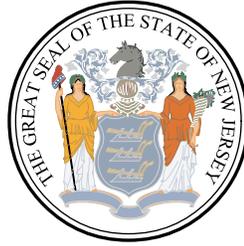


**New Jersey
Department of Human Services
Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired**



**2015 Annual Report
of the
State Rehabilitation Council**



**New Jersey Department of Human Services
Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

2015 Annual Report - State Rehabilitation Council

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI) promotes and provides services in the areas of education, employment, independence, and eye health for people who are blind, deaf-blind, or vision-impaired, their families, and the community.

The Commission adopts four major strategies in carrying out its mission, which are:

- (1) Providing specialized services to people with limited or no vision;
- (2) Educating and working in the community to reduce the incidence of vision loss;
- (3) Improving social attitudes about blindness and vision-impairment; and
- (4) Increasing employment outcomes for individuals who are blind, vision-impaired, and deaf-blind.

Detailed information about services can be found at: <http://www.cbvi.nj.gov>

Any questions regarding this report, or to request it in alternate formats, should be directed to Amanda Gerson at (973) 648-3660 or via e-mail at amanda.gerson@dhs.state.nj.us

Table of Contents

Greetings from SRC Chairperson 3

CBVI Executive Director’s Report 4

Overview of the CBVI 7

Major Service Programs Provided by CBVI 8

SRC Working Principles and Responsibilities 9

SRC Board Members 10

SRC Accomplishments in FFY 2015 12

Statewide Impact of CBVI Services 13

Project BEST 14

Vocational Rehabilitation Services 15

Standards and Indicators in FFY 2015 16

Business Enterprises -New Jersey..... 19

Joseph Kohn Training Center..... 21

Technological Support Services..... 23

ICanConnect..... 24

Bonner Pre-College Prep Experience. 25

Work Skills Prep Program..... 27

EDGE Program 29

Life 101 30

SHARP 33

ASPIRE..... 35

Deaf-Blind Services 36

Success Stories 38

SRC Goals for FFY 2016..... 46

Did you know?..... 47

SRC Meeting Dates 2016..... 48

Service Centers and Facilities 48

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) - Chairperson

Dear Governor Christie:

I am pleased to present the 2015 Annual Report of the State Rehabilitation Council of the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI).

In fiscal year 2015 the SRC worked with diligence to promote an even wider understanding and appreciation of the role of the Commission in fostering and empowering blind and vision-impaired citizens of New Jersey in their quest to increase their independence, achieve equal opportunities in the workplace, and further their engagement in society.



The SRC worked hand in hand with CBVI to develop and implement policies that incorporate the training and supports that enable NJ citizens with vision loss to acquire the skills and competencies that promote success in the workplace along with their sighted peers. CBVI and SRC, in conjunction with an outside consultant, completed a three to five year agency-wide Strategic Plan that upgraded the agency's service delivery system into the 21st Century to enhance the quality of life for blind and vision-impaired residents. The SRC and CBVI are facilitating a strong collaboration with State and Federal partners to open up employment opportunities, while continuing to address the absolute need to enhance, support, and expand blindness specific services.

SRC and CBVI will continue to work in collaboration with our State and Federal partners to implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) recently signed into law.

We are extremely proud of the accomplishments achieved during FFY 2015 in collaboration with CBVI, and anticipate continuing a close partnership on behalf of New Jersey residents who are blind and vision-impaired

Respectfully,

The Rev. James W. Warnke, MA, MSW, LCSW
State Rehabilitation Council Chairperson

Executive Director's Report

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI) and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) are pleased to submit the Annual Report for Federal Fiscal Year 2015 (FFY 2015). We welcome this opportunity to update you regarding our programs, achievements, and accomplishments. This Annual Report is required under Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and represents the ongoing teamwork and collaborative effort of the Commission and the SRC. The SRC's support for, and contribution to, the planning and execution of Commission programs has resulted in innovative initiatives, yielding yet another productive year for CBVI's mission on behalf of blind and vision-impaired residents of New Jersey.



The Commission and the SRC, with the guidance of an outside consultant, have concluded and published a substantive three-to-five year Strategic Plan. Introduced to all of our staff and the general public in July 2015, this plan is expected to transform the Commission's service-delivery systems, creating greater agency-wide consistency and quality services for CBVI consumers. Through six distinct initiatives (a service-delivery re-design, communications improvements, employment program enhancements, education reforms, attention to human resources policies, and cultivation of external partnerships) we are optimistic that CBVI will be better positioned to fulfill its mission and historical promise. Only several months into the time frame for our Strategic Plan, we are making strides to develop the Welcome and Evaluation (WE) team, a group of talented professionals that will, over the next year, be the first point of contact for all consumers who seek services from the Commission. This initiative will support greater uniformity and access to all of our programs for each person that lodges an inquiry with our agency. Moreover, we have devoted substantial energy this year to reviewing and reforming our Blindness Education services. These are just two of the high-profile steps that we have started this year, consistent with the goals and objectives of our new Strategic Plan.

CBVI enjoyed a tremendously productive year in helping blind and vision-impaired consumers find integrated, competitive work. During this fiscal year, 296 consumers had their cases closed as successfully employed. This figure represents a year of significant accomplishment, reflecting a continued and gradual upturn in the economy, and illustrating considerable effort on behalf of some of our ambitious consumers and dedicated staff. The Rehabilitation Services Administration, the federal entity responsible for monitoring state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs, measures VR agencies that are charged with delivering services to blind and vision-impaired consumers on a

two-year basis, given our smaller population. Our employment closures for the last two years (296 in FFY2015 and 331 in FFY2014) are higher than our combined closures were in FFY2013 and FFY2014, so CBVI has achieved federally accepted standards in terms of employment placements.

In an effort to promote a greater spirit of partnership between the Commission and its consumer base, agency leaders joined with members of the National Federation of the Blind

of New Jersey during its fall convention to co-sponsor a Diabetic Education Seminar for blind and vision-impaired diabetics. Further, our agency provided presentations during this convention on our Assistive Technology programs; Orientation and Mobility services; and our new peer support group program for blind and vision-impaired consumers, ages fifty-five and older, called the Assistive Support Program for Independence, Renewal, and Education (ASPIRE). Additionally, CBVI administrators participated in the fall convention of the New Jersey Council of the Blind, held at the agency's Joseph Kohn Training Center.



As usual, CBVI continued its commitment to sponsoring high-quality transition programs for the state's blind and vision-impaired youth. Our innovative Life Skills 101 program, held at the Joseph Kohn Training Center, introduced Freshman and Sophomore high school students to career planning, skills of independence, college preparation, and information technology. Similarly, our College Prep Experience Program, in session from early July to mid-August, received a fresh facelift this year. The Commission, in conjunction with our partners at The College of New Jersey, integrated nine college-bound students in The College of New Jersey's Bonner Scholars Program, where our consumers took classes in either sociology or local history alongside their sighted peers, and our students actively participated in the social justice, community learning component of this program, which served to strengthen their self-confidence and appreciation of the importance of giving back to the larger world. One week prior to the start of the formal Bonner Scholars Program, our students moved into the dormitories at The College of New Jersey, where they were given basic instruction about transitioning to college, using assistive technology, independent travel, and other skills consistent with realizing success in a post-secondary environment. Finally, our Work Skills Prep program, in partnership with The College of New Jersey, catered to the needs of transition-age students with complex disabilities, who may not be bound for college, but who may be best suited for other vocational training or immediate employment.

In addition to the Commission's traditional transition programs, during the last year CBVI started both the Student Hands- On Alternatives Re-enforcement Program (SHARP) for students in grades 1-8, and we began operation of the Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement (EDGE) program for high school-aged consumers. The SHARP program served over fifty blind and vision-impaired youngsters during its first season, and EDGE, our year-round transition program for high school students, began with forty-five participants in its first cohort. Both of these new programs promise to deliver much-needed blindness skills to our consumers, outside the conventional education setting. We are optimistic that the long-term benefits of both the SHARP and EDGE programs will yield tremendous results for those who choose to participate in these extracurricular offerings.

Now that CBVI is operating under the new provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), we are working collaboratively with all of our WIOA partners throughout the state to develop a Combined State Plan that will promote employment opportunities for disabled candidates of the VR system and will generate work opportunities for others who are looking for careers through the other titles of WIOA. CBVI's SRC has proven especially invaluable in recommending policy guidance that should inform our agency's part of the WIOA-required Combined State Plan.

During this year the SRC has made significant strides toward becoming a more active Council, committed to honoring its obligation to provide guidance and counsel to the Commission's administration. The SRC has developed several sub- committees to address agency program performance and the development of a blindness-specific resource guide for the community. Fully constituted and thoroughly engaged, the Commission's SRC has added tremendous value to the work of CBVI this year.

We are proud of the accomplishments achieved during FFY 2015, in collaboration with the SRC, and we anticipate continuing a close partnership in the years to come on behalf of New Jersey residents who are blind and vision-impaired.

Please read and enjoy the remainder of this report, which will outline these and other strides made during the previous year. If you would like to learn more about our programs and services, please contact the Commission using the details provided elsewhere in this report.

Respectfully submitted by,

Daniel B. Frye, J.D.
Executive Director

Overview of the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

In April of 1909, the New Jersey State Legislature directed that a single agency be formed to “provide all means which it deems feasible for ameliorating the condition of the blind and visually impaired”, (NJSA 30:6-1). The Commission was established in 1910 under the direction of Lydia Young Hayes, a teacher of the blind, who was blind herself, and through the advocacy efforts of Helen Keller. The formation of a single agency to administer to the needs of New Jerseyans who are blind was the culmination of a wave of social consciousness that swept the country in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

As a result, significant strides have been made toward equalizing opportunities for people who are blind or vision-impaired. The Commission, known as the Commission for the Blind until 1982, was at the forefront of that movement and continues to provide services that will assist people with vision loss to reach their highest personal level of independence and economic self-sufficiency. The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired strives to ensure access to services that enable individuals with vision loss to obtain their fullest measure of self-



reliance, while assuring dignity and full integration into their community. This is accomplished by the establishment of goals, priorities, and the provision of services that address the special needs of people living in New Jersey who are blind or vision-impaired. In State Fiscal Year 2015, the agency operated with a budget of \$28,456,555.

