

Thrive

2021 New Venture
Award Winners

Hadley Pioneers
New Approach
for Tactile Braille
Learners

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Hadley President

Hadley helps
build confidence

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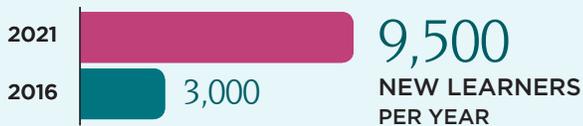
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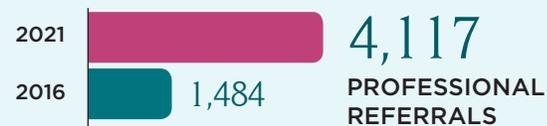
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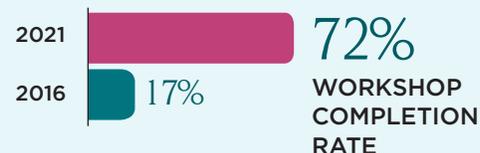
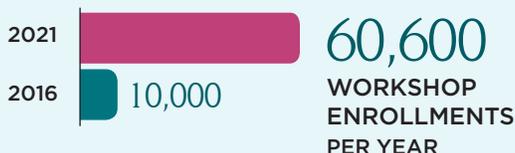
Expanding its reach



Gaining recognition in the field



Improving engagement with learners





A Conversation with Julie Tye...

2021 marks Julie Tye's fifth year as Hadley president. As she reflects upon the past and prepares for the future, she answers some important questions.

Q. Where is Hadley making the greatest impact?

A. We are making the greatest impact with a new audience for Hadley, older adults who are new to vision loss. Hadley had not traditionally served this group, but it is where the most vision loss is occurring. This audience needs practical help in accomplishing familiar tasks, but in new ways.

There are three legs to Hadley's mission—home, work and community. We are focused on making an impact across all of these because they are each critically important to a person's well-being.

Q. What results are you most proud of?

A. The positive impact we have on individuals' lives is the most important result. This is difficult to quantify, but the learner stories in this issue show how instrumental Hadley is to them.

Other key indicators provide valuable directional information. For example, we are reaching more people than ever. In 2016, Hadley attracted 3,000 new learners and in Fiscal Year 2021, we welcomed 9,500.

Q. What are you excited about?

A. I am thrilled other vision service organizations are recognizing that Hadley is filling a critical void, and they are offering Hadley as part of the solution. This is happening nationally and internationally with wonderful organizations—such as Spectrios Institute for Low Vision, Prevent Blindness, Royal National Institute of the Blind, and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. It is so rewarding that Hadley is reaching new audiences and helping more people.

Q. What new initiatives are in the works at Hadley?

A. Recently, we reimagined how braille is taught to

sighted learners. Now, we are reinventing how it is taught to tactile learners. Braille is extremely helpful on many different levels. However, it is extremely challenging to learn, so there is a high attrition rate. We are setting out to change this and we believe it is going to be revolutionary.

Q. What challenges do you foresee?

A. The number of adults with visual impairment is growing exponentially. So, the need for Hadley's services will increase. However, we are prepared. To be successful, an individual needs to function both physically and mentally—and Hadley has the learning they need. Also, Hadley's technology platform is fully scalable so we can efficiently help more people.

Q. What has surprised you?

A. I am stunned by the amount of innovation at Hadley over the past couple of years. Even in the best of circumstances, innovation is challenging. The fact that staff and learners have kept innovating through the pandemic to create, learn and connect is incredible and inspiring. ■

our mission Hadley creates personalized learning opportunities that empower adults with vision loss or blindness to thrive—at home, at work and in their communities.





Hadley Pioneers New Approach for Tactile Braille Learners

Imagine not being able to tell which knob turns off the oven, which clothes in your closet you want to wear or which medication you need to take. These are some of the things that people with vision loss struggle with daily. And, when they lose their ability to do these types of essential tasks, they also lose their autonomy.

Braille is a game-changer. Even a basic knowledge of braille allows someone to label and identify things in their environment so they can continue to live safely and independently.

With greater braille proficiency, a person can capture and read their thoughts on reminders, notes and lists—a simple yet crucial capability that sighted people take for granted. More

advanced braille literacy allows someone without vision to curl up with a good book, without audio assistance, and read at their own pace for their leisure or knowledge.

However, learning braille is not easy, and many people who would benefit from braille give up along the way. Hadley has been teaching braille for over a century and is the world's largest provider of braille education, but there is still a significant level of learner attrition. So, we got to work reimagining how tactile braille is taught to keep learners engaged to increase braille literacy.

