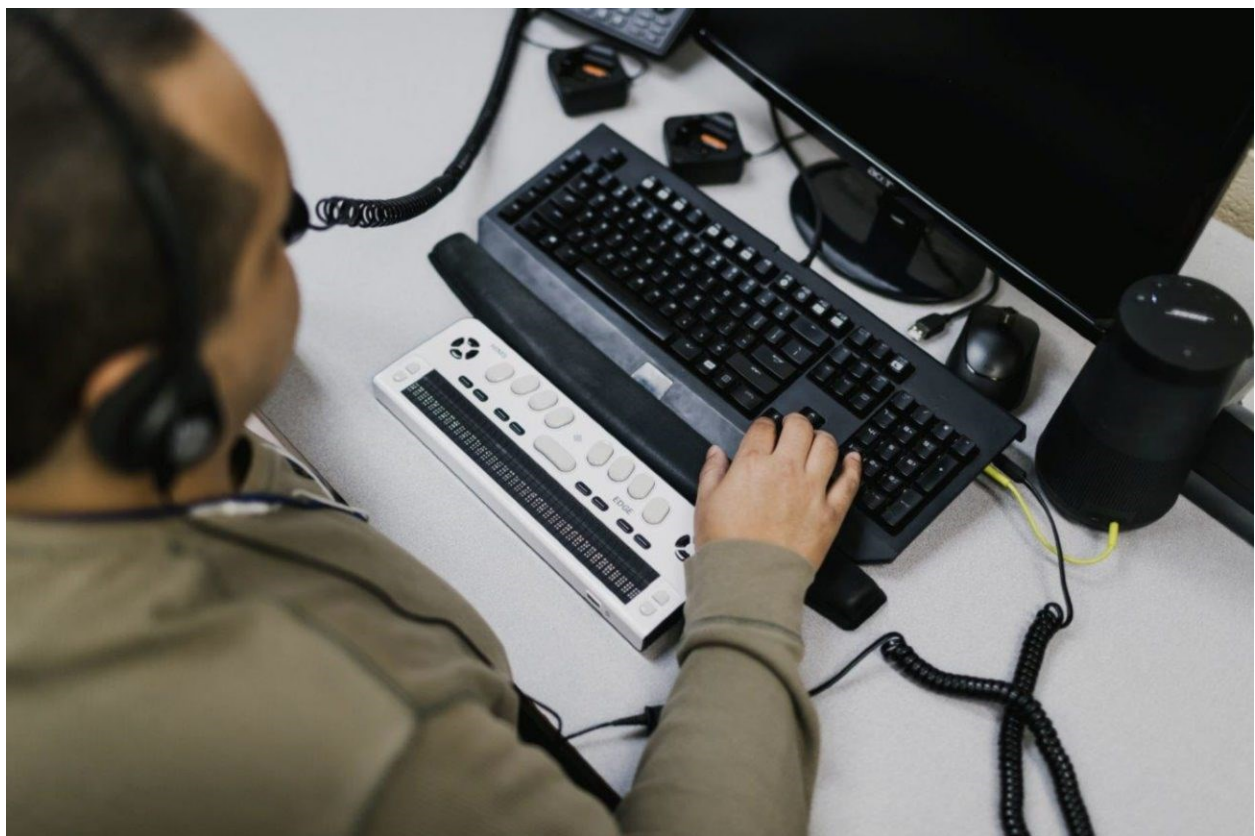


# The Dallas Express

*The People's Paper*

## NSITE: Seeing the Potential for Blind & Low-Vision Employees

[BUSINESS](#)



An man uses screen reading software in combination with a Braille keyboard to do his job more efficiently. | Image by The Chicago Lighthouse.

By [Andrew Terrell](#)

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Everyone is only one diagnosis away from having their entire lives wholly altered.

That couldn't be truer than for [Doug Goist](#), the workforce development and project manager for NSITE, the national talent management enterprise for NIB (National Industries for the Blind).

Goist spoke with *The Dallas Express* about how difficult losing one's vision can be for an individual and how much of a positive impact a decade's worth of technological advancements has made for the blind and low-vision community.

Goist was diagnosed with [Retinitis Pigmentosa](#) (RT) in college and gradually began to lose his vision. RT is a rare disorder passed from parent to child that can lead to sight loss in 1 out of every 4,000 individuals.

"Nine years after being diagnosed, I went from pretty much 20/20 vision to nothing," said Goist. "After repeated incidences of running into my teammates on the field, accidentally stepping on the dog, and running into the dishwasher door, I accepted that my vision wouldn't be around forever."