The Commission headquarters is located in Newark, New Jersey, at 153 Halsey Street, with a central administrative unit that includes the Office of the Executive Director, Program Administration, Operational Logistics, Fiscal, and Coordinators of direct service delivery disciplines. The Public Information and Staff Development functions, along with the State Rehabilitation Council and the Board of Trustees, are also part of the Commission’s central administration.

Major Service Programs Provided By CBVI

Educational Services

Certified Instructors work closely with the child, family members, and local school personnel to provide educational services that allow students who are blind, vision-impaired, or deaf-blind to participate equally with other students in mainstream classroom activities. These services are provided for eligible children (from birth through high school years) and their families.



Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Vocational Rehabilitation provides a full range of services to assist persons who are blind, vision-impaired, or deaf-blind with the development, acquisition, or strengthening of skills to enable them to secure and maintain employment. This can include working in the labor force or operating a business. This program is a federal-state partnership funded by the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

Independent Living Services

Independent living/training services are designed to help people of any age who are blind, vision-impaired or deaf-

blind gain the skills needed to lead a full and productive life. CBVI provides five general types of assistance/instruction with the program, including: daily living skills, communication skills, orientation and mobility, Braille instruction, and eye health.

Eye Health Services

The Project BEST (Better Eye-Health Services and Treatment) works to save sight and restore vision whenever it is medically possible. CBVI conducts a variety of educational programs and eye health screenings in communities throughout the state to help detect vision problems and to assist residents of New Jersey with restorative treatment. Annually, Project BEST screens more than 40,000 New Jerseyans.

SRC Working Principles and Responsibilities

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) was established in Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. It gives advice to, and works in partnership with, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency. The members of the State Rehabilitation Council are appointed by the Governor and convene at least five meetings a year. All meetings and public forums are announced, and are open and accessible to the general public. The meetings are held in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meeting Act, NJSA 10:4-6.



The functions of the SRC are to:

- ❖ Review, analyze, and advise CBVI regarding performance of its responsibilities of the agency under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act amendments of 2014;
- ❖ Assist CBVI with the development of State goals and priorities, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the Vocational Rehabilitation program;
- ❖ Advise and assist CBVI with the preparation of the State Plan and amendments to the plan, applications, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations required under the Rehabilitation Act amendments of 2014;
- ❖ Conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of, and consumer satisfaction with, Vocational Rehabilitation services;
- ❖ Prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor and the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) on the status of Vocational Rehabilitation programs operated within the State, and to make the report available to the public;
- ❖ Coordinate with other councils within the State, including the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC);
- ❖ Establish successful working relationships between CBVI, the Statewide Independent Living Council, and Centers for Independent Living within the State; and
- ❖ Perform other functions consistent with the purpose of this title, as the SRC determines to be appropriate.

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NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Representative (Ex-Officio)*

SRC Accomplishments in FFY 2015

The SRC met five times in FFY 2015 to foster a collaborative working relationship among members, assist with identifying strategies for improving service delivery to CBVI consumers, advise on the development and implementation of new innovative programs, and provide training opportunities.

- ❖ The SRC was instrumental in recruiting qualified representatives to expand the expertise and scope of its membership.
- ❖ SRC members actively participated in the implementation of an agency-wide five year strategic plan to facilitate significant positive change in the delivery of services and outcomes for the agency's consumers.
- ❖ The Commission and the SRC collaborated to develop the Welcome and Evaluation (WE) team, which will serve as the first point of entry for CBVI consumers to learn about the full array of services offered at the agency. The team members will facilitate CBVI eligibility, initiate needs assessments, connect consumers with the broader resources in their communities, and conduct outreach to the public.
- ❖ Members of the SRC worked closely with the Commission to collaborate with the Bonner Institute for Civic and

Community Engagement at The College of New Jersey to offer a two-week integrated, community service-focused learning experience to high school students under CBVI sponsorship. Students resided on campus, earned four college credits, and engaged in Community Service throughout the program.

- ❖ The SRC actively participated in the implementation of the new Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement Program (EDGE), designed to assist blind and vision-impaired high school students to prepare to transition to post-secondary pursuits through engagement in community work experiences, mentoring activities, and independent skills development.
- ❖ SRC membership assumed an active role to increase awareness throughout the community about the unique needs and capabilities of individuals served by the Commission.



Statewide Impact of CBVI Services

Numbers indicate total served by Commission services and/or programs (Please note that individuals may be served in multiple programs at CBVI):

| | COUNTY | ED | IL | IL-OB | VR | PB* |
|----|------------|-----|-----|-------|-----|-----|
| 1 | Atlantic | 67 | 112 | 147 | 112 | 19 |
| 2 | Bergen | 169 | 133 | 296 | 226 | 24 |
| 3 | Burlington | 130 | 65 | 130 | 193 | 14 |
| 4 | Camden | 179 | 141 | 162 | 240 | 29 |
| 5 | Cape May | 15 | 27 | 42 | 43 | 6 |
| 6 | Cumberland | 55 | 64 | 58 | 67 | 18 |
| 7 | Essex | 200 | 225 | 317 | 300 | 96 |
| 8 | Gloucester | 97 | 70 | 88 | 112 | 3 |
| 9 | Hudson | 84 | 146 | 139 | 157 | 45 |
| 10 | Hunterdon | 28 | 10 | 20 | 32 | 0 |
| 11 | Mercer | 84 | 58 | 85 | 149 | 17 |
| 12 | Middlesex | 226 | 130 | 218 | 307 | 47 |
| 13 | Monmouth | 170 | 123 | 204 | 230 | 1 |
| 14 | Morris | 109 | 70 | 97 | 126 | 29 |
| 15 | Ocean | 176 | 114 | 385 | 206 | 7 |
| 16 | Passaic | 129 | 132 | 170 | 166 | 72 |
| 17 | Salem | 16 | 13 | 34 | 17 | 3 |
| 18 | Somerset | 84 | 32 | 79 | 95 | 8 |
| 19 | Sussex | 36 | 23 | 20 | 26 | 4 |
| 20 | Union | 148 | 89 | 172 | 200 | 17 |
| 21 | Warren | 11 | 15 | 20 | 18 | 5 |

*** Explanation of Abbreviations**

ED-Education (Ages: 0-21 years)

IL-Independent Living (Ages: 54 years and younger)

IL-OB – Independent Living for Older Individuals who are Blind (Ages: 55 years +)

VR – Vocational Rehabilitation (Ages: 14 years and older)

PB – Project BEST (Serving all age groups)

Project BEST (Better Eye-Health Services and Treatment)

Project BEST comprises all eye health services offered by CBVI, a component of which, is our screening unit. The primary roles of the Project BEST screening unit are to identify eye disease in target populations of New Jersey residents that do not have access to eye health care, facilitate treatment through community providers, and to serve as a robust source of CBVI referrals for those who meet the various eligibility criteria for blindness training and the other services covered under N.J.A.C. 10:94. Providing a growing array of services since 1979, the screening unit continues to meet its statutory obligation to increase access to the community. Approximately 500,000 residents have been screened in the past decade.

Along with identifying those in need of eye health care and follow up, Project BEST provides outreach and education to those who host as well as participate in the eye screenings. Project BEST provides, in conjunction with the Department of Health and CDC, a Diabetic Eye Disease Detection Screening, targeting populations with diagnosed Type II diabetes. This program continues to grow, facilitating increased outreach for those with the disease. There has been an increase of 53% screening participants compared to last year. The grant award is for \$125,000. The Early Childhood Screening program (Pre-School Vision Screenings) identifies impediments to education and as well as eye disease specific to that age group. Migrant Worker Screenings and the Adult Vision Screenings target primarily adult populations, but are available to children as well. All venues offer an eye health education component. CBVI staff also advocate for Affordable Care Act enrollment for all eligible residents.



Schools, faith-based groups, Federally Qualified Health Centers, municipalities, and other organizations throughout New Jersey can access vision screenings by contacting the Supervisor of Project BEST at (973) 648-7400.

| 2015 Highlights (Number of people served) | |
|---|---------------|
| Adult Vision Screening | 7,107 |
| Pre-School Vision Screening | 20,958 |
| On-Site Screening | 5,968 |
| Migrant Screening | 787 |
| Diabetic Eye Disease Detection (DEDD) Program | 2,295 |
| Total Individuals Screened | 37,814 |
| Total Number of Screening Events | 1,254 |
| Referred for Further Evaluation | 3,585 |
| Referred for additional CBVI services | 332 |

Project BEST strives to expand services to address the need for access to eye health care in all 21 Counties. Working closely with Federally Qualified educational Health Centers and other community-based medical hubs, and appearing at large public gatherings such as health fairs, Project BEST will continue to return people with vision loss or at risk of vision loss to the workforce, provide education regarding systemic health conditions associated with vision loss, and serve CBVI by identifying residents in need of blindness skills training services.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

The SRC is pleased to acknowledge the contributions of the Commission’s staff in assisting our consumers to achieve increased levels of independence and obtain employment. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services are authorized from a federally funded program emanating from the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The VR program is a State-Federal partnership with state government providing matching funds.

VR services provided by the Commission under this program are designed to assist individuals who are blind, vision-impaired, and deaf-blind to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment that is consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, interests, and informed choice. The scope of Vocational Rehabilitation Services includes:

- ❖ Assessment for determining eligibility and VR needs by qualified personnel;
- ❖ VR counseling and guidance, including information and support services to assist an individual in exercising informed choice, including referral and services from other agencies;
- ❖ Physical and mental restoration services;
- ❖ Vocational and other training services;
- ❖ Maintenance and transportation related to the rendering of any VR services;
- ❖ Vocational rehabilitation services to family members to assist in achieving the employment goal for an individual with a disability, e.g., family counseling;
- ❖ Interpreter services, including sign language and oral interpreter services, for individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, and tactile interpreting services for individuals who are deaf-blind;
- ❖ Independent living skills instruction including personal and home management;
- ❖ Orientation and mobility services to instruct in methods of independent, safe community travel;
- ❖ Services to assist students to transition from school to work;
- ❖ Job-related services, including job search and placement assistance, job retention services, follow-up services, and follow-along services;
- ❖ Supported employment services;
- ❖ Personal assistance services, including reader services;
- ❖ Occupational licenses, tools, equipment, initial stocks, and supplies;
- ❖ Technical assistance to individuals who are pursuing self-employment;
- ❖ Rehabilitation technology services and devices; and
- ❖ Post-employment services, i.e., short term services required to keep a job.