The result, Hadley's new Tactile Braille workshop series, mirrors the Braille for Sighted Learners series that Hadley rolled out earlier this year and builds upon

this lesson framework that has already proven successful.

However, teaching and learning tactile braille is more complicated. Tactile braille requires additional materials, methods and instruction to get the “feel” of things. So, the Hadley team began researching, developing and piloting the best way to provide this learning.

The result is a multidimensional approach that incorporates large print, braille, audio, and video materials—with a combination of autonomous, group and one-on-one instruction.

Lessons are centered around a workbook that is mailed to learners. The lessons are in both braille and large print on each page. Historically, the majority (approximately 80 percent) of

Hadley's new workshop series, Braille for Everyday Use, provides learning for a wide range of braille users—from those who just want to label items with letters to those who want to read and write in contracted braille.

Hadley's tactile braille learners have some residual vision and are preparing for future vision loss. Including large print allows these individuals to comfortably transition to tactile skills.

Each lesson follows predictable patterns so learners can concentrate on the braille and not worry about navigating the page. Learners strengthen their understanding through fun and repetitive exercises that have real-world applicability. The workbook also includes braille stickers that learners can put to use immediately to label items in their home.

An accompanying audio component guides learners through each lesson, while a video on the Hadley website allows enlarged views of the materials.

Hadley learning experts are easily accessible when learners have questions on the material. These experts also hold weekly group meetings where learners can share ideas, ask questions and engage with their peers.

This combined approach provides flexibility and choice, allowing learners to utilize the best mediums for their situation.

To make sure we were on the right track, Hadley asked learners who had dropped out of the old course to test the new one. Their input provided guidance on where tweaks were required and also reassurance that this reimagined approach is effective. Feedback was extremely positive and demonstrates the tremendous potential of this new program.

Learners said:

- "Braille seemed inscrutable to me. I could never figure it out. THIS makes it accessible."
- "It's empowering."
- "This is the most effective method I've found for learning braille."
- "I can master this!"
- "There's a use for braille, even for those with low vision."
- "I didn't think I needed braille, but I am very positive this is something I do need, want and can learn."
- "I was fighting learning braille, but it really is for everyone." ■

Thank you, Lavelle Fund for the Blind

The new tactile braille program was made possible by the support of Hadley donors, including a generous grant from the Lavelle Fund for the Blind. The Lavelle Fund is dedicated to supporting programs that help individuals who are blind or visually impaired live independent and productive lives.

The Fund's executive director, Susan Olivo, explains that Lavelle shares Hadley's commitment to braille. "Braille is important in the continuum of services for people with diminishing vision. It is a critical tool to make activities of daily life easier."

Focused on supporting programs that demonstrate impact and measurable progress, Lavelle was impressed with the Hadley approach and prototype. In addition, Susan explains, "This workshop series helps to demystify the braille learning process, and Hadley has managed to make it not only easy-to-understand and undertake, but fun as well."

Braille Brings Hadley Learner Independence and Peace of Mind

When Dianne Roberts was 23 years old she was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa. That was in 1984, and in the following years she experienced a gradual loss of her peripheral vision. In 2011, her central vision declined too, leaving her unable to read printed text. “I am an avid reader, so it was tough giving this up,” she shares. This led to a dark period. “I could only do things from memory and felt like I was not really living. I felt like I was becoming a non-person.”

Tired of being helpless, Dianne decided to learn braille in 2013. She still remembers the relief she felt when she called Hadley’s toll-free number and heard, “Yes, we can help you.”

“When I entered the world of the blind, I felt like an alien. I am so glad that Hadley was there,” she shares. “It has changed the course of my life.”

Dianne enrolled in braille literacy and “gobbled up” the content. “I could quickly see the benefits,” she states. She also made immediate use of the bump dots and labeler, which Hadley provides to braille learners, to identify things in the house.

Dianne overcame breast cancer in 2009, but cancer has taken those closest to her. Her husband died from leukemia in 2019, and her mother

succumbed to throat cancer earlier this year.

She is relieved her husband was alive when she began this journey and shares, “It is helpful to have someone to cheer you on.” Still, learning sometimes seemed overwhelming, “There were times I thought this is too hard to do because I was dealing with other things. Should I quit? But I could not do that to myself.”

As it turned out, “learning braille became a wonderful escape from the stresses.” While caring for her husband and mother, Dianne kept her slate and stylus with her so she could work on her writing skills. She also practiced reading braille everywhere she went—such as buildings and elevators.