Although being blind has specific challenges to overcome, Goist is enthusiastic about the future and believes future technological advancements and bioscience companies like [CRISPR](#) will improve — or even better — eventually restore vision to those who have lost it.

Having vision restored would be life-changing for skilled, blind, working-age Americans, 70% of whom are not employed, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).

Though many U.S. companies have increased their focus on "diversity, equity, and inclusion" (DEI) initiatives, some employers could be overlooking an [untapped pool](#) of skilled talent who are also blind or have low vision.

That is where [NSITE](#) comes in. The Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit provides services that connect employers with talented, dedicated people who are blind and visually impaired.

Employers struggle to fill vacant positions; meanwhile, blind or low-vision Americans compete to find employment. NSITE is bridging the gap between the two, making it easier to connect job seekers with organizations looking to attract and retain diverse workforces.

These services include working with employers to identify and assist potential candidates with accessibility needs, onboarding, and training before finally preparing both parties for job placement.

From there, NSITE provides ongoing support to accommodate changes in accessible technology and employer requirements.

The Dallas Express spoke with some of the NSITE organizers and attendees at this year's "Are You In? 2022 Disability:IN Global Conference" held in Dallas earlier this summer.

NSITE Director [Jonathan Lucus](#) explained how his organization is aiding the blind and low-vision community to find meaningful employment.

"The goal is to provide comprehensive services to employers across the U.S. to ensure that when they are working on their DEI programs and their hiring programs, they don't forget people who are blind or visual-impaired," Lucus told *The Dallas Express*.

"Unless it is highly visual, essentially any office job is suitable for the blind and low-vision workers," he said. "Technology has become so robust now that there is really nothing an individual can't do."

Goist explained that current technological advancements are proving to be highly beneficial to those who have vision loss.

"Whether you have an android or an iPhone, you have almost everything you need for a blind person," he said.

Goist touted the advent of vision-based technology such as [Aira.io](#) with its live, on-demand visual-interpreting service and companies like [Second Sight](#), which has developed a prosthetic retinal implant to improve vision for individuals diagnosed with RP.

While Second Sight's retinal implants have helped many people restore vision loss, aging tech and allegedly poor corporate leadership caused the Los Angeles-based company to [discontinue its retinal implant](#) in 2019. It almost went out of business a year later.

Goist is in his third year as a goalie for the [United States Blind Hockey Team](#). He said although technology has simplified everyday life for blind and low-vision individuals, searching for a job remains an arduous, uphill battle.

When it comes to finding meaningful employment, 79% of all prime-age adults in the United States have a job, but only 40% of adults with disabilities in their prime working years (ages 25-54) do, according to a [report](#) from the Brookings Institution.

“Statistically, an employer’s additional costs for accommodating a visually impaired employee are minimal, especially compared to the employee’s tendency to stick with an employer who hires them,” explained Lucas.

Unlike typical employees who are prone to “job hop” more frequently, members of the blind and low-vision community choose to remain at the same company, according to Lucas.

Lucas told *The Dallas Express* that it had recently launched its own version of a job board called [NSITE Connect](#). Through NSITE’s Connect, employers can share openings at their organization, and then designated NSITE members will work to fill them with dedicated, qualified employees who are blind or visually impaired.

One company partnered with NSITE to help job seekers in the blind and low-vision community find meaningful employment is the global biopharmaceutical giant [Bristol Myers Squibb](#) (BMS).

The Dallas Express interviewed Tinamarie Duff, a global lead for the Disability Advancement Workplace Network (DAWN) at BMS. She described how her team is helping organizations like NSITE to foster equitable workplace environments for blind and low-vision job seekers.

Partnering with NSITE, BMS created a program through which “fellows that are part of the blind and low-vision community” are trained and gain experience at Bristol Myers Squibb.

“If they love our culture and environment,” Duff said, “hopefully, they come over as full-time employees or active recruiters.”

Duff said her team looks for “innovative ways to hire and retain talent with disabilities, lifting the stigma around disabilities, and health equity for people with

disabilities.” They want “a process that works for all, and NSITE is leading that charge for members of the blind and low-vision community.”

While non-profit organizations like NSITE look to improve job accessibility for individuals with vision loss, Lucas acknowledged that an essential first step to improving the lives of hardworking blind and low-vision individuals is to spread awareness that they are able and available to work.

*This story was pitched to The Dallas Express by one of our readers. Do you have a story you think should be covered or a tip on breaking news? Submit your idea [here](#).*

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