Standards and Indicators

The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) has established evaluation standards and performance indicators for all state Vocational Rehabilitation programs, which include outcome and related measures of program performance. RSA mandates that state Vocational Rehabilitation programs submit performance data on an annual basis. The state-specific and national data is compiled and analyzed for tracking performance success or need for improving performance levels.

The Evaluation Standards assess Vocational Rehabilitation program impact on employment using Performance Indicators. These indicators measure employment outcomes not just in terms of numbers, but also in terms of their impact on meaningful, quality of life issues, such as salaries and placements within competitive work settings.

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired uses the Standards and Indicators to benchmark the quality of services that are provided to consumers. In Federal Fiscal Year 2015, the Commission surpassed expectations for both overall Evaluation Standards set by RSA and exceeded required levels on 6 of 7 Performance Indicators. Below are the RSA performance standards and the Commission's performance for the Federal Fiscal Years of 2013, 2014, and 2015

1.1 - Total number of individuals employed:

RSA expects to see a matching or an increase on this metric based on comparison of two years of employment outcome data, i.e., FFY 2015 is the combined employment outcomes for FFY 2014-2015 which is compared to the same data for FFY 2013-2014 data.

*CBVI exceeded RSA benchmark for this standard.

FFY 2013 - 564

FFY 2014 - 611

FFY 2015 - 627

1.2 - Percentage of individuals who achieved an employment outcome after the development of a plan of services:

RSA Standard - 68.90%

*CBVI achieved RSA benchmark for this standard

FFY 2013 - 68.13%

FFY 2014 - 71.96%

FFY 2015 - 68.90%

1.3 - Percentage of individuals who are earning at least minimum wage:

RSA Standard - 35.40%

*CBVI exceeded RSA benchmark for this standard.

FFY 2013 - 93.93%

FFY 2014 - 96.94%

FFY 2015 - 94.90%

1.4 - Percentage of individuals employed who have a significant disability

RSA Standard - 89.00%

*CBVI exceeded RSA benchmark for this standard.

FFY 2013 - 92.80%

FFY 2014 - 91.00%

FFY 2015 - 91.30%

1.5 - Ratio of the hourly wage of individuals employed compared to the State average hourly wage:

RSA Standard - 0.59

FFY 2013 - 0.56

FFY 2014 - 0.52

FFY 2015 - 0.53

1.6-Change in the percentage of individuals employed whose current earnings are their primary source of economic support:

RSA Standard - 30.40%

*CBVI exceeded RSA benchmark for this standard.

FFY 2013 - 34.20%

FFY 2014 - 34.70%

FFY 2015 - 31.30%

2.1-Ratio of the service rate minority individuals compared to the non-minority rate:

RSA Standard - 0.80

*CBVI exceeded RSA benchmark for this standard.

FFY 2013 - 0.95

FFY 2014 - 0.87

FFY 2015 - 1.05

Participants in the Vocational Rehabilitation program attained employment in the following fields:

| | |
|--------------|---|
| 5.4% | Management |
| 4.1% | Business and Financial |
| 2.7% | Computer and Mathematical |
| 1.0% | Architecture and Engineering |
| 3.7% | Community and Social Services |
| 0.7% | Legal |
| 6.1% | Education, Training, and Library |
| 1.4% | Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media |
| 2.4% | Healthcare Practitioners and Technical |
| 7.1% | Healthcare Support |
| 0.3% | Protective Service |
| 10.5% | Food Preparation and Serving |
| 6.1% | Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance |
| 2.4% | Personal Care and Service |
| 11.1% | Sales |
| 13.5% | Office and Administrative Support |
| 0.0% | Farming, Fishing, and Forestry |
| 3.4% | Construction and Extraction |
| 3.0% | Installation, Maintenance, and Repair |
| 4.4% | Production |
| 7.4% | Transportation and Material Moving |
| 1.4% | Homemaker |
| 1.7% | Business Enterprises – NJ (Manager) |

Business Enterprises – New Jersey

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI) is the State Licensing Agency (SLA) for the Federal Randolph-Sheppard program. Business Enterprises of New Jersey (BENJ), a unit within CBVI, directly oversees New Jersey’s Randolph Sheppard program. As such, BENJ is responsible for coordinating the operation of fifty-three (53) Randolph Sheppard food locations across the state. The types of operations include: 7 cafeterias, 6 single person sites (dry stands), 1 military cafeteria, 22 snack bars, and 17 vending sites.



Individuals who wish to enter BENJ are required to: be at least 18 years of age, be legally blind, have a high school diploma (or GED), pass a background check, and be a United States citizen. The BENJ unit is comprised of: one Supervising Community Program Specialist, 6 Field Representatives, and one Administrative Assistant.

BENJ 2015 Highlights

- ❖ Total gross sales: \$11,538,917
- ❖ Operator average net income: \$49,735
- ❖ Total number of Managers served: 55
- ❖ Total number of consumers evaluated for Small Business Program: 2
- ❖ One consumer received assistance for their Small Business Program
- ❖ Total number of consumers evaluated for BENJ: 2
- ❖ Total number of consumers trained: 6
- ❖ Total number of consumers receiving placements: 3

- ❖ New cashless systems have been put into operation at several vending locations. The new system is a Smart Phone app called PayRange.
- ❖ Several new vending machines have been ordered for our locations that are both user friendly for our Blind Managers and customers.
- ❖ iPad cash registers with the Square App are on the way for three Blind Managers as an alternative to traditional cash registers.

New Locations Setup:

- ❖ A vending machine location at the Department of Children & Family Services in Paramus
- ❖ A snack bar at the Department of Children & Family Services Training Facility in New Brunswick
- ❖ A vending route has been converted to two satellite locations

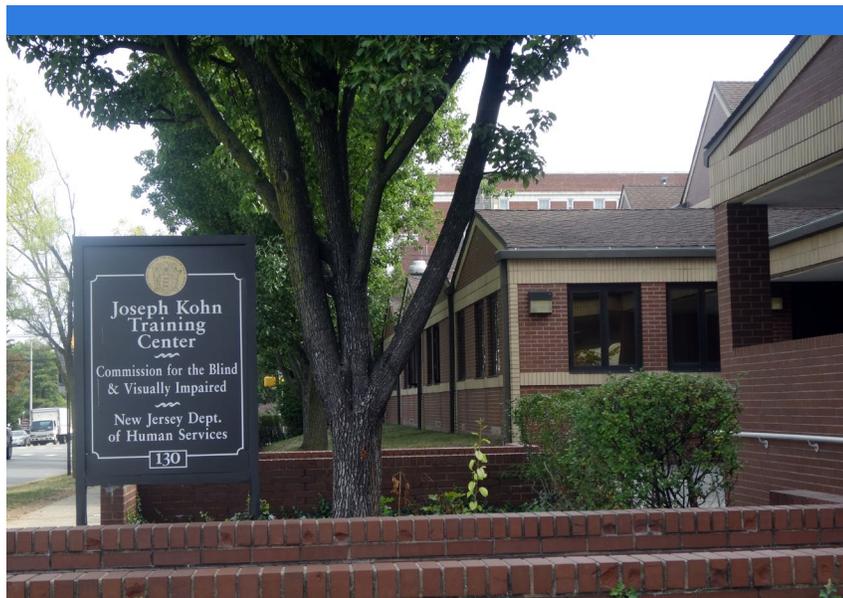
BENJ 2016 Highlights

- ❖ New training through the Hadley School for the Blind will be implemented for new potential candidates.
- ❖ Hired a new field representative.
- ❖ Implementing a computerized vending payment system like the iPad & Clover cash register systems. This will allow for buyers to utilize credit cards.
- ❖ Continuing the revision of Chapter 97, New Jersey's "mini Randolph-Sheppard" and the governing document of the BENJ.
- ❖ Continuing education programs for upward mobility training for Blind Managers is planned.
- ❖ The program will continue replacing aging vending machines with modern models at postal facilities and other vending locations.
- ❖ BENJ will start making renovations to some of the current locations.



Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC)

The JKTC is a state of the art facility that offers vocational rehabilitation, employment services, and skills training for blind and vision-impaired residents of New Jersey. The Training Center was inaugurated in 1988 in the city of New Brunswick, replacing the previous training center, which existed in Newark for more than thirty years. The JKTC, a three floor residential center, can accommodate up to twenty-four CBVI consumers. Consumers also have the option to attend the program on a commuter basis. There is no fee for eligible participants. Referrals for the program are submitted by CBVI VR Counselors. Eligible candidates for the program are required to be 18 years or older and classified as vision-impaired or legally blind. This is verified via a report provided to CBVI by a licensed eye doctor. The JKTC mission is to assist blind and vision-impaired individuals to lead full and productive lives as they live and work in their community. For this purpose, the 20 week program curriculum is primarily developed for consumers seeking employment. A wide range of the provided services are designed to enable the program participants to increase their independence and access employment. Each participant begins the program by engaging in a comprehensive assessment to establish a baseline of skills and identify areas for improvement. Subsequently, a customized program plan is designed to address each participant's needs, abilities, and goals. The following core areas are assessed:



- ❖ Activities of Daily Living (ADL)
- ❖ Braille/Communication Skills
- ❖ Technology Skills
- ❖ Orientation and Mobility Skills (O & M)
- ❖ Career Exploration

Program plans include specific goals and objectives in each of these areas. Participants engage in individual and small group instructional sessions geared toward achieving their specific goals. Participants also engage in a variety of group activities in the areas of communication skills, self-advocacy, job seeking skills, and adjustment to vision loss. Support is also provided in the areas of psycho-social adjustment counseling, nursing and nutritional counseling. Presentations are offered by guest speakers including: the Seeing Eye, NJ Work Incentives Network Supports (NJWINS), and the Community Health Law Project (CHLP), among others.