While Dianne can still read enlarged text and uses technology and tools such as magnifiers for assistance, braille is extremely important. “Braille has given me the solid foundation that I needed and has been an anchor through the storms. I don’t use technology every day, but I do use braille every day.”

For Dianne, who lives alone in her home in Georgia, “Being able to use braille at home helps to ease the difficulty.” It is also key to maintaining her independence. “I will always need help, but I don’t want to be totally dependent on someone.”



Dianne Roberts still remembers the relief she felt when Hadley told her, “Yes, we can help you.”

Hadley is helping. “When I need something, I go to someone I know and trust—and Hadley is my first go to,” states Dianne. This includes Hadley’s workshops where learning simple things—like where to place a knife and position a pot handle—have enabled her to continue cooking safely.

Dianne has limited financial resources so she appreciates that Hadley’s services are free. “I honestly don’t know if I could have afforded to pay for learning,” she shares and thanks Hadley’s supporters, “Their donations have changed the course of my life. I am just one person, but I am grateful.” ■

In the Hadley Garden: An Experience for the Senses

Last summer, the Hadley garden was renewed—a final step in the renovation of its headquarters in Winnetka, IL. When updating this special space, a landscape designer and arborist, John Eskandari, owner of Urban Plantsman in Chicago, kept several key goals in mind. Among them, he recognized the garden’s important history and sought to retain as much of this matured essence as possible. Second, he aimed to build on how the garden benefits the Hadley community and the community at large.

The result is a stunning space that engages all senses. It is accessible to the public by way of a crushed granite footpath that crosses the front main walkway, enticing visitors to meander in. For someone with limited sight, the grit of the crushed stone allows visitors to feel and hear their way through the garden.



Fresh plantings add new life to containers the Garden Guild of Winnetka gave to Hadley in 2009



A beautiful assortment of flowers welcomes visitors to the Hadley building

It is also a cue that this space is interactive and it is safe to touch things. In fact, visitors are encouraged to feel the plants.

The garden is designed for a range of tactile experiences. This includes a wonderful selection of conifers—a floating bonsai garden—a stunning visual and textural presence of stark white containers against a dark purple wall of European beech. Along the edge of the front path, flowering plants will grow up to have a “frothy” feel and sound for those walking by.

Further engaging the senses, a native shrub Sweetfern (*Comptonia peregrine*), emits a lovely scent when its leaves are crushed. In the autumn, a Katsura tree emits a fragrance that is compared to caramel or cotton candy. Two water features create lovely background sounds, with windchimes adding to the mix on breezy days. Hadley staff

and visitors are encouraged to pick, taste, and eat the fresh vegetables planted in boxes at the back of the building.

For people with limited vision, use of contrasting colors and the play between positive and negative spaces throughout help to enhance the experience.

John is excited about all of the ways Hadley can use the garden and share its bounty with others—such as donating plants to local causes or sharing seeds that its plants produce. As a specialist in horticulture therapy, he also promotes the power of plants, “There is a universal connection with plants. Everyone likes plants and there is something truly special about that.” ■

BECAUSE YOU CARE,
HADLEY LEARNERS THRIVE
IN THE COMMUNITY.

Two New Venture Award Winners Develop Their Personal Interests into Small Businesses

The Forsythe Center for Employment and Entrepreneurship established the New Venture Competition Award in 2016 to encourage Hadley learners to apply their knowledge and skills to create and grow their own businesses.

This year was the first time that learners developed their proposals by completing Hadley's new "Starting a Business" curriculum. An outside and impartial panel of three judges reviewed nearly 20 entries and interviewed the top candidates. The judges explained that two individuals rose to the top because of their "outstanding knowledge of the business markets they were in," and "focus and ability to execute." So, the \$30,000 award was divided between them.

Award Winner Tackles the Fishing Market



Where would you go for fishing bait delivered overnight? An Amazon search might lead you to Bronco Fishing and Tackle, founded by Bruno D'Avanzo of Dearborn, MI, in 2015.

Bruno grew up fishing on the Detroit River. When considering a business he could start after leaving his career in accounting, he decided to pursue the fishing and tackle market. Bruno

vouches for all the products he sells and has used them himself over the years.

Bronco Fishing and Tackle's mission is to "sell competitively priced, brand name, sport fishing tackle online and to deliver the products to customers fast and free." The store is set up on the Amazon Marketplace, which gives Bruno access to Amazon's selling, marketing, inventory, and shipping tools. Bruno prides himself on delivering top quality products with a guaranteed 24-hour handling time, which has earned him a 5-star seller rating.

