 years, residents of Chicago's North Shore - and generations of Chicagoans - have known Hadley as a charitable organization serving those with visual impairments. Hadley's historic building, resembling a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century school, has been nestled in a neighborhood near Winnetka's quaint downtown for the past 60 years.



Yet for the many who pass by Hadley's iconic home, few know the building was never a "school" in the traditional sense, with no classrooms, chalkboards or school buses shuttling students back and forth. Even fewer know the early history of Hadley which was founded as a correspondence school in 1920 providing braille lessons delivered by mail through the U.S. Postal Service ("Braille by Mail").

By the early 1960's Hadley was exploring new approaches to distance learning, producing plastic braille books and audio recordings all from its Winnetka location at 700 Elm Street, for distribution to a growing population of visually impaired across the country. In the ensuing decades, Hadley added film and video production to its array of media channels to enhance the learning experience.

With the advent of the internet in the 1980's, e-learning quickly became a staple of remote education, leaders with Hadley point out that they had a 100-year head start on the distance learning phenomenon. "We have been engaging with learners remotely for a century, there are a lot of best practices we pioneered, particularly in the technology realm, to create personalized learning opportunities that empower those with vision loss to thrive at home, at work and in their communities," said Julie Tye President and CEO of Hadley.

Today Hadley, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is the nation's leader in distance and online learning for those with visual impairments. Behind Hadley's historic exterior is an impressive array of state-of-the-art media production technology, including a digital recording studio and advanced sound and editing suites where they produce videos, podcasts, and online workshops for thousands of people with vision loss each year from all 50 states and more than 100 countries, all at no cost.



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In 2019 Hadley rebranded, undergoing a name change from “Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired” to simply Hadley, in order to more accurately represent its growing array of



online learning capabilities, technology and services. The change coincided with the launch of Hadley’s new learning platform [Hadley.edu](https://www.hadley.edu), an online hub for a wide selection of free how-to online workshops on a variety of topics, live support from experts, and timely discussion groups, including the popular podcast *Hadley Presents: A Conversation with the Experts*. Built on many months of research and development work, Hadley.edu is entirely based on the needs and wants of visually impaired adults to keep them informed, engaged, and connected.

In recent years Hadley has also seen an explosion in the number of those who could benefit from its help. As life expectancy rates increase, research is projecting that the number of older Americans who have visual impairments or are blind will double by 2050, with macular degeneration, glaucoma or diabetic retinopathy as the leading causes for vision loss among aging seniors.

“People with vision impairment can rely on Hadley for accessible, practical information and advice on doing the things they want to do,” said Maria Zacharias, communications director at the National Eye Institute. “That’s why we’re pleased to partner with Hadley through our National Eye Health Education Program.”

Larry Carlson, 62, of Las Vegas lost his vision recently due to a progressive genetic eye disorder. The irony isn’t lost on Carlson, whose job with the City of Las Vegas would often involve installing talking traffic signals for the visually impaired. “After months of struggling there came a moment when I realized I could no longer do what I did best,” said Carlson. “I didn’t want to sink into despair like so many others diagnosed with vision loss. That’s when Carlson turned to Hadley.edu. “Fortunately, the new online learning platform contains thousands of things that if you didn’t have low vision you would never think about.”

During the height of the pandemic, Hadley experienced a surge in enrollment for workshops and discussion groups designed to keep the visually impaired connected to expert help during the pandemic, including new learning modules for those with vision loss on [how to use Zoom](#), as well as how to access special [low vision features](#) on their cell phones, smart devices, and computers.

Linda O’Connell, 71, of Seguin, Texas, is a former school administrator diagnosed with glaucoma. O’Connell realized that getting back on her computer after many years was important for her to stay informed, in touch and healthy. O’Connell began taking workshops through Hadley to learn how to get back online using screen readers and other new technologies.

For other Hadley users like Michael Gold of Niagara Falls, New York his introduction to Hadley began eight years ago when his adult daughter lost her sight due to an illness. As his daughter faced the initial challenges adapting to her vision loss, including learning braille, Gold turned to Hadley committed to learn braille on his own in a show of support and encouragement for his daughter.

As Hadley moves into its second century of service, they have been inviting learners across the country to serve as advisors to provide ongoing input on content, design and implementation of new classes and workshops. Julie Tye, Hadley’s president and CEO points to a change in Hadley’s culture that will serve them well into the future. “Turning to our learners for advice and counsel is central to Hadley today,” Tye remarks. “Listening and learning and evolving to meet their needs will be key to ensuring we always maximize the good we can do in the world.”

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**Note to media:** Hadley experts are available to speak on the issue of the challenges facing those with low vision or blindness and the free resources available through the Hadley.edu and the century of service to those with visual impairments. To arrange an interview contact: [press@hadley.edu](mailto:press@hadley.edu)