To complement their training experience program participants engage in evening activities, community trips, special events, and shopping experiences on a regular basis. They also can take part in a number of in-house activities such as planting and maintaining a vegetable and flower garden, and collaborating to organize celebrations for graduating participants. Program participants work with a certified personal trainer in the newly remodeled fitness room at the Center. The JKTC library offers books in accessible formats, videos and computers with adaptive software. The JKTC offers the “1-Touch Program”, a self-defense course to participants taught by vision-impaired trainers. A case manager works with each participant to ensure that progress toward specific goals is achieved. Ongoing communication is maintained with the primary CBVI VR caseworker throughout the consumer’s engagement in the program. A team meeting is held at the midpoint of a participant’s program where the student’s progress is reviewed and next steps are clearly identified.

A community work experience which aligns with the participant’s interests and abilities is arranged toward the end of the program. Worksites include: The Heldrich Hotel, Best Buy, the Clara Barton Assisted Living Center, the New Brunswick Food Co-op, the New Brunswick Public Library, Puerto Rican Action Board, and others. During the Work Experience participants are responsible to independently negotiate transportation to and from the job sites; managed via public transportation, Access Link, or taxi service. A job coach is initially available to provide support and orient the participant to the job location. Once the participant is comfortable

with performing work tasks, the job coach fades out. When participants near the end of their work experience, a final team meeting is arranged, where participants take an active role as their progress is reported by JKTC instructors, supervisors, and the VR caseworker. Next steps are identified as part of transition planning to ensure that progress toward achieving personal goals is sustained after the program. Following the final case conference, each participant engages in a graduation ceremony where they have an opportunity to share their experience in the program and discuss their future plans. Family, friends, staff and other JKTC participants also share their impressions of the graduate and the positive changes that have occurred as a result of the program. Current program participants become inspired by recognizing that those being honored are more prepared to meet the challenges that life will bring.



Technological Support Services

CBVI offers New Jersey residents who are blind and vision-impaired support to acquire assistive technology that is necessary to gain or retain employment. Assistive technology is defined as any item, piece of equipment, or system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is commonly used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. The agency's Technological Support Services department assists consumers to have direct access to computer equipment and other information technology. The goal of the unit is to minimize barriers to task performance by taking into account the consumers specific needs. Technological Services Specialists (TSS) are responsible for maintaining and staffing five comprehensive and up-to-date Regional Technology Assistance Centers (RTAC) located throughout New Jersey. Each RTAC is stocked with a variety of assistive technology devices and is open to the public by individual or group appointments. Three of these labs are located in CBVI's Service Centers (Newark, Freehold, and Cherry Hill); the fourth is operated in partnership with the NJ State Library Talking Book and Braille Center and is located in Trenton; the fifth is located at the Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC) in New Brunswick.

In addition, the regional TSS staff performs technology assessments and skill evaluations for consumers who are seeking employment and require equipment adaptations to assist in carrying out their work and/or tasks in an educational environment. The specialists



make recommendations suitable for each consumer's unique situation, such that it would enable the individual to efficiently address his/her professional or academic responsibilities. Following the evaluation, both in the regional offices and at the JKTC, a comprehensive report is completed by the TSS, which includes recommendations for equipment, software, integration and/or training. Recommended training is time limited and goals are specifically linked to tasks and learning objectives via vocational training or on the job. The report details the number of training hours anticipated for the consumer to reach proficiency in the needed skill sets. Training services are provided by a service provider under contract with the Commission serving the Northern, Central, and Southern regions of the State. Training is provided one-on-one with consumers in their home, at training locations or work-site. The contracted agency provides periodic progress reports and a final report when training is completed.

The TSS staff installs, sets up, and configures recommended equipment for consumers on-site and provides brief instruction on proper utilization of assistive technology. TSS works with outside agencies, businesses, and institutions to evaluate work environments with respect to accessibility for vision-impaired employees. The specialists also suggest appropriate solutions to outside agencies that would make these workplaces and the software applications they use more compatible with assistive technology.

TSS staff members at the Joseph Kohn Training Center conduct an initial skills assessment to determine the appropriate assistive computer software and training goals suitable to the consumers' needs. Training is then provided to strengthen the necessary skills and technological proficiency that facilitates the opportunity to succeed in a work

or educational environment. The TSS staff also provide technical support, evaluation, and training during CBVI summer pre-vocational programs for transition-age consumers, such as Life 101.

The Adaptive Technology Loan Program is a CBVI funded project, managed on a day to day basis by the Talking Book and Braille Center. The loaner program is intended to provide computer access for VR consumers receiving assistive technology training as they move toward job readiness. Equipment available for loan includes desktop PCs, laptops, adaptive software, printers, scanners, and CCTVs. There are also a small number of MacBook's and handheld digital magnifiers for loan on a limited basis. Laptops are only available for students enrolled in remedial college courses.

ICanConnect/NJ

The ICanConnect/NJ program is a partnership between the Commission and the Center for Sensory and Complex Disabilities at The College of New Jersey. It provides services, devices, and software to increase access to telecommunications and the internet for individuals who have a combined hearing and vision loss, and who meet income criteria, i.e., deaf-blind and have income less than 400% of the Federal poverty level. The program is mandated by the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 and established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Program staff members provide assessments, equipment, and related training for eligible individuals throughout the state.



Bonner Pre-College Prep Experience

For over forty years, CBVI has offered a summer college preparation program for transition students to access the knowledge and tools necessary for entering post-secondary education upon graduating high school. For the first time, during the summer of 2015, CBVI collaborated with the Bonner Institute for Civic and Community Engagement at The College of New Jersey. According to their mission statement the Bonner Institute finds ways to improve the quality of life for all in our surrounding communities. It cultivates the common ground that exists between the educational mission of the College and the needs of non-profit organizations and neighborhoods. By creating teaching and learning opportunities, students become more knowledgeable, skilled, and civic minded, while community partners gain additional resources to effectuate positive change.

The Bonner Pre-College Summer Fellowship Program was established to offer this same community service-focused learning experience to high school students. CBVI high school students were referred by their CBVI transition counselor to apply and participate in interviews and assessments. Once selected, they completed a traditional application process consisting of letters of recommendation, a college essay, and official transcripts. Nine students receiving CBVI services were integrated among the forty-plus students accepted.

The nine, aforementioned students committed to attending a series of weekend Orientation activities:

3 ORIENTATION SATURDAYS, Spring

- ❖ Saturday #1: Part 2 of the Application Process/In-Person Interview
- ❖ Saturday #2: Group Activities/Support Needs/Review IEP
- ❖ Saturday #3: Support Needs/Dorm Tours/Campus Orientation

FULL WEEK ORIENTATION, Summer

One week prior to the start of the Bonner Summer Fellow Program, our CBVI students move into their dorms, for a week of orientation to the college.

- ❖ Intensive Orientation and Mobility Instruction
- ❖ Dorm and Campus Life
- ❖ Team-building activities
- ❖ Community Service Preparation
- ❖ Academic Support Preparation
- ❖ Recreational/Leisure

With support of CBVI staff, a team including: Teacher of the Blind and Visually Impaired, Orientation and Mobility Instructors, Rehabilitation Teachers, and Technology Support Specialists, as well as college students, Bonner staff and TCNJ professional staff, the students learned what was necessary in preparation for their success in college; living on-campus as well as in the classroom.

All accepted Bonner Pre-College students resided on campus and were given the opportunity to earn four college credits by choosing one of the two courses offered: HIS165/ USA 101: American Cities and Suburbs or SOC101: Introduction to Sociology. In addition, the students fulfilled community service hours each day within an urban context. This summer, the students served at the Academic Sports Academy, a summer program for Pre-K to 8th graders in Trenton, run by former NBA Basketball

player, Greg Grant. A culminating ceremony took place on the final day of the program, where students presented what they learned regarding their course-related research topic, in addition to what they were inspired about regarding their Bonner Pre-College experience. A slide show demonstrated the activities and happenings throughout the program, and it goes without saying that the experience was a win-win for all participants involved, including faculty, staff, and community service partners.



Work Skills Prep Program

We celebrated the tenth year of the Work Skills Preparation Program, in partnership with The College of New Jersey's Center for Sensory and Complex Disabilities in the School of Education. The college campus is an ideal setting for students to put their learning to practice on campus and in the local community.

This two-week residential program offers extended school year service and transition assessment for high school students who are blind, deaf-blind, or vision-impaired, ages 16 to 21 with additional complex educational needs. Each summer the staff, consisting of teachers, undergraduate, and graduate students, work alongside CBVI staff to create innovative ways to facilitate formal and informal transition assessments that highlight student needs, preferences, and interests, in the areas of academic, work, independent living, and recreation/leisure. The goal of the program is to give students the opportunity to learn and/or enhance their skills that will help them engage in employment.

Two consecutive programs took place from June 28-July 24 and seventeen high school students participated in activities reflecting the transition domains: academic, work, independent living, and recreation/leisure.

Academics: During the day Special Educators worked alongside of Teachers of the Blind and Visually Impaired and Technology Support Specialists to assess the functional academic skills, such as literacy (including Braille and large print), numeracy, assistive

technology, and the soft skills for successful employment, including self-advocacy skills. Formal assessment approaches coupled with observations, interviews, and direct instruction were utilized to assess each student's skills and the quality of his/her access to academics.

In conjunction with the initiative from the NJ Department of Education, The Person Centered Approaches in Schools and Transition (PCAST) and in partnership with the Boggs Center, the staff helped students set personal goals and objectives related to employment and post-secondary outcomes. A brochure was created to reflect these initiatives, and each one included the following sections: great things about the student; what is most important to the student; best supports; how the student best communicates; vision for the future: work and living, goals and action plan, work strengths.

Employment: The second half of the students' day was spent in the community where the students applied their skills to real-life work. Both formal and informal transition assessment approaches were used to document the students' work contributions regarding their social skills, executive functioning and overall work readiness. The WSP Program has been in proud partnership with several community partners. In fact, some work sites have supported our students for ten years! Some of the partners include, but are not limited to:

- ❖ The Talking Book and Braille Center (10 year partner!)
- ❖ NJ Manufacturers Insurance Company (10 year partner!)