Now completely blind due to retinitis pigmentosa, Bruno leads the day-to-day operations. Carol, his wife, helps with shipping and inventory management.

The healthy sports fishing market and the pursuit of outdoor activities during

COVID-19 has enabled Bronco to double its business in the past three years. In fact, business has been so good that Bruno has not been able to stock needed inventory which has led to significant lost revenue.

With the \$22,500 award monies Bruno can purchase additional inventory at better wholesale prices, thereby enabling him to fulfill customer orders and increase his margins. He also plans to invest in additional shipping and warehouse supplies and to hire help for increased distribution needs.

"I am elated to win," Bruno shares. It is especially meaningful because this was his second try. Although he did not win when he entered in 2019, he took the judges' feedback to heart and put in the work to refine his operations and fine-tune customer acquisition and engagement strategies. ■

New Venture Brings Beauty Products to “the Fairest of Them All”

Jennifer Rhodes of Brooklyn, NY, was born with albinism, a rare congenital disorder that is marked by a reduced amount of melanin in the body. Melanin is responsible for pigmentation in the body and also plays a role in the development of the retina. So, a lack of melanin can lead to a variety of eye problems. In Jennifer’s case, she has been legally blind since birth with extreme nearsightedness.

Because people with albinism typically have light hair and skin, it can be challenging for women to find beauty products that look natural with their coloring. Jennifer decided to do something about it and founded Ivoree Beauty in 2020.



With the tagline, “for the fairest of them all,” Ivoree Beauty’s mission is to provide beauty product options that did not previously exist for women with albinism. A beauty influencer and former make-up artist, Jennifer is extremely knowledgeable about the field.

Jennifer launched Ivoree Beauty with an assortment of light color lashes and has expanded to include hair extensions, wigs, lip gloss and eye makeup. While her target market is women with albinism, she has also had interest from others looking for these types of products.

Today, Jennifer is the sole owner and operator of Ivoree Beauty. She works with vendors who make the products customized to her specifications. Products are sold online through the website (ivoreebeauty.com). She also designs the packaging, illustrates the artwork, and assembles and ships the items.

“I learned a lot through the application process. It has given me confidence.” —Jennifer Rhodes

Jennifer started learning with Hadley in 2012 and has taken a number of courses over the years, including some on business in hopes of starting her own business one day. While working on Ivoree Beauty, Jennifer completed Hadley’s Starting a Business program. She found the curriculum helpful because it provided a framework for organizing her thoughts, exploring considerations and making a plan.

The competition judges were impressed by Jennifer and her business plan sharing, “Jennifer has proven that she has the creative grit to grow her business into something bigger. Her niche is well defined, and she has a natural instinct for marketing.”

With her \$7,500 award, Jennifer will purchase an updated computer, expand inventory and create promotional social media content to take Ivoree Beauty to the next level. She is excited about this opportunity and shares, “I learned a lot through the application process. It has given me confidence.” ■

Learning Builds Confidence and Self Esteem



Despite distance and time zone differences, Divya Bijur of Mumbai, India, is an active member of the Hadley community

Divya Bijur first heard about Hadley in a career guidance seminar at the age of 16. Blind since birth, she was mainstreamed in her school in Mumbai, India, and Hadley courses on subjects including personal safety, technology, and the human eye became a wonderful way to supplement her education.

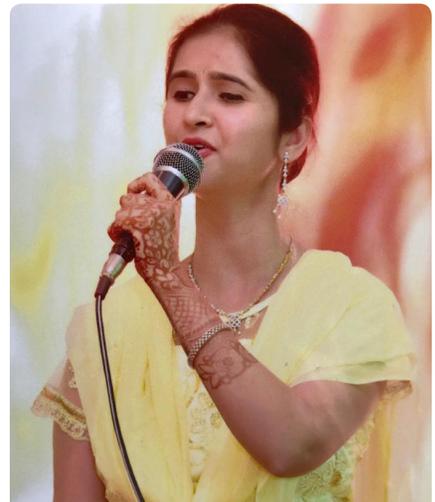
Now 34 years old and a successful physiotherapist, Divya continues to learn with Hadley. She explains, “Hadley has played an important role in shaping my independence and building my self-esteem.” Through Hadley’s independent

living courses, she has gained confidence in both her home and community. “By helping me on the home front, these courses have helped me gain confidence at this smaller level. This then translates into greater confidence out in the world.”