- ❖ Trenton Thunder/ Arm & Hammer Park
- ❖ Sodexo
- ❖ Little Gym
- ❖ ShopRite
- ❖ Pennington Market
- ❖ Hopewell Valley Board of Education
- ❖ Department of Transportation Dining Services, Business Enterprise Program
- ❖ REI

Independent Living/Recreation and Leisure: Students resided on campus where they learned to develop recreation and leisure goals, as well as independent living activities. Life Skills facilitators organized lessons to teach students Activities in Daily Living (ADLs):

- ❖ Personal Hygiene
- ❖ Laundry
- ❖ Bed Making
- ❖ Light Cleaning
- ❖ Nutrition and Exercise
- ❖ Food Preparation
- ❖ Handling/Budgeting Money
- ❖ Social & Emotional Well-Being
- ❖ Conflict Resolution

With the support of Orientation and Mobility Instructors, staff facilitated informal assessment approaches during community-based instruction to assess each student's skills and the quality of his/her access to the community, as well as to help support the students to develop recreation and leisure goals.

Community experiences included:

- ❖ Dining at local eateries
- ❖ Shopping
- ❖ Bowling
- ❖ Post Office
- ❖ Museums
- ❖ Planning/Attending a party
- ❖ Movies
- ❖ CBVI Awareness Night with the Trenton Thunder Baseball Team

Finally, the WSP Staff hosted a graduation ceremony to celebrate the students' talents and accomplishments with their families and CBVI Transition Counselors. An individualized, collaborative, and comprehensive report was written on behalf of each student, and then was shared with students and their family/guardian, the local school district case manager, and CBVI Transition Counselor.

EDGE Program

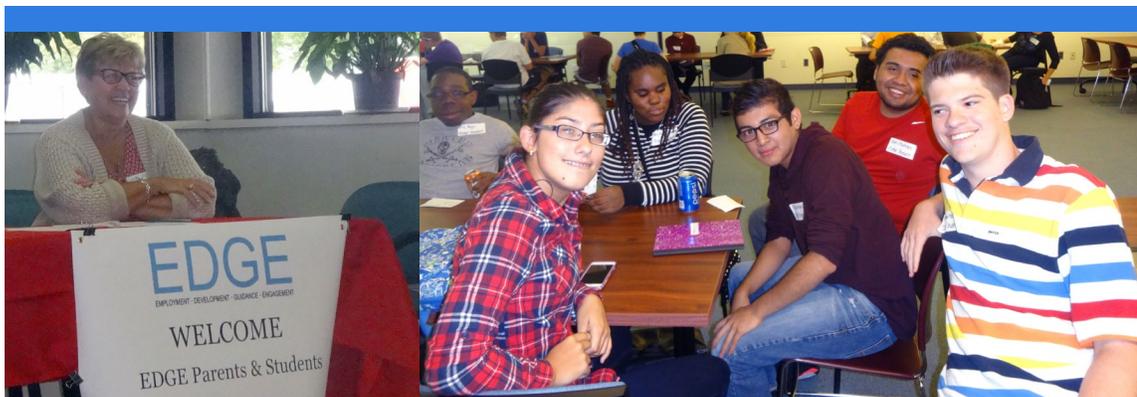
Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement

The EDGE program is a year-round program for transition students, age 14-21, which is administered by the Family Resource Network and sponsored by CBVI. EDGE is designed to assist blind and vision-impaired high school students as they prepare to transition from high school to post-secondary pursuits and the competitive job market. They will discover who they are and how they can become fully participating members of their communities; accessing resources, overcoming barriers and finding meaningful competitive employment independently. EDGE is an interactive program focused on assisting students to become independent, advocate for themselves, and find employment. To achieve these outcomes, EDGE will involve students and parents in interactive coursework and intentional mentoring activities staffed by highly successful blind mentors.

Monthly topics include, but are not limited to: independent travel; communication and networking skills; professional appearance and presentation; resume writing and interview skills; college and post-secondary education preparation; independent living skills; and self-advocacy. To address each monthly topic, students and parents will

meet once a month on a Saturday afternoon for in-person, separate parent and student workshops; students will participate in remote phone conference and Skype sessions twice monthly with mentors and EDGE coordinators; students will meet once monthly in small groups to apply their learning and use assistive technology related to the monthly goals; and regular writing assignments will be given to students to enable self-reflection and application of the concepts presented. By the end of a student's participation in the program, which may span multiple years of their high school career, all students will be provided with the opportunity to develop the necessary vocational skills and obtain employment opportunities ranging from job shadowing, to internships, to part-time/summer paid employment.

This program had its formal kick-off on Saturday, June 13, 2015, with a barbecue at the Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC) for invited students, their families, and EDGE and CBVI staff. Approximately 100 students were referred to the program, and after application, 40 students signed on to participate in the first year of the EDGE program.



LIFE101

Life 101 was a two week, residential program conducted at the Joseph Kohn Training Center, (JKTC) from July 27 through August 7, 2015. Life 101 is designed to provide freshman and sophomore high school students who are blind and vision-impaired with a hands-on learning experience to gain the necessary tools and self-awareness that facilitates their preparation for life after high school graduation.

The program curriculum incorporates experiential learning activities in four major instructional areas: information technology, skills of independence and daily living, career exploration, and post-secondary opportunities. The program is staffed by Commission employees who have expertise in the subject matter for each of the program areas. JKTC staff and transition caseworkers from the three service centers actively worked with the Life 101 students. The students participated in a variety of field trips and evening activities that were designed to promote independence in a variety of ways. Communication skills, self-advocacy skills, decision making skills, and leadership skills were themes that were addressed throughout the program as various activities were presented.

INFORMATIONAL TECHNOLOGY: As students participated in the informational technology core instructional area, they actively engaged in a variety of computer games and activities so that their technology skills could be initially assessed. Instruction was then designed around their needs and a strong emphasis was placed on assisting them to effectively utilize adaptive software. As



they learned tips for navigating websites, the Life 101 consumers became more proficient at using the computer as a tool to research information. The students also learned the processes needed to download books and manipulate the text to meet their needs. They were exposed to issues and safety precautions when social media websites are accessed. Moreover, students became familiar with various apps and other pieces of technology, such as a bar code reader, that are designed to assist persons with vision impairments.

SKILLS OF INDEPENDENCE AND ADAPTIVE LIVING: A variety of skills and concepts were addressed in this instructional area. Strong emphasis was placed on money identification, management, and budgeting. The Life 101 consumers were provided with real life experiences in this discipline as they were required to work within a budget to order

food at a local restaurant and to budget their money for recreation and food at the Point Pleasant Beach Boardwalk. Students reviewed basic nutritional concepts as they focused on making choices in selecting food items. They reviewed kitchen safety skills and prepared a healthy snack. Also, students learned a variety of methods for organizing and managing clothing. Students were exposed to safe methods for navigating in and out of doors.

CAREER EXPLORATION: The purpose of the career exploration instructional area was to assist students to learn more about preparing for employment. Through formats of lecture, group discussion, audio-video presentations, guest speakers, interactive games, student presentations, and interviewing exercises, the Life 101 students were introduced to the following topics and skills. Understanding how individuals and occupations can be categorized into general occupational themes.

- ❖ How to conduct an information interview
- ❖ Being aware of useful career exploration websites (i.e. American Foundation for the Blind, Career Connect, and Occupational Outlook Handbook)
- ❖ What are employers looking for in job applicants
- ❖ How to interview for a job
- ❖ What to say when an employer asks, “Tell me about yourself.”
- ❖ What is a resume
- ❖ When and how to disclose a disability to an employer
- ❖ How do personal values influence vocational choices

The students were encouraged to ask any questions they had about jobs, careers, job seeking skills, and labor market issues, as well as about services offered by the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and by the JKTC.

It was notable that, when these high school consumers were given the chance to interact with hiring managers from the Heldrich Hotel, they impressed the presenters. The students asked about the application process, the interview format, and were specifically interested in learning about the qualities that employers looked for in potential workers.

POST-SECONDARY PLANNING: As students took part in instruction related to post-secondary opportunities, they learned how to compare and contrast different educational programs and to identify their individual preferences. They became aware of terminology that will be used as they move forward in the college exploration and application process. Students created “action packs”, which will become useful as they take an active role in determining how to proceed in the educational program they may attend after high school. Students also learned tips for time management as they balance the demands of school, work, and independent living. They gained an in-depth understanding of the steps required to enroll in college, and strategies for negotiating college with a vision impairment. The students were given a first-hand experience by visiting nearby Rutgers University campus and speaking with representatives from the Office of Students with Disabilities.



PROGRAM ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES:

During the evening hours, students participated in a variety of activities outside of the JKTC including bowling, swimming, and a trip to Medieval Times. They also took part in many in-house activities including karaoke night, and an ice cream social. Working within a budget, students worked in groups to plan and organize their final dinner dance party, which was themed “midnight club”. They independently selected and ordered the food, decorated the hall, and created an evening filled with excitement and fun for all.

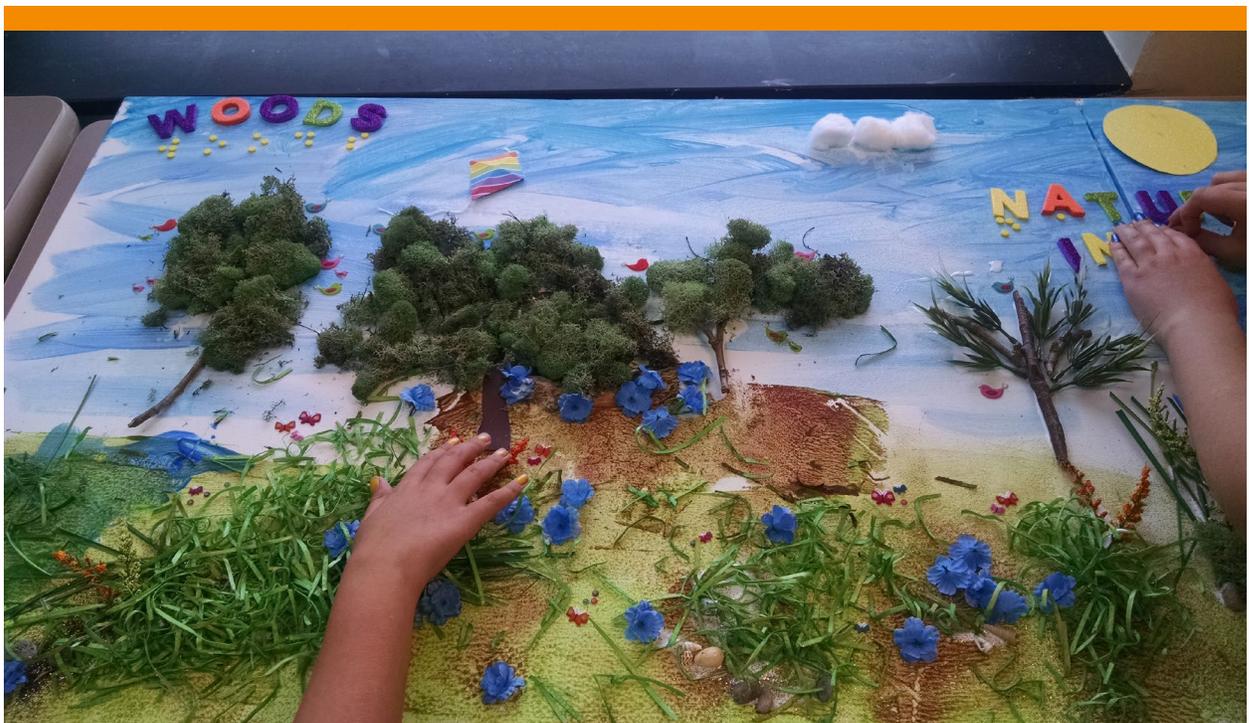
The two week Life 101 session concluded with a breakfast for students and families along with a graduation celebration. The ceremony was well attended by students, parents, and CBVI staff. Executive Director, Dan Frye, and JKTC Manager, Del Basha, made opening remarks followed by the Life 101 graduates who spoke about what they learned, and how they benefitted from their participation in the program. The positive reactions from all attendees was a testimonial of how their lives transformed as a result of their participation in this program.

SHARP PROGRAM (Student Hands-On Alternatives Re-enforcement Project)

The SHARP Program, a vision of Executive Director Daniel Frye, provides an innovative approach to enable students with vision impairment, ages six through thirteen, to acquire and practice blindness skills in the areas of Braille, assistive technology and independent living, including orientation and mobility. The program was offered at each of the three CBVI Service Centers from July 28 through August 20, 2015. Initially, each service center was scheduled to accept only ten participants; however, due to the overwhelming response from students and their families, a total of fifty nine students attended the first annual SHARP program. A team composed of staff from all CBVI disciplines developed the program curriculum, consisting of activities that provided student hands-on experiences, which reinforced skills developed during the program. New Jersey Transit, Wegmans Grocery Store,

Newark Police and Fireman, Liberty State Science Center, State Forestry Services, and the Battleship of New Jersey are a few of the community agencies, organizations, and enterprises that provided students with life skill experiences.

Activities in the areas of personal care, leisure, and community engagement included tying shoes, brushing teeth, matching and ironing clothes, and tying ties. Students learned to budget money, plan and cook meals, shop for groceries, download books, travel independently, groom themselves, eating etiquette, and practiced interacting with the public. Students took part in group games and practiced their math skills to keep score. They learned to read map keys, common survival signs, and compass navigation, prior to going out to community field trips.





Students in the Newark Service Center visited the Turtle Back Zoo to see their favorite animals; foxes and jaguars were a must see. The sprinkler cooling stations around the zoo were also a big hit. The students and staff had a tour of Newark Penn Station, and a train ride to Cranford for pizza and ice cream.

Students in the Freehold Service Center spent a day at Ocean Grove beach. On the way there, a student was asked if he liked the beach and he responded “I have never been to the beach”. He was told about the barges, the horizon and the breakers. His face lit up when he ran around at the shoreline experiencing the sand and surf.

Other field trips included a trip to the mall, where students took part in a scavenger

hunt and story-time at Barnes & Noble. Everyone had to budget their spending money to purchase an item. Students were also introduced to firefighters and mounted police officers. They explored a fire truck and sprayed the fire hose.

SHARP introduces students with vision impairment to core skills and life experiences that serve as a strong foundation for facilitating next steps for each student. The program success was evident by the numerous enthusiastic testimonials from students and their families as well as staff who participated. Plans are underway to build on the success of the pilot program to include additional learning experiences and community engagement.

Assistive Support Programs for Independence, Renewal, and Education (ASPIRE)

As the number of seniors with vision loss increases, many struggle with the challenges of living a quality life. Vision loss coupled with diminished ability to participate in once cherished activities can take a heavy toll on a senior's emotional well-being. Loss of vision can often give rise to negative emotions such as anxiety, sadness, loneliness and lowered self-esteem.

In 2015, CBVI launched a new state-wide program targeted to improve the quality of life for older adults living with blindness and vision impairments. ASPIRE is a state-wide network of peer support groups designed to provide individuals who are living with vision loss, the opportunity to gain the necessary

coping skills, information, and education needed to thrive. ASPIRE is administered by the Independent Living Unit of CBVI, and is geared towards those with vision loss 55 years or older, and is also available to all adults interested in attending. ASPIRE offers individuals with vision loss the opportunity to connect with others who share similar challenges and the same life experiences. Through attendance in monthly group meetings, program participants talk with one another and receive emotional support, to exchange useful information, and to find practical solutions for challenges that accompany low vision and blindness. ASPIRE helps people with vision loss to realize they are not alone and that they can achieve much more than they ever thought possible.



Deaf-Blind Services

The CBVI Deaf-Blind Unit provides transition and vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with dual sensory impairments, i.e., the combination of hearing and vision loss. The agency employs two Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (Deaf-Blind Specialists), one located in the Newark Service Center serving the northern region of the state and the other in the Freehold Service Center serving the southern half of the state. A full range of services are provided to assist individuals with hearing and vision loss to reach their highest level of independence and prepare for, obtain, or retain employment.

Special attention is given to the unique communication needs of individuals who are deaf-blind. Interpreter services and special equipment may be provided to help individuals maximize their independence and achieve their employment goals.

SUPPORT SERVICE PROVIDERS OF NEW JERSEY (SSP-NJ)

CBVI, its State Rehabilitation Council, and The College of New Jersey (TCNJ), have collaborated to develop and implement a consumer-driven statewide network of Support Service Providers, or SSPs to promote greater community integration for adults who are Deaf-Blind. SSPs provide visual and environmental information, human guide services,

and access to communication. This facilitates the connection with others, thereby reducing barriers that would otherwise result in social isolation.

Into its sixth year, the Support Service Providers (SSP) program continues to assist adults who are deaf-blind to gain access to and integrate in their communities. SSPs relay visual and environmental information and serve in the role of sighted guides to facilitate communication and provide support. CBVI deaf-blind consumers eligible to receive vocational rehabilitation services may be eligible to engage in up to sixteen hours per month of SSP services. By promoting and supporting employment for adults who are deaf-blind, SSP-NJ encourages community integration through the development and implementation of a statewide network of Support Service Providers.

In accordance with program guidelines, Deaf-Blind program participants select when and how they want to use SSPs, and their SSPs of choice. If asked to match, we



consider the skills of the SSP, the needs of the consumer, and the community location of both individuals. SSP-NJ program policy includes priority training for applicants recommended by program participants. For new program participants who may not know those in the SSP network, SSP-NJ provides community events where everyone can get to know each other in a neutral community activity, such as shopping in a mall. This way, program participants and SSPs can spend time “testing each other out” for compatibility before committing to working together. SSP-NJ Advisory Council meetings are held quarterly, and are also attended by the SSP-NJ business manager, program director, and regional managers.

SSP-NJ approved activities are applicable to the areas of:

Post-secondary education/training: Assist in the classroom, library, educational project or trip, continuing education class, night school, study group, workshop, acclimate to a new educational environment.

Employment: Assist with job search, shopping for job-related clothing and materials/supplies, personal care appointments, job-related conference, meeting or workshop, job interview, acclimate to a new work environment, facilitate work experience, networking events, employer-sponsored events, accompany self-employed individuals to sales/development venues.

Health and Well-Being: Assist with medical screenings, donate blood, blood work, doctor’s appointment, exercise or fitness activities, hospital or out-patient clinic appointment and/or surgery, prescribed related therapies, pharmacy.

Household Management: Read mail, para transit application, scribe to complete forms, provide communication assistance with making phone calls (VRS, TTY).

Accompany on Errands: Laundromat, personal finance and banking: reader and/or scribe support, shopping, in-store and online: food, clothing, household & personal items, read directions, recipes, labels and other household items.

Community Integration: Public meetings and events, community seminars, civic organizations, assist in voting, volunteering in community organizations, peer support groups.



SUCCESS STORIES

Rolando Lee

I was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) at age 2. Although my family knew I had a significant eye condition, it didn't impair my ability to do much during the course of my childhood. In 8th grade I was assigned to research a genetic disease as part of my biology class. I took that opportunity to find out about RP, since I knew it was something I had to live with. So at age 13 I discovered that RP is progressive and eventually I would be almost completely blind. At that age this was a very difficult truth to cope with, and the result was depression. I kept those feelings buried inside, and didn't share about the looming blindness that was in store for me. In college when I couldn't read my textbooks and night navigation was a struggle, I began to open up to my girlfriend and brother because I needed their help. I slowly began adapting and developing my own ways of completing tasks independently. When I was 21 I learned that I was legally blind and eligible for disability benefits. A doctor at UMDNJ registered me with the Commission for the Blind. I have been dealing with the progressive loss of vision as far back as I can remember. Now I can do most everything I have to do without looking. I also rely heavily on technology, particularly Zoom text with my computer, magnification with my cell phone and tablet, and high contrast tools such as a CCTV. In situations where I need to get somewhere quickly and alone, I carry my cane.



I completed my degree at Rutgers. Then I was introduced to Fernando, my first CBVI caseworker. I saw a mobility instructor and received my first cane. I attended the JKTC program, and today I can say without a doubt that it completely changed my life by providing the training and tools that enabled me to become successful. Throughout the program I met other vision-impaired people. I spent time watching and learning from them, and taught them a thing or two about myself.