COVID-19 presented a new set of challenges. As a physiotherapist, Divya helps people manage pain and improve balance, motor function and mobility. This is difficult to do remotely, especially without sight. While Divya was eager to get back to working with patients in person, she was apprehensive about moving around in the world during the pandemic. A Hadley podcast episode on COVID-19 helped her overcome this trepidation with constructive advice and assurance that made her realize, “of course I can do this.”

“Everyone should be associated with Hadley,” states Divya. A Hadley learner for more than 18 years, she remarks, “I admire how Hadley is keeping pace with the times.” This includes the discussion groups, which she enjoys despite the time difference between India and the U.S. She attends and has shared her own expertise with the Embracing Braille group, presenting on Braille Options for Smart Phones and Foreign Language Braille.

These interactive forums also provide her with a community of support. For example, in the Resource Roundtable group there was discussion about the frustrations of working in the kitchen. She relates, “It was amazing to hear others laugh about making messes and mistakes and learning from them! It’s nice to feel that I am not the only one.” ■



Divya is also a gifted singer. She has pursued music since childhood and credits it as a wonderful way to “build up my mindfulness.” Recently, she had the opportunity to sing a promotional song for a movie. You can watch a video of Divya singing—and reading the lyrics in Braille—here.



Hadley Workshops Open a New World

Randy Ott's vision problems began when he was 23 years old due to Usher's Syndrome, a rare genetic disorder characterized by hearing loss and vision loss. He was forced to give up driving and, without independent transportation, also his career plans of becoming a plumber.

Instead, Randy worked at a plumbing supply warehouse. However, at the age of 53, he could no longer see to read and had to leave his job as branch manager to go on long-term disability. In 2018, when he was 63, he officially retired.

"With the technology available today, I probably could have kept my job," Randy believes. Tools such as a screen reader, VoiceOver and audio books have been wonderful in recent

"It has opened up a whole new world. It has been a huge help and has made me realize there are still things that I can do." —Randy Ott

years. However, should his hearing further deteriorate, these may not be enough. So, last year, he started learning braille with Hadley. "I don't want to be in a world where I can't read. I want to be prepared," he explains. "The timing was also right with COVID-19 because that was when I was just starting to get into braille."

Around this same time, Randy and his wife moved from British Columbia to Saskatchewan to be near their daughter and her six children. In addition to helping with his grandkids, Randy enjoys listening to audio books and hockey games. He also loves baking and jokes, "It is a good thing I also like walking to counter this."

Over the past year, Randy has also been an avid Hadley learner, completing more than 150 workshops. "I fell in love with the Hadley website," he states. "It has opened up a whole new world. It has been a huge help and has made me realize there are still things that I can do."

He is amazed by how much useful information he has found for dealing with vision loss. For example, Randy had assumed

that he could not rely on sound cues because he has lost much of his hearing, but after completing the Getting Around Outside workshop, he realized that he can distinguish enough sound to make a difference. Hadley's technology workshops, which are helping him take full advantage of his iPhone and computer, have been another



Randy Ott recently won a Hadley HEROES award for completing an outstanding number of workshops

highlight. "There are so many little tricks I didn't know—like, the fact that you can answer the iPhone by double tapping. You don't need to locate the button on the screen. Something as simple as that is so helpful.

"It can be isolating not knowing where to go for help," Randy explains. While he has tapped into excellent resources provided by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), "It is great to have resources like Hadley to complement this." Plus, he values Hadley's personal touch, "It makes a big difference to have Hadley learning experts reach out to me to see how I'm doing and encourage me." ■

**THANK YOU
FOR HELPING HADLEY
LEARNERS THRIVE.**

YOU MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR HADLEY LEARNERS TO THRIVE
AT HOME, AT WORK AND IN THE COMMUNITY.

Presenting the Hadley Woman's Board 2021

Braille Holiday Card



Hadley's 2021 Braille Holiday Card features a delightful winter village beneath a snowy sky. For tactile effect, some of the village buildings and a tree have been embossed. Inside, the card carries the greeting, "Wishing you peace, happiness and the spirit of the season" in both print and embossed braille.

The card was designed by artist Sarah Sheridan. Sarah's large family inspired her creation. "Some of my favorite times are spent with my family. We all live near each other, and this snowy town reminds me of the joy I get from being so close them."

Cards may be purchased online at brailleholidaycard.hadley.edu through December 10 or by phone by calling 800.323.4238, ext. 2755.

A pack of 25 cards is \$35. Custom imprinting is also available.

For photo cards this holiday season, visit Minted.com.

When you use the code **FUNDRAISEHADLEY**, you will save 20% on your order and Minted will donate 15% of your total purchase to Hadley.