This experience helped me emotionally and mentally, and changed my outlook on the world and my life. My confidence and self-awareness significantly increased. I learned that Braille, technology, and the right mindset enable those who are totally blind to maintain employment and provide for their families. I also noticed that some participants with better vision than I were restricted by their fear. This observation lit a fire under me to stop second guessing myself and to continue pursuing all of my goals, regardless of whether I would become blind one day or not.

When I discovered the Commission for the Blind existed, I felt like one of the luckiest people in the world. Prior to that I had always battled my disability alone. I can't possibly explain to others what it is like, and despite their best intentions, family and friends can't really help me in the way I needed them to. I needed slight accommodations from time to time, which is exactly what I got from the Commission. When I look back at it today, it makes me happy to know that I am an American and I live in a country that cares enough about people with disabilities to provide such vital services.

At the JKTC I learned to read 3 levels of Braille; and practiced commuting by foot, bus, train and even getting to the airport. My mobility instructor, vocational instructor, Braille instructor and peers during my time at JKTC impacted my life in a way no one else ever will. My new vocational caseworker, Fanny, helped me get back to school and earn my teaching certification. There is no way I would have my job today were it not for

Fanny and the services of the Commission. They paid for the tests I needed and the 3 semesters of necessary classes. Without the Commission I might still be working a customer service job.

Currently, I am a 7th grade Social Studies teacher at Bloomfield Middle School in Bloomfield, NJ. I live in an apartment with my fiancé in Clifton, NJ. It is important for students to see someone like myself, Latino male with a disability, at the front of a classroom showing anyone who could identify with me that there are people out there who they can look up to. After all, the job of a teacher is not only to educate students about a particular subject, but also to lend a hand in expanding awareness for the next generation of Americans.

There is nothing for me to be ashamed of. The world is a visual one; therefore, we have a hard time being a square peg trying to fit into a circular hole. However, I believe that society is starting to recognize its rigidity and will soon change that circular hole. This will occur because there are many square pegs along with triangles, pentagons, and rectangles ready to make their mark. We have to make noise and make ourselves seen. The first step is to take up the challenge that life has chosen to give us, and succeed no matter what. With the help of the Commission for the Blind, along with our families and friends, we have an opportunity that many others don't have - to seize the moment, to promote our independence, and actualize our gifts in service to ourselves and the world.

SUCCESS STORIES

Susan Vanino

I began losing my vision at the age of eight from macular degeneration, and although by adolescence, I was aware of services provided by the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI), most of my interaction as a consumer with CBVI occurred much later as a mature adult.

For much of my adult life, my husband and I ran a home-based business, which like many, generated earnings of either feast or famine. By 2005, I had grown weary of our roller coaster income and the demanding physical work required by the business. I also had lost the majority of usable vision I had once retained as a young adult, leaving me with light perception only, and in need of blindness related skills.

It was while on my quest for alternative employment that I connected with CBVI, and was immediately referred by my VR counselor to the New Jersey Foundation for the Blind for assistive technology training. At the same time, I also received valuable mobility instruction and counseling through CBVI, which allowed me to see potential in myself that I might not have discovered on my own.

While attending assistive technology training classes, I became aware of accessible transportation (Access Link), and thought it would be wise to apply for the service before embarking on a job search. In a strange twist of fate, the agency in Hackensack where I was applying for Access Link happened to have a



job opening, and was specifically looking for someone with vision loss to fill the position. I was encouraged to apply for the job, and before being accepted by Access Link, was offered the position of coordinator for the Adjustment to Vision Loss Project (AVL), a program long-funded by CBVI. From October, 2005 through June, 2013, I worked for AVL, first as peer support coordinator and soon after as program coordinator.

As AVL coordinator, I was responsible for the development and maintenance of support

groups for people with vision loss. These groups, located throughout 14 counties in northern and central New Jersey, provided participants with relevant information, support, knowledge of coping mechanisms, and special understanding difficult to find elsewhere. It was my privilege to assist the extraordinary individuals who participated in this meaningful program, and who truly changed the course of my life. In addition, I had the invaluable opportunity to work directly with two licensed clinical social workers (LCSW's), who ultimately inspired me to pursue my education in social work.

Throughout full-time college classes I continued on as AVL coordinator, and though the program experienced funding cuts in 2010, the program was able to secure private funding on a smaller scale. I was thrilled when I graduated Magna Cum Laude with a BSW from Ramapo College in May 2013, but disappointed when learning that all funding for AVL ended the following month, leaving me unemployed. By this time, I had already been accepted into the advanced standing master of social work program at New York University (NYU), and due to the generosity of scholarship donors through Ramapo College of New Jersey, as well as organizations such as CBVI, the Trenton Thunder Baseball team, the Saddle River Valley Lions Club, the National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey, Learning Ally, and many others, I was able to make plans for continuing my education the following fall.

My year as a graduate student flew by, with back-to-back classes and 600 social work internship hours completed at a large mental health facility. I also had the good fortune to be selected as a top winner of the Learning Ally National Achievement Award, which was a once in a lifetime opportunity. The top winners traveled to Washington, D.C., to be honored at a gala dinner at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Through this award, I was able to meet with the Director of the National Library Services (NLS), to discuss options for improving their services to consumers, and for a tour of the impressive NLS facility. Another highlight of the event was being chosen to appear on a Washington DC. "Morning Show" on the ABC network.

I spoke on behalf of Learning Ally regarding the achievement award, and about being a college student with vision loss. I also explained that it was through CBVI that I first learned about Learning Ally and the services they provide. Winning the award led to other opportunities as well, such as an article featuring my accomplishments in "The New Social Worker", a nationally recognized social work magazine. When I was interviewed by the writer, I mentioned that I received an award for leadership and community service from CBVI, and was pleased to see the information appeared in the article. Having received this award twice in three years has always been one of my most cherished accomplishments, and one I am most proud of.

As a college student for four and a half years, my experiences with CBVI were extremely positive. My VR counselor, mobility instructor, college counselors, technology instructors, members of the Saddle River Valley Lions Club and the Trenton Thunder Baseball Team, as well as so many others at CBVI were partners with me in achieving my goal of obtaining a master's degree in social work. When I graduated from NYU in May 2014, with an MSW and 4.0 grade point average, I felt as though it was not only my efforts being recognized, but those efforts of so many at CBVI as well.

After graduating from NYU's MSW program, I began studying vigorously for the state licensing exam for social workers (LSW). I had no idea that it would take more than three months before my request for using a screen reader (JAWS) as an accommodation would finally be met by the Board of Social Work Examiners and testing center. Using advocacy skills I learned while assisting others with vision loss proved extremely helpful in dealing with the arrangements for my own accommodation, and on August 28th, 2014, I took and passed the state licensing exam using JAWS. Since then, I have often chosen to volunteer my time to organizations that have had a large impact on my life. I have participated on an employment panel for CBVI's College Preparatory Experience program, and am proud to be a long-time mentor in their Bell-ringer Program held at the Joseph Kohn Training Center. I currently serve as a mentor in the Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement (EDGE) program,

an employment program for high school students with vision loss, which is funded by CBVI. In addition, I often participate in national events for Learning Ally, assuming various roles and advocating on their behalf.

This past June, I was extremely fortunate to finally realize my dream and goal of employment as a licensed social worker. I was thrilled when CBVI offered me the position of Support Program Coordinator for the new Assistive Support Programs for Independence, Renewal, and Education (ASPIRE) program.

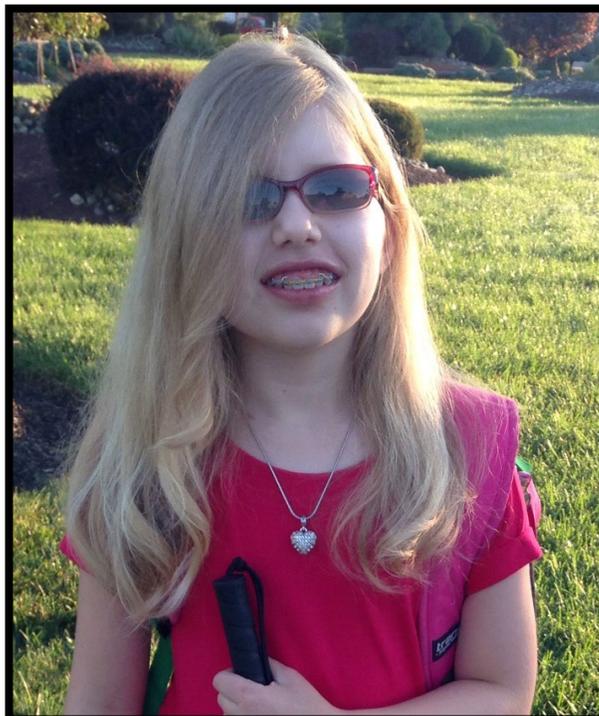
Throughout my life, I have been extremely fortunate to be encouraged to explore individual interests and goals by a strong support network consisting of family, friends, and community resources. Through my role working with people with vision loss, I realize that many are not as blessed to have support from others, or knowledge that may assist them to achieve the best of their ability. I know from my own personal experience that when someone is blind or vision-impaired, they must find new, different ways of doing things, but once they do, they can begin to overcome the obstacles that hinder them. Now as Support Program Coordinator for ASPIRE, I can put my skills and knowledge to use assisting others with vision loss, and be a positive part of their journey, as so many at CBVI have been part of mine.

SUCCESS STORIES

Kaleigh Brendle

a life with impaired vision can be quite difficult; I myself was born with a condition that limited my sight and required glasses and a cane. All throughout school, I have felt the eyes of students on me as I walked through the halls. The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired has provided amazing assistance to ensure that I acquired many skills that would help me to be successful, such as mobility, technology sessions, and Braille, which has been life-changing by itself. Thanks to the CBVI's Braille instruction when I was small, I have placed fourth, third, and second in the National Braille Challenge, an intellectual competition that assesses the skill level and reading comprehension abilities of Braille readers nationwide. Braille has also helped me to become a successful debater. The Garden State Debate League was hesitant to allow me to compete in tournaments due to my many pages of Braille notes, but when they agreed and I was permitted to participate, I achieved four awards in the three tournaments that I have been to. Those awards include Best Speaker of my middle school, as well as the Golden Gavel, which is given to the best speaker in the league at each tournament.

In the fourth grade, I joined the Westminster Children's Choir, thereby pursuing my love for singing and music. I was able to Braille the lyrics to the songs so that I could memorize them; quickly, my fellow choir members realized that my impaired sight made me no less of a musician than them. I have since performed three times at the Governor's Mansion with the choir; in the near future, we plan to sing at a shelter for the homeless called the Home Front. Singing with the Westminster Choir inspired me to take chorus class in



school, where the lyrics were also brailled for me. I have been part of two choirs now for three years, and I do not regret a second of that time.

Over the course of my twelve years of life, the insecurity that I felt about my impaired vision changed into pride, as it has led me so far and aided me in achieving my goals. I have set large plans for my future, such as to win the Golden Gavel at a debate tournament where contestants from around the Eastern United States compete. Another of my hopes is to publish a novel that I am currently writing, in both Braille and print so that readers, no matter their sight condition, can enjoy its thrilling tale. I have one message for those who have lost their sight or those who have limited vision; do not let that condition stop you. One road block should not stop you from cruising successfully down the road you dream of.

SUCCESS STORIES

Erica Garcia

At an early age it was apparent that I had difficulty performing visual tasks. At age ten I was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa, (RP). My family and I were told by the genetic counselor that I would most likely lose all of my vision by age 21. At that time I was very hesitant to receive any help; I felt embarrassed and just wanted to fit in at school. My mother began searching for services that could help make my life easier. Fortunately, we found CBVI and I was introduced to services and accommodations that would enable me to function more effectively at school. At first I was resistant to assistive technology and mobility training. I was very reluctant to use my cane because it implied that I was vision-impaired and would lose my independence.

As I experienced the benefits of the accommodations offered, I realized that using a cane actually made my life much easier. Assistive technology has evolved into a very useful means for carrying out daily tasks. The accessibility features of laptops, tablets, and phones were outstanding, especially while attending college and graduate school. CBVI's financial assistance and guidance during my undergraduate and graduate studies significantly contributed to completing my education.

The impact of vision impairment had a major influence on how I arrived at my career choice. At first I struggled with feelings of depression, anticipating a gloomy future.



I didn't think that attending college was possible because my vision would be gone by that time. After graduating high school in 2006, I struggled for some time to find an appropriate career choice. While taking an abnormal psychology course I found my passion to work in the mental health field. I switched my major from teaching and have since completed my Master's degree in Clinical & Counseling Psychology. I have a

deep love for helping others, and this career choice is a good fit for me in every way. Currently, I am applying for licensure to practice as a licensed psychotherapist in the State of New Jersey.

When I began my job search I felt nervous about carrying out simple tasks due to my visual limitations. I was interviewed for a Mental Health Counselor position at a partial care program for children located in Clifton, NJ. I chose to be honest about my vision impairment, and the supervisor was extremely open and non-judgmental. I was hired part-time and fortunately only a few accommodations were required.

At the age of 27, I still have functional vision and keep an optimistic outlook. I am currently in a long term relationship of over 7 years. My partner is unbelievably understanding and always open to helping with any difficulties that come up. I reside with my mother,

and plan to rent an apartment or become a first time homeowner when I become more financially stable.

Initially, I felt vision loss meant that I would lose my independence. Over time I realized that asking for help isn't something to be ashamed of. Receiving and accepting services didn't mean that I lost my independence. In fact, I finally understood the accommodations were necessary for me to fully experience my independence. Visual impairment can be extremely difficult for anyone to go through at any age. It takes a lot of trial and error. In retrospect I discovered that the process of finding what worked for me was so rewarding and shined a light on the independence I already had. I am grateful for all of the assistance CBVI has offered, as well as the choices I have made. They have paved the way to eventually open up a practice as a licensed psychotherapist in the State of New Jersey.



State Rehabilitation Council Goals for FFY 2016

- ❖ The SRC will continue to meet at least five times in FFY 2016 to maintain its effective working relationship among members and the CBVI Administration.
- ❖ The SRC Chair will work collaboratively with agency administration and the SRC Chair for the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, to develop training protocols to educate new Council members on the role and responsibilities of the SRC membership.
- ❖ SRC members with vision impairments will participate in Commission sponsored programs and activities to share their knowledge base and expertise with consumers, and to serve as mentors and role models.
- ❖ The SRC will continue to be involved in public outreach so that agencies and individuals will better understand the capabilities of persons who are blind and vision-impaired.
- ❖ The SRC will continue to collaborate with the Commission to facilitate the implementation of a three to five year agency-wide strategic plan to incorporate innovative and practical measures to insure the ongoing provision of high quality services to enable CBVI consumers to maximize their skills of independence and achieve their employment goals.
- ❖ The SRC will assist the Commission to implement the new Welcome and Evaluation (WE) team, which will serve as the first point of entry for CBVI consumers to learn about the full array of services offered at the agency, facilitate CBVI eligibility, initiate needs assessments, connect consumers with the broader resources in their communities, and conduct outreach to the public.
- ❖ The SRC will assist CBVI with the implementation of the second annual College Prep Experience for high school students with vision loss in conjunction with the Bonner Institute for Civic and Community Engagement at The College of New Jersey.
- ❖ The SRC will assist CBVI to expand the new Life Skills 101 program, which is designed to assist freshman and sophomore high school students to develop basic life skills that facilitate the next step of their transitional plan.
- ❖ The SRC and CBVI will collaborate to expand the new Employment Development Guidance and Engagement (EDGE) program that enables high school students with vision loss to develop skills of independence, expand their career awareness, and facilitate their transition to adulthood through the implementation of career preparation, mentoring, and independent living services.
- ❖ The SRC and Commission will develop a Business Relations Unit designed to open up employment opportunities for CBVI consumers by fostering collaboration with the Business Community, the National Employment Team, and accessing the Talent Acquisition Portal.
- ❖ The SRC will revamp and expand SRC sub-committees to foster collaboration to effectively address the agency's VR initiatives.
- ❖ A designated SRC sub-committee will review and analyze CBVI policies and procedures to recommend any necessary improvements to the agency's administration of services and programs.

Did you know?

- ❖ The NJ State Library Talking Book and Braille Center offers an array of leisure reading and magazines in digital audio, braille and some large print. Call 1-800-792-8322 or visit: www.njsltbbc.org
- ❖ Bookshare.org offers thousands of leisure reading and academic materials in text to speech and embossed braille formats. www.bookshare.org
- ❖ Learning Ally is a major provider of academic books on all levels in DAISY-format CD or download. www.learningally.org

If you are blind or vision-impaired you may be entitled to:

- ❖ Newspaper reader services from NFB – NEWSLINE, sponsored by CBVI at 1-888-882-1629

The Commission may be able to assist with:

- ❖ Vocational Rehabilitation to help you obtain employment
- ❖ Rehabilitation teaching to help you perform daily living tasks
- ❖ Orientation and Mobility instruction to assist you in traveling independently
- ❖ Referral to community resources for housing, financial assistance and other supported services
- ❖ The Commission will respond to your concerns if you are dissatisfied with the services you receive. Call the Office of the Executive Director at 973-648-2325
- ❖ The Client Assistance Program can assist you in resolving any disputes regarding provision of VR services by calling 1-800-922-7233
- ❖ Para-transit can provide transportation to work, medical appointments, etc. Call the NJ Transit Office of Special Services at 1-800-772-2287 to get the phone number for your county

SRC Meeting Dates – 2016

SRC meetings are held in compliance with Section 105 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and also are in compliance with the NJ Open Public Meeting Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6.

The public is invited to all meetings, which will start at 9:30 a.m. on the following dates:

- ❖ February 5th
- ❖ April 15th
- ❖ June 3rd
- ❖ October 7th
- ❖ December 2nd

Service Centers and Facilities

For a complete description of CBVI services, please visit the web site at <http://www.cbvi.nj.gov>

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE:

153 Halsey Street, 6th Floor
P.O. Box 47017, Newark, NJ 07102
Phone: (973) 648-3333 Fax: (973) 648-7364

Daniel B. Frye, Executive Director
daniel.frye@dhs.state.nj.us

John C. Walsh, Chief of Program Administration
john.walsh@dhs.state.nj.us

NEWARK SERVICE CENTER (NSC):

153 Halsey Street, 5th Floor, Newark, NJ 07102
Phone: (973) 648-2111 Fax: (973) 648-7674
Manager: John Reiff
john.reiff@dhs.state.nj.us

FREEHOLD SERVICE CENTER (FSC):

100 Daniels Way, Freehold, NJ 07728
Phone: (732) 308-4001 Fax: (732) 308-4104
Managers: John Reiff & Jack Thompson
john.reiff@dhs.state.nj.us
jack.thompson@dhs.state.nj.us

CHERRY HILL SERVICE CENTER (CHSC):

2201 Rt. 38 East, Suite 600, Cherry Hill, NJ 08002
Phone: (856) 482-3700 Fax: (856) 482-3770
Manager: Jack Thompson
jack.thompson@dhs.state.nj.us

HAMMONTON OFFICE (SRO):

40 N. Whitehorse Pike, Hammonton, NJ 08037
Phone: (609)704-6000 Fax: (609) 704-7109

DEAF-BLIND SERVICES:

153 Halsey Street, 5th Floor, Newark, NJ 07102
Phone: (973) 648-7504 Fax: (973) 648-7674
Supervisor: Ed Sroczyński
edward.sroczyński@dhs.state.nj.us

JOSEPH KOHN TRAINING CENTER:

130 Livingston Avenue, New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone: (732) 937-6363 Fax: (732) 247-6628
Manager: Del Basha
delavar.basha@dhs.state.nj.us

BUSINESS ENTERPRISES – NEW JERSEY:

Joseph Kohn Training Center
130 Livingston Avenue
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Phone: (732) 937-6363 Fax: (732) 247-6628
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GEORGE F. MEYER INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE CENTER:

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**New Jersey Department of Human Services
Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired**