

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED



2018 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

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

2018 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, vision-impaired, or deaf-blind, 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 .

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State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) - Chairperson

Dear Governor Murphy:

The year 2018 was truly a year of transition for the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, with the departure of our Executive Director in January. Under the leadership of Acting Director Davis, and with the help and support of the State Rehabilitation Council, CBVI staff and management have continued with the important job of serving blind and vision-impaired citizens of New Jersey. As this report will show, blind and vision-impaired people are finding employment, people with multiple disabilities are receiving increasing attention, and high school and college students are learning the hard and soft skills they will need to enjoy a productive and meaningful life in the future, all with the help and encouragement of the SRC.

The SRC, with its advice and feedback, played a vital role in the CBVI's successful monitoring by the Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration, which occurred over the summer and into autumn.

We look forward to a new Executive Director in 2019, and will work with CBVI personnel to ensure that blind and vision-impaired New Jerseyans will be able to participate ever more fully in the life of our dynamic and diverse state.

Richard Fox

State Rehabilitation Council Chairperson

Executive Director's Report

On behalf of the New Jersey Department of Human Services' Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI), I would like to congratulate the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) on their continued achievements. The SRC is an invaluable asset to CBVI, with each of the members having proven themselves to be strong partners committed to assisting the agency in the areas of consumer service needs, advocacy, inclusion and economic vitality of blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind persons statewide.

The SRC continues to support the Commission's initiatives and activities to provide comprehensive, individualized services specific to employment, self-sufficiency, and community integration for our consumers. The SRC has provided progressive and proactive perspectives that have been used to strengthen our service delivery systems. With their guidance, CBVI will continue to seek new strategies to enhance the lives of NJ residents who are blind and vision impaired.

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight both CBVI's Vocational Rehabilitation services and programs, as well as the State Rehabilitation Council, whose support continues to enable the Commission to maximize independence and self-sufficiency for each and every one of its consumers.

Sincerely,

Bernice Davis, Psy.D.
Acting Executive Director

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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SRC Accomplishments in FFY 2018

The SRC met five times in FFY 2018. The sub-committees were streamlined to better meet the tasks required of them. These bodies continued to develop resources for CBVI staff and consumers and conducted reviews of current and updated policies. These policy reviews played a vital role in the CBVI's preparation for a successful monitoring by the Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration.

SRC Goals for FFY 2019

The SRC will continue to meet five times in Federal Fiscal Year 2019, as well as continue ongoing sub-committee work between these meetings to foster the goals of the CBVI and its excellent services to the consumer population.

The SRC Chair will seek to work in more extensive collaboration with Commission administration and the SRC Chair of the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services to continue to develop protocols for the integration and education of new SRC members to their roles and responsibilities, as well as the scope of the work of their respective agencies.

The members of the SRC will continue to participate, as appropriate, in public forums and agency programs for the benefit of consumers.

State Rehabilitation Council Subcommittees

Annual Report Subcommittee

The SRC Report Subcommittee is charged with putting together the annual State Rehabilitation Council report. Members of the subcommittee assist with the creation, recommendations, compilation, and editing of the report.

Business Relations and Blindness Resources Subcommittee

The members of the SRC Sub-Committee, Business Relations collaborated with Resources, to develop a more streamlined approach to collecting, organizing, and sharing resources and contact information for the diverse audience navigating support: employers, consumers, families, professionals and service providers, etc. After facilitating trainings and providing technical assistance with Supported Employment Agencies for the Blindness Learning Committee effort, we learned that there was a need to improve our current methods of dissemination and how to keep up with an ever-changing world of resources, techniques and approaches that benefit our consumers to help them reach their goal of independence and a greater quality of life. We will be looking into effective ways to provide current, accessible, user-friendly information.

Policy and Evaluation Subcommittee

This year, the SRC decided to consolidate its Evaluation and Policy Subcommittees into the Policy and Evaluation Subcommittee. This subcommittee reviewed and provided feedback to the CBVI on all VR policy documents in preparation for the Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration's audit.

I would like to thank our subcommittee members, Jonathan Goodman, Susan Head and Evangelia Stone for their wise and dedicated work.

Overview of the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

In April of 1909, the New Jersey State Legislature directed that a state agency be established "to provide any and all means which shall be deemed feasible for ameliorating the condition of the blind." Over 108 years later, the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI), more than ever finds itself fulfilling that original mandate.

The Commission was established as a state agency in 1910 under the direction of Lydia Young Hayes, a blind teacher of the blind. One of the initial tasks of the Commission was to compile a registry of the state's blind residents. During that first year, 750 people were registered.

The formation of a single agency to administer to the needs of New Jersey's blind population emerged from a wave of social consciousness that swept the country in the late 1800s and early 1900s. As a result of increased awareness, significant strides were made toward equalizing opportunities for people who were blind.

During that first year, Miss Hayes and another teacher, Janet Paterson, established the state's first integrated classes for blind and sighted students within the Newark school system. These classes were based on the belief that integrated classes provided blind students with the educational tools and exposure necessary for a smooth assimilation into society.

The integrative educational philosophy and policy was recognized throughout the country, as an innovative model in the field of education of the blind. From the early 1940's to the late 1960's, and under the supervision of Josephine Taylor, the Commission's evolving educational programs, known as the New Jersey Plan, gained world-wide recognition. The educational initiative of supporting blind and vision-impaired students in public schools, and sending teachers to assist them through lessons in Braille, low-vision aids, and special classes, has grown over the years into an even more comprehensive educational service program that supported over 2000 students last year.

A Home Teaching Service Program was also installed during the first years of the Commission. Teachers went into consumers' homes to help them discover ways to efficiently use new techniques and their own talents to achieve self-sufficient lifestyles. This program offered instruction in communication skills such as Braille and typing, and included guidance in the production of marketable crafts and handiworks, which led to the creation of a Home Industries Program, that functioned as an agent for the sale of products made by blind persons.

In 1915, the Commission began a program to place blind workers in the work industry at large, capitalizing on employment opportunities resulting from World War I Armed Services recruitments. Federal and state legislation offered additional support to the Commission's early employment and social service programs, which were designed to provide legal and economic leverage to agencies that served people with disabilities.

Basic legislative mandates and their various amendments allowed the Commission to vastly enhance its services during the middle period of its growth, under the direction of George Meyer (1936-1964). Major legislative amendments, such as the Barden LaFollete Act in 1943, and earlier federal rehabilitation legislation like the Smith-Fess Act of 1920, provided funds and authorized state agencies to help blind and vision-impaired people obtain meaningful employment through vocational training, counseling, physical restoration, and placement services.

The Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936 authorized the Commission to license qualified blind people to operate vending stands in federal and federally-sponsored buildings, which was later broadened to include state, municipal and private buildings. There are presently 53 Commission-sponsored newsstands, snack bars, coffee shops, and full-service cafeterias in facilities throughout the state, with several more planned.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services were formally organized in 1941 under the supervision of Carl Pirrups-Hvarre. Vocational Rehabilitation Services provided a wider range of training, placement, counseling and guidance to prepare blind people for employment, and to further immerse them into the business arena.

From 1911 to 1918, the Commission, concerned citizens, and private organizations, such as the New Jersey Association for the Blind, pooled their resources to secure legislation to promote research into blindness prevention. Eye Health Services were formally established in 1943 under the supervision of the late Emma Howe, which included the nation's first traveling eye unit and a glaucoma registry. These Commission services have continued to grow over the years with the Better Eye-Health Services and Treatment (Project BEST) program, which provides services in the areas of eye health and eye safety by offering free vision screenings for adults and children, with a concerted effort to provide these services to historically underserved sectors of the population (low income, elderly, minorities, people with Diabetes, and individuals with special needs).

Under the direction of Joseph Kohn, (1964-1976), the size and scope of the Commission's staff and service programs more than doubled. Significant expansions occurred in many departments: social services, rehabilitation teaching, eye health nursing, the home industries program, vocational rehabilitation, an expanded contract workshop program, the opening of the George Meyer Textbook and Materials Center, preschool eye screening programs, and many more.

With the establishment of the first Consumer Forum in 1964, under the auspices of Governor Richard Hughes, consumers and other interested individuals began to take active participation in the Commission's decision and policy-making procedures. Now the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) established in Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, advises and works in partnership with CBVI administration and staff.

CBVI, known as the Commission for the Blind until 1982, was at the forefront of that movement and still works diligently toward the realization of new levels of achievement in the quest for equal opportunity in education, employment, and community integration.

Although the Commission's scope of services has significantly expanded since 1910, the established direction is still an integral part of today's programs and policies as well as tomorrow's goals and aspirations.

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	80	82	127	90	10
2 Bergen	163	74	205	273	2
3 Burlington	148	79	132	168	3
4 Camden	193	146	206	207	9
5 Cape May	11	16	49	31	0
6 Cumberland	61	55	64	58	0
7 Essex	181	147	251	377	22
8 Gloucester	101	62	103	104	1
9 Hudson	104	110	114	227	9
10 Hunterdon	25	7	20	31	0
11 Mercer	103	41	90	153	5
12 Middlesex	230	106	244	318	8
13 Monmouth	192	107	265	223	4
14 Morris	112	57	109	149	6
15 Ocean	207	94	381	186	4
16 Passaic	142	68	126	182	5
17 Salem	18	17	29	20	0
18 Somerset	93	43	78	127	1
19 Sussex	34	20	29	38	1
20 Union	144	97	150	212	6
21 Warren	18	13	25	31	1
22 Out of State	2	2	1	11	0

* 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)

Employment Outcomes in FFY 2018:

*196 total employment outcomes

12.8%	Office and Administrative Support Occupations
9.2%	Sales and Related Occupations
7.1%	Education, Training, and Library Occupations
6.6%	Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations
6.6%	Transportation and Material Moving Occupations
5.6%	Production Occupations
5.6%	Homemaker
5.1%	Management Occupations
5.1%	Community and Social Service Occupations
4.6%	Healthcare Support Occupations
4.1%	Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations
4.1%	Personal Care and Service Occupations
4.1%	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations
3.1%	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations
3.1%	Business Enterprise New Jersey Manager
2.6%	Business and Financial Operations Occupations
2.6%	Computer and Mathematical Occupations
2.6%	Construction and Extraction Occupations
2.0%	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations
1.5%	Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations
0.5%	Architecture and Engineering Occupations
0.5%	Legal Occupations
0.5%	Protective Service Occupations
0.5%	Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations

Spotlight Stories

These stories feature individuals who have made great strides this past year toward greater independence, academic achievement, and employment success. At CBVI, success is not only defined by the acquisition of employment, but multiple times throughout life, as it occurs each time one overcomes barriers, makes significant progress, and achieves one's goals. The following pages highlight both the amazing people of all ages that CBVI has the privilege of serving, as well as descriptions of the unit, programs, and services that have contributed to their accomplishments.

Blindness Education Services

Certified Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs) work closely with the child, family members, and local school personnel to provide Blindness Education Services that make it possible for students who are blind, vision-impaired, or deaf-blind to participate equally with other students in general education classroom activities. These services are provided for eligible children (from birth through high school years) and their families.

Damien Gonzales

Damien Gonzalez is a 10-year-old, 5th grader in the Emerson, NJ School District. Damien was born with congenital glaucoma and has been visually impaired since birth. Through the NJ Commission for the Blind, he was made aware of the Student Hands-On Alternatives Reinforcement Project (SHARP) program, which he participated in over the past 3 summers. The summer program allowed him to be exposed to new skills and experiences that are not normally taught in the classroom environment, such as community-based educational and recreational activities to develop independent living skills. He especially enjoyed interacting with other students within his age group that have similar needs and interests.

As Damien got older, his participation in team-based sports diminished, as it frequently involved “seeing” a ball, such as soccer and basketball. Over the past year, Damien’s interest in baseball has grown, and he has become a die-hard Yankees fan. His parents learned about a modified version of baseball called “beep baseball” from his teachers of the Visually Impaired a few years prior, but understood that there was a league for adults only. When Damien was in 4th grade, he expressed a strong interest in playing softball since the ball was larger and brightly colored. He joined the team and did very well with few strike outs as a first-year player. Subsequently, his father contacted the NJ Beep Baseball team (NJ Titans), asking if Damien could come observe. The team welcomed Damien and invited him to play.

Damien unfortunately had to take a break from his practice while recovering from eye surgery in March. However, once he got an “all clear” from his surgeons, he was back on the field. He played in National Beep Ball Association (NBBA) tournaments over the summer in Chicago, IL, Rochester, NY, Haddonfield, NJ, and the World Series in Eau Claire, WI. Damien is currently the youngest player on his team and in the league. He has learned from his teammates that with perseverance anything is possible, and that having a visual impairment should not limit his possibilities and what he hopes to accomplish.

Student Hands-On Alternative Reinforcement Program (SHARP)

In addition to CBVI’s traditional education services, the SHARP Program is a summer program that provides an innovative approach to summer learning. SHARP stands for Students Hands-On Alternative Reinforcement Project. This program enables participating students in grades 1 through 8 opportunities to use literacy skills (Braille or large print), assistive technology, and independent living skills in practical, real-life settings through community engagement, service projects, and in peer groups. A total of 90 students attended the program during the summer of 2018. The students also had an opportunity to interact with high school students from our Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement (EDGE) Program, who worked within SHARP as High School Mentors.

Pre-Employment Transition Services

In FFY 2018, the Commission continued to develop and expand its Pre-Employment Transition Services, in order to be in alignment with the recent changes in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (the most recent reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973). The Commission has a long history of providing Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services to students and youth with disabilities with dedicated programs going back nearly 50 years. CBVI currently has six Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors dedicated to working with high school students, four Counselors dedicated to our consumers enrolled in College full-time, and a number of programs and services that have been developed and continue to evolve to meet the needs of our consumers and the federal regulations that govern the VR program. These transition programs include Life 101, EDGE (Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement) 1.0 and 2.0, Work Skills Preparation, and College Prep Experience.

Pre-Employment Transition Services are available to eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities, ages 14 to 21, and include job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, workplace readiness training, instruction in self-advocacy, and counseling on post-secondary enrollment opportunities.

Kaleigh Brendle

Kaleigh Brendle has been a consumer with the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI) for 15 years, since her infancy. She initially started tactile learning when she was just eight months old! While in elementary and middle school, Kaleigh continued to work actively with CBVI teachers, and continued to learn Braille and other useful skills.

As a high school sophomore, Kaleigh's list of activities and accomplishments is already quite remarkable. She is enrolled in honors classes, and is involved in a number of extracurricular activities. She enjoys public speaking, is the captain of the mock trial team, and is active on social media. Kaleigh loves music, has been singing for many years, plays the piano, and writes her own music. She even directs an online international choir for blind and visually impaired individuals. Kaleigh is also part of the Princeton Westminster children's choir and has sung at the White House on two occasions. Kaleigh also won first place at the Junior Varsity level at the 2018 National Braille Challenge. Developed by the Braille Institute, the Braille Challenge is the only academic competition of its kind in North America for students who are blind or visually impaired.

Given her keen interest in learning, when Kaleigh heard of CBVI's Life 101 Transition summer program, she became interested. Some of her friends, who had previously attended the program, had made positive comments about their experiences. These Life 101 graduates described how the program was enriching, educational, and fun. They also talked about the great friendships they made through Life 101. Kaleigh felt that the experience of living independently would be vital to her growth.

By the time Kaleigh finished the Life 101 program, she had gained a number of valuable experiences and skills. She specified that she learned how to have a more productive daily routine and schedule. Kaleigh also stated that she learned how to more effectively use her blindness skills as she progressed through the classes. Moreover, she loved the demo of the various accessibility apps and assistive technology applications. Kaleigh felt strongly that that all aspects of the Life 101 curriculum emphasized valuable communication skills for the workplace.

Kaleigh shared that she also loved the interactive Life 101 activities, events, and trips. She especially appreciated the Jeopardy game and the student celebration party. Additionally, she thought that the trips to the beach and mall were not only fun, but helped to develop mobility skills.

Kaleigh has some remarkable life goals. She would like to blend her love of public speaking with her love of music. Kaleigh wants to become completely independent and wants to utilize the various resources available to her. After high school, she plans to go on to college where she would like to major in English. Following college, she plans to attend law school. Kaleigh is particularly interested in environmental law and disability education.

A quote that Kaleigh loves is, “Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.” (Winston Churchill)

Life 101

Life 101 is a two-week, residential program conducted at the Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC). Life 101 usually takes place in late July and early August, and is designed for ninth and tenth grade students. Life 101 focuses on career exploration, independent living skills, and post-secondary education. The program is comprised of classes, instructional lessons, and interactive activities. Recreational and social activities as well as trips are all designed to promote independence. In addition, themes related to communication, self-advocacy, decision making, and leadership are addressed throughout the program. The ultimate goal of Life 101 is to give the participants a hands-on learning experience, empowering them with the necessary tools to facilitate their transition following high school graduation.

Natasha Ishaq

Many college-bound seniors don't know what they want to be when they grow up, and Natasha Ishaq is no different. Is a career as a lawyer right for her, or maybe something in the STEM field? Perhaps politics is where her talents are best suited. There's only one way to find out, Natasha is determined to experience it all before settling on a field. In the last year, Natasha has gone on a tour of Rutgers Law school, participated in the NFB's STEM EQ (Engineering Quotient) summer program, partook in CBVI's College Prep Experience summer program, competed in a contest held by the League of Women Voters about youth voting, volunteered at a thrift store, and served as an intern/mentor for the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired's SHARP program where she worked with younger blind children. Natasha isn't letting her blindness stop her from exploring her passions. Instead, with the help of the full range of CBVI programs (EDGE, College Prep), as well as opportunities within her school, community, and beyond, she has come to embrace her vision impairment and blossomed into a confident, independent young woman.

During her time in the College Prep Experience program, Natasha demonstrated that she is a passionate, driven student constantly seeking to excel at each task she is given. She approached a teambuilding activity or doing laundry with the same enthusiasm she would approach a class assignment. Natasha worked hard to learn how to best balance her course work and enjoy the social aspects of the program—something many college students struggle to do. Throughout the program, Natasha was a strong advocate for herself, but took the time to learn how to advocate differently across a variety of settings, such as class and group settings with peers.

During her three-and-a-half years in the EDGE program, a program for blind and vision impaired high school students to encourage employment readiness and exploration, Natasha has connected with many of the program's mentors, successful blind professionals that guide students as they prepare for and pursue their careers. Being surrounded by these mentors and other blind peers has had a profound impact on Natasha that she wouldn't trade for anything;

"One benefit I have gained from a visual disability is the EDGE program, so I tell people all the time that my disability has given me more than it ever could have taken away from me. I have gained an internal drive that I otherwise would envy, a worth ethic that makes me stronger not only as a student, but as a person, and a sense of how important it is to do everything to the fullest to prove myself capable to the doubters--and ultimately myself."

Natasha has also leveraged the knowledge of EDGE staff to become more involved in the blindness community. In early November, Natasha participated in the National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey's state convention, where she spoke on a panel about her experience at STEM EQ. Additionally, she ran for (and won) a leadership position on the board of the New Jersey Association of Blind Students.

Natasha is similarly supported by her connections with her peers in the program. Surrounded by fellow blind and vision impaired high school students, Natasha feels there is a strong sense of camaraderie and mutual support at events. She notes she has made lifelong friends through the EDGE program and knows that she has a strong support system for the rest of her academic journey.

EDGE (Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement) 1.0

Now in its fourth year, the EDGE (Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement) program helps prepare blind and vision impaired high school students receiving transition services from the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired to become successful professionals. Students attend monthly workshops at the Joseph Kohn Training Center in New Brunswick. Between these sessions, they participate in monthly conference calls where they hone their professional, advocacy, and independent living skills. Additionally, students also attend regularly scheduled field trips where they enjoy opportunities to socialize with other blind peers, build life skills, and learn about opportunities to find employment or become more involved in extracurricular activities. The program is run and staffed by successful blind and vision impaired individuals, who understand the importance of instilling blind youth with independence and confidence for them to become successful adults, professionals, and members of their communities.

College Prep Experience at The College of New Jersey

The College Preparation Experience (CPE) is an integrated part of The College of New Jersey's pre-College Program in partnership with the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. During the Orientation portion of the program, the students had the opportunity to practice work and college readiness skills on TCNJ's campus. This included learning to navigate a college campus, practicing time-management, and beginning the process of writing essays for the college application process. We were also able to offer credit-bearing options for rising high school juniors and seniors who have a desire to attend college upon graduation. The program helps prepare students for college through college-level coursework, community engaged learning, and college-based exploration workshops.

Charlie Baez

Charlie is a 21-year-old young man who has been working with CBVI since he was 17, receiving services from our Education, Transition/Vocational Rehabilitation, and Independent Living units. Flexible, organized, and friendly, he is a strong self-advocate with a very strong work ethic. Charlie is self-aware and has good sense of his strengths and abilities. Through his school, he has had the opportunity to obtain work experiences at various locations, including Marshalls and Edible Arrangements, and never failed to make connections with fellow staff and impress his managers along the way. Charlie is able to assess a social or work related situation and determine the best way to handle it. When faced with a challenge, he uses his patience, humor, and determination to succeed and takes pride in his accomplishments. Whether it's seeking support from a peer/staff, or taking matters into his own hands, he is able to think through situations and make thoughtful decisions. He is often found encouraging his peers and took initiative to help staff as well. Charlie makes strong connections to people with his personality and genuine care for those around him.

Charlie has been a participant in the Work Skills Prep program at The College of New Jersey over the past three summers, and has demonstrated a growth and desire to learn each year. He has experienced a range of job exploration and work experiences, most recently this year in food service at the campus dining hall and Marsilio's Kitchen, a local restaurant, and doing administrative support tasks at the NJ State Library Talking Book and Braille Center.

His dedication to being independent and successful in the workplace, as well as his ability to make positive connections to those around him, will surely lead to his success with his future goals in life. Charlie was the well-deserving recipient of this year's F.A.I.R.R. Award. F.A.I.R.R. is an acronym used in the program that stands for striving to be Flexible, Accepting, Independent, Respectful and Responsible. Charlie consistently demonstrated each and every one of these characteristics throughout the program.

He has also taken advantage of the EDGE program to learn all that he can about employment and develop relationships with fellow students where they can share ideas, goals, and personal success stories. Upon graduation in 2019, he is interested in continuing with his employment goals and considering taking advantage of the Joseph Kohn Training Center to further enhance his independent living and vocational skills.

Work Skills Preparation Program (WSP)

The Work Skills Preparation Program (WSP) is a pre-employment transition program for high school students (ages 16-21) who are blind and vision-impaired with additional disabilities, who would benefit from an employment outcome upon completion of high school. Consumers who attend WSP have a desire to work, are self-directed, and are able to work with or without support. WSP prepares consumers for life after high school by providing opportunities to practice functional academic skills, employment skills, and independent living skills in both classroom-based and community-based settings.

Ida Behreini

Ida is a 21-year-old senior at Drew University in Madison, NJ, majoring in Computer Science and minoring in Humanities. In addition to her recent paid summer internship and promise of employment from JP Morgan Chase upon her graduation in May 2019, she has also had a range of exceptional experiences. In 2016, she spent the summer studying abroad at Hannam University in South Korea as a Student Program Developer in their Robotics Program, and in 2017, spent the summer as a Research Assistant at Texas A&M University working on Natural Language Processing and Information Extraction. She is legally blind, and is from Bayonne, NJ. She has also recently been nominated for appointment to CBVI's State Rehabilitation Council.

Below is Ida's story in her own words.

The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI) has been a constant presence in my life. I clearly remember looking up from my plastic dinosaurs, and seeing a friendly CBVI case worker chatting with my kindergarten teacher. From then on, I was pulled out of class about once a week for games and exercises that taught me how to read braille.

As my passions, worldview, and eyesight changed, the CBVI remained a steady current in the sometimes tumultuous waters of my adolescence. Like many visually impaired people, I ran into the pitfalls of denial, of trying to 'pass' as sighted. However, when I was finally ready to accept myself and embrace my disability, the CBVI offered training, career counseling, and referrals to get me up to speed. I joined the EDGE 2.0 program, and gained invaluable mentorship. Next, I joined EDGE 1.0 as a mentor, and I strive to make sure current high school students have a head start and helping hand at one of the most pivotal points in life.

True to form, my greatest opportunity came wrapped in just a few kilobytes. CBVI's Business Relations Unit emailed me a tremendous opportunity to apply for the 'We See Ability' program at J.P. Morgan Chase & Co [a Disability Mentoring Day event as part of National Disability Employment Awareness Month]. I would have never spotted the niche event on my own, and might have simply glazed over it in a list of hundreds of other intimidating corporate functions. However, my VR counselor encouraged me to apply, and all it took was her gentle nudge to urge me into the next chapter of my life.

My application was accepted, and CBVI helped me arrange transportation to a midtown Manhattan high rise. There, I went through four rigorous rounds of interviews, met hundreds of talented college students, and eventually received an internship offer. I was over the moon, and my support network at CBVI was equally—if not more—ecstatic at my achievement.

Throughout the internship, I've received orientation and mobility training, counseling, and general support to ensure my success. I knew that the CBVI was always just a call away, and that they were invested in my development as a young blind professional. Now that I've accepted an offer to return to J.P. Morgan Chase & Co. as a full time software engineer. I realize that I owe my success to the passionate people at the CBVI. As a marginalized group, blind people like me need someone in their corner to encourage them to reach their true potential. I believe that—especially in historically homogenous fields like STEM—diverse perspectives breed innovation. Thus, we must encourage young people from all walks of life to pursue their passions unflinchingly. CBVI has been instrumental to my success, but their work isn't done. We need to continue knocking down hurdles, stereotypes, and barriers for blind people throughout New Jersey and beyond.

EDGE (Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement) 2.0

EDGE 2.0 serves over twenty college undergraduates across New Jersey and Pennsylvania who are blind and vision-impaired. Students learn how to maximize their college experience through an individualized assimilation plan that addresses barriers on campus, sets academic and social goals, as well as establishes plans for campus and community engagement. An intensive curriculum from Learning Ally accompanies the program and targets research-based skill sets necessary for college success. As upperclassmen in the program, students have career development plans that provide a map to graduation and a guide to careers in their fields of interest. In addition, students participate in campus visits with a career advisor, monthly mentor conversations, and peer meetings with career-centered activities. Using each of these resources and a career-focused approach, students enhance their ability to become employed competitively in their field of choice.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

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 advance in 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 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, including customized employment;
- 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.

Nick Martucci

Nick Martucci was introduced to us in the summer of 2010, when he was a teenager at Freehold Borough High School. Sports, music, and social activities were a big part of Nick's life, and helped shape the goals he set for his future. He attended the Work Skills Preparation (WSP) Program that summer (and the following summer, 2011). While attending WSP he was able to job sample, learn daily living skills, and work toward being a more independent young man. Nick was articulate about the fact that he wanted to work after high school, and he wanted to find a job that was a reflection of his passions and interests. Nick developed a strong sense of the type of jobs he liked, and always remembered the time he spent job sampling at one place in particular.

Fast forward to 2018; Nick has maintained a part-time job at a hotel since 2013. He has worked hard to earn more hours/shifts, and has been a productive and well-respected employee there for over 5 years. Although Nick has a job, he couldn't help but remember the way he felt when job sampling at Trenton Thunder Baseball Stadium, when he attended WSP in 2011. There was just something about it that he needed to explore.

Nick used that memory to stay motivated to continue to explore more options. He knew that he wanted to pursue a job where he could be surrounded by some of his favorite things ... sports, music, and people. He began working with his YES Support Specialist, Danielle Sweeney, in the winter of 2018. Danielle and Nick met over the course of several months, and collaborated with his Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, and job coach. Through this collaboration, the Discovery Process, Person Centered activities, and Job Developing, Nick was able to update his resume, work on his interviewing skills, network, and make new connections with possible employers. Through a Customized Employment approach, Danielle was able to assist in finding a job that was a match for Nick!

Nick interviewed with the General Manager of Arm & Hammer Park, the home baseball field for the Trenton Thunder and was hired in April of 2018. He was assigned to work several of the home games during the 2018 baseball season where he assisted with program distribution, Game-Day Give-Aways, and offered support in the Fan Service Booth.

This job is a direct reflection of Nick's interests (even though they are a Yankees AA team, and he is a Mets fan)! Nick had the determination and motivation to pursue a job that he loved, and with the support of the YES Program, he was able to fulfill this goal he had set back when he was in high school. Nick hopes to continue to work at Trenton Thunder for many seasons to come.

Youth Employment Solutions (YES) Program

The Youth Employment Solutions (YES) Program is currently being piloted in partnership with TCNJ to serve youth with disabilities, ages 18-25 years old. TCNJ's role is to match a job seeker with a Support Specialist, whose goal is to engage the job seeker in the discovery process, using strategies that prove effective for individuals with developmental disabilities. The Support Specialist will lay the foundation of job development, and create deliverables (i.e., Person-Centered Planning Tool, Brochure, Visual Resume) which are put in place to help support the job coach with job development, and to raise awareness of greater potential. It's a win-win-win with YES Support Specialists working with CBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to support their caseload and teaming up with the SE agency to support job development and coaching, to lead to greater outcomes!

Anthony Bradley

First, Anthony explained that he decided to enroll in JKTC so that he could learn skills that would help him as a visually impaired individual. Anthony also shared that when he enrolled, he was continuing to lose vision and wanted the appropriate skills to help cope with the life challenges he faced. Anthony elaborated that it was difficult at first for him to make the “transition from depending on vision to dealing with vision loss.”

In addition, Anthony described the valuable skillsets he gained from the JKTC program. He was proud of being able to learn Braille, was appreciative of the keyboarding class, and greatly enjoyed using assistive technology. Anthony shared that notable experiences for him, while attending JKTC, were all the memories he had with the staff and fellow students. Anthony specifically valued the ADL class, where he was able to practice his love of cooking.

Anthony clarified that he not only benefitted from the JKTC program, but also benefitted from CBVI services in general. He pointed to how CBVI helped him with transportation skills and job development. He elaborated that his CBVI vocational counselor has been instrumental in helping him to find work. Anthony meets with him regularly, and greatly appreciates the support he receives. Anthony also loved being introduced to audio books by CBVI staff and appreciated the replacement cane that he received from his caseworker.

Currently Anthony is working on job development, attending seminars, and volunteering. Anthony explained that he has clear goals for the future. He plans to find full time employment, continue to improve his travelling skills, and to become more independent overall. For fun and leisure, Anthony goes out with friends, watches sports, and spends time with his family.

After he graduated from the JKTC program, Anthony said that his family immediately noticed his improved independent living and blindness skills. He stated that, for example, he was able to perform tasks that he was unable to do previously. These included travelling alone to New York City, managing his home, and going shopping. Anthony was happy to share that he was cooking independently at home for himself and his family.

Anthony had tips to pass on to current and potential JKTC students. He advised students to “stay focused” and to “get everything possible out of the program.” Anthony further recommended that JKTC students should concentrate in class to learn skills that would empower them. Anthony emphasized that blind and visually impaired students should learn best by implementing what they learned firsthand.

Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC)

The Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC) is a state of the art facility that offers vocational rehabilitation, employment services, and independent living skills training for consumers of the Commission. The JKTC is a three-floor residential center and houses meeting and conference rooms, classrooms, a cafeteria, a gym, a recreation room, a student lounge, an accessible kitchen, a technology demonstration and evaluation center, and student dorms.

The mission of the JKTC is to assist blind, deaf-blind, and vision-impaired individuals to lead full and productive lives as they live and work in their communities. The program is customized for each consumer and can range in duration from approximately 2 weeks to 20 weeks or more.

Richard Foster – Newark Service Center

Richard Foster did not give up when the going got tough; instead, he utilized his resources and services in order to succeed. Three years ago, Richard began losing his vision as a result of diabetic retinopathy. Even though diabetes runs in his family, he was not living a healthy lifestyle. As his vision worsened, he started struggling more in his job as a shipper/receiver. Things began to get more difficult and his hours became less and less, until he eventually lost his job and went on unemployment. He reached out to a temp agency to assist him with finding employment, and while he found placements, the jobs were not permanent. He began to get down on himself as his unemployment was going to run out. Finally, he was referred to CBVI by his retina specialist, and after months of injections, his vision began to stabilize.

Then his brother, who was also diabetic, passed away suddenly. This hit him pretty hard, and he became depressed. Through his VR Counselor, guidance and counseling services were provided, and he began to see his confidence and self-esteem improve. He realized that he needed to make a change, and began to focus on his job search. Services were provided to assist with job development and job placement, and he began going on interviews.

In the summer of 2018, the Business Relations Unit (BRU) coordinated a visit to Amazon's simulation center for the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselors. This provided the VR counselors an opportunity to observe and understand the essential functions of the Fulfillment Associate positions, and connect CBVI consumers with opportunities that were available in the Teterboro and Avenel locations.

As a result of the observation, Richard was referred to the simulation center for an assessment as to whether he could perform the essential functions of the job. He was then given the opportunity to interview for the Amazon Distribution Center in Teterboro. He was very excited about it and the interview went well. He began orientation on November 2, and his first day of work was November 5. He loves the job and is very grateful for all of the of the help that CBVI provided. He stated that he would not be where he is today if it weren't for the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Solomon Krow – Freehold Service Center

Solomon Krow is an experienced, hard-working, and dedicated professional who has tremendous experience in jumpstarting corporate projects for Information Technology (IT) systems and business integration. Solomon has many certifications in the IT field that include a Webmaster Certificate from NJIT, Network Engineering and Data Communication from the Chubb Institute, and Project Management Certificate Program from International Institute of Learning. He has designed and administered different software systems for global companies by using innovative technology such as Cisco UCS, Citrix and VMware Virtual Infrastructures. Solomon has trained and supported the consolidation of Fortune 500 companies by creating administrative systems for help desks and marketing IT solutions. Solomon has displayed perseverance and exemplifies positive energy as a role model amongst the blind and visually impaired community.

Due to his recent vision loss, Solomon had to overcome life challenges and re-vamp his skills to continue his career in Information Technology. He has displayed resiliency, has proven to be confident in his abilities, and serves as an inspiration to many others. He has been working with his Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor on a plan to prepare and sharpen his education and skills to jump back into the IT field. He has been getting

Technology training to brush up on his technology skills, and is learning different styles of navigating the computer and databases by using Zoomtext and Voiceover softwares.

He is also registered for coursework to obtain a credential as a VMware Certified Professional, and is looking forward to updating his IT skills and making himself more marketable when entering into the fast changing marketplace of IT. He explained that “CBVI has motivated me to get back into the workforce and live life through a different and positive perspective. It has given me a lot of hope and motivation, and has been instrumental in returning to the vocation that I love.”

Erika Flores – Cherry Hill Service Center

Erika Flores currently works as an assistant in a pediatric day care center where she works with medically fragile children. Her day consists of ensuring the children are safe, fed, cared for, and most of all having fun. She helps with the childrens’ meals and other scheduled activities. This is a small glimpse into who Erika has become throughout the years. She may have had to face much difficulty in achieving her goals without the help of her family, community, and services. It is safe to say that there has been much improvement in gaining independence, self-esteem, and goal achievement.

Erika has been with the agency since she was a child. She always had a good experience with the dedicated staff at CBVI. During the few years after high school graduation, Erika and her family explored different paths for her future. With family support and encouragement, Erika decided that she would like to enter the workforce. She and her family contacted CBVI to explore the Vocational Rehabilitation program.

With the help of family, her Rehabilitation Specialist, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, as well as supported employment services, Erika’s true colors were provided a space to shine at the daycare. She worked diligently with her support team and was hired part-time at the center. Her family noticed that Erika’s confidence, independence, and self-esteem has positively increased. She continues to volunteer with her mother at a local church, working with children with autism.

Technological Support Services

Assistive technology support is available to consumers to train, gain, retain, or advance one’s 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 in gaining direct access to computer equipment and other technology through a comprehensive assessment of skill and accessibility needs. The purpose of the unit is to minimize barriers, while also taking into account the consumers’ unique situation, making recommendations that would enable the individual to efficiently address his/her professional or academic responsibilities. Technological Services Specialists (TSSs) are responsible for maintaining and staffing six comprehensive and up-to-date Regional Technology Assistance Centers (RTACs) located throughout New Jersey in Newark, Freehold, Cherry Hill, Atlantic City, Trenton, and New Brunswick.

Business Relations Unit (BRU)

The Business Relations Unit (BRU) of CBVI provides services to both public and private sector businesses in order to assist them with meeting their diversity initiatives in hiring individuals with disabilities. The BRU

partners with businesses to address their needs, such as education and technical assistance on recruiting, hiring, and retaining employees who are blind, deaf-blind, and vision-impaired. The BRU endeavors to present an alternative pool of candidates to businesses, while attempting to break down any barriers of employment for people with disabilities, including assistive technology and accessibility consultation.

Business Enterprises New Jersey (BENJ)

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired is the State Licensing Agency (SLA) for the Federal Randolph-Sheppard program. Business Enterprises 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-two (52) Randolph Sheppard food locations across the state. The types of operations include: 7 cafeterias, 5 single person sites (dry stands), 1 military cafeteria, 21 snack bars, and 18 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 2018 Highlights

- Total gross sales*: \$12,171,039.00
- Operator average net income*: \$51,712.00
- Total number of Managers served: 44
- Total number of consumers evaluated for Small Business Program: 2
- Total number of consumers received assistance for their Small Business Program: 0
- Total number of consumers evaluated for BENJ: 5
- Total number of consumers training: 2
- Total number of consumers receiving placements: 1
*estimated

New Locations Setup:

- Opened a new vending location in Division of Child Protection and Permanency in Cherry Hill.
- Opened a new vending location at the NJ Department of Transportation in Cherry Hill.
- Converted the State House Snack Bar in Trenton into an all vending location.

BENJ 2019 Initiatives:

- BENJ will continue to utilize the Hadley Institute for the Blind & Visually Impaired's Business Enterprise Program Licensee Training (BEPLT) for training in the program.
- BENJ is continuing pursuits to various vending opportunities with NJ State Park Services
- BENJ continues to work with the General Services Administration (GSA) and pursue potential locations with the Federal Government with new locations projected for 2019.
- BENJ is looking to grow into the private sector with micro-markets and vending opportunities
- Continuing education programs for upward mobility training for Blind Managers is ongoing.
- BENJ will continue modernizing and making renovations to its locations.
- BENJ is looking to work with CBVI's high school aged transition to expose them to the opportunities offered by the Randolph-Sheppard program, and to facilitate work-based learning experiences at Randolph-Sheppard locations.

Derrick Watts

Derrick Watts was born and raised in Newark, NJ. Derrick was one of three children, and has a brother living in North Carolina. Towering at well over 6 feet tall, Derrick was a star track athlete during his high school days at Malcolm X Shabazz High School. Whether it was the 50-yard dash, relays or hurdles, Derrick always did his best and showed his competitive spirit when the whistle blew. This competitive spirit would serve him well later in life.

During his early years, Derrick developed an interest in the beverage industry and became a very successful liquor salesman, thanks in large part to his skills as a gifted communicator and natural salesman.

In his 30's, Derrick developed his eye condition and eventually lost his sight. During this period, Derrick became involved in the various programs offered through the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and it was at the Joseph Kohn Training Center in New Brunswick where Derrick learned about Business Enterprises New Jersey (BENJ).

He began preparing and working toward his goal of becoming a BENJ manager and establishing himself as a serious prospect for BENJ. Derrick completed Serv Safe training for food safety and proper handling, and in 2017, he graduated from the Hadley School for the Blind and Visually Impaired's Business Enterprise Training Program. When asked if he was ready to operate a location, Derrick let it be known he was not only interested, but he would take on all challenges presented.

Derrick had trained under several blind managers in BENJ, and worked under Steve Rutch at the Department of Children and Families Training Facility in New Brunswick. During this time, Steve taught Derrick some techniques and business strategies that would serve him well. Derrick also developed a good rapport with the existing blind managers, which provided Derrick with an informal mentorship and a wealth of information to help him manage the bumps the road ahead presented to him.

This odyssey took Derrick to the Paramus Veterans Home location – the opportunity that Derrick had been waiting for. There was an extended vacancy at this location for food services, and Derrick stepped up as a new trainee and began to successfully operate this location. Derrick filled a long time void of services at this location that assisted the BENJ program tremendously.

Customer service is the foundation of Derricks business. He consistently asks for feedback on items he serves, and gives the staff and residents at Paramus Veterans Home a good variety of choices to satisfy them. As the new year comes closer, Derrick is looking toward success with the same recipe he has used all along; 100 percent customer service all of the time.

Deaf-Blind Services

The 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.

Jimmie Mackery

At the age of 70 years young, Jimmie Mackery decided there is too much life left to live to retire. Jimmie had a 40-year career as an Audio/Visual Recording Technician in New York City until hearing and vision loss due to Usher Syndrome presented significant barriers to maintaining employment. With his wife, he moved to New Jersey and connected with NJ CBVI's Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB) program. When presented with the idea of returning to work, Jimmie jumped at the opportunity.

When Jimmie engaged VR services, he had very limited ideas of what he was capable of vocationally. With several pathways to employment presented to him, Jimmie made an informed choice to attend the Helen Keller National Center to obtain vocational, independent living, and disability related skills, as well as self-advocacy training. Jimmie entered this program to receive specialized training from experts in various fields of Deaf-Blindness. Additionally, he entered this program with the full knowledge that his training can require more than a year away from his home and wife.

Jimmie embarked on his training journey in August of 2018. The reports and feedback received all share a theme: amazing attitude and outstanding effort. Day by day and training by training, Jimmie's progress is steadily growing. While he has more training to complete, Jimmie is a shining example to the Blind, Visually Impaired and Deaf-Blind communities of what it takes to succeed as a person with dual-sensory disabilities. With his balance of humility, positivity, strong work ethic and sacrifice, Jimmie is maximizing his chances for his successful employment outcome.

When Jimmie's training is complete, he will engage with CBVI's BENJ program to develop a business plan to produce and sell leather goods. To arrive at this outcome, Jimmie will work on increasing his Orientation and Mobility, Technology, Communications, Independent Living and Braille skills. Jimmie is embracing these opportunities with open arms.

Molly Henkle

In May, iCanConnect Program Coordinator, Carly Fredericks, attended the inaugural Northeastern Regional CHARGE Syndrome Conference in Plainsboro, New Jersey.

It only seemed appropriate to highlight one of the youngest iCanConnect recipients. Molly Henkle, age 5, had just received her iPad through the program. Molly communicates using American Sign Language. She has been trained to use her device and now she is able to independently communicate with friends and family through the FaceTime app (rather than stealing her Mommy's iPhone).

iCanConnect serves individuals with combined hearing and vision loss, regardless of age. “It’s comforting to have a program like iCanConnect that truly understands the needs of our children and knows how to help them navigate technology to keep them connected to the outside world,” said Molly’s mom, Jennifer Henkle.

iCanConnect NJ

The iCanConnect NJ Program has provided various types of assistive technology and telecommunication devices to over 125 New Jersey residents. Devices such as iPads, iPhones, Braille notetakers, laptops, screen readers, and adaptive software have been purchased for individuals meeting the program’s eligibility requirements. This program was established in order to make sure that laws enacted in the 1980s and 1990s to increase the access of persons with disabilities to modern communications were brought up-to-date with 21st century technologies, including new digital, broadband, and mobile communications. Any New Jersey resident with combined hearing and vision loss can reach out to see if they qualify for the iCanConnect program to receive free technology to support distance communication. Program guidelines can be found at <http://www.icanconnect.org/see-if-you-qualify>.

Betsy White

Success is an attitude and our SSP-NJ consumer, Betsy White, has just that! Betsy benefits from the services of both the NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Support Service Providers of New Jersey (SSP-NJ) program. Betsy is successfully employed and maintains a presence in her community with the support of the SSP-NJ program. She utilizes an SSP to participate in various community events, meetings, and networking opportunities. She effectively balances her work schedule while making time to connect with her friends and peers in the community. At times, many community events occur on the weekends, a time where she is scheduled at work and cannot make the events. Betsy relishes those occasional community events where she can take advantage of the opportunity without effecting her work schedule. Recently, Betsy attended the New Jersey Disability Pride Parade in Trenton. She was thrilled to learn this event would be held on a day she had off from work. She advocated for a Support Service Provider to support her in attending this event, where she participated in the parade among other partakers. Betsy is proud of the community she belongs to, and she oozed confidence as she walked into the parade’s celebration with the guidance of her SSP. “I use my SSP hours to fit my needs and what I like to do,” Betsy commented. She is a strong advocate for the Support Service Providers of New Jersey Program and she is a wonderful example of an independent consumer living her best life.

Support Services Providers of New Jersey (SSP-NJ)

The Support Services Providers of New Jersey Program, or SSP-NJ, is a consumer-driven program providing qualified trained professionals to support our deaf-blind New Jersey residents to promote independence. SSPs provide visual and environmental information, as well as human guiding, to acclimate the consumers to their environment so that they can make informed decisions. The program supports consumers in a variety of activities such as post-secondary education, household management, employment, health/well-being, and community integration. The relationship between the deaf-blind person and the SSP is a partnership based on trust and open, honest, and comfortable communication.

Independent Living Services

Independent Living services are designed to assist individuals of all ages (Independent Living -54 years of age and under, and Independent Living Older Blind – 55 years of age and better) who are blind, vision-impaired or deaf-blind gain and adapt the skills needed to lead full and productive lives. CBVI provides assistance/instruction in the areas of: daily living, communication, orientation and mobility, assistive technology, Braille instruction, eye health education and low vision services. The Independent Living Services Department works with community partners providing information and education so that they can best serve blind and visually impaired members of their community.

Anthony Piccirillo

Since the age of eight, Anthony Piccirillo has loved playing with model trains. He is a long-time member of the National Model Railroad association (NMRA), Garden State Division, and is past treasurer and secretary of the organization. Tony is the proud recipient of a plaque for his many years of service to NMRA and for the “Golden Spike Award” for his Pittsburgh Lake Erie Railroad model train layout.

Unfortunately, in 2012 Tony’s life suddenly derailed, when he suffered two consecutive optic nerve strokes leaving him with low vision at age 72. He quickly became dependent on Judy, his “Guardian Angel” and wife of 54 years, to complete the daily tasks he had been responsible for accomplishing for so many years. No longer able to drive, he found household chores he once enjoyed such as going to the hardware store a major inconvenience, and with great difficulty reading print, writing bills became virtually impossible.

In June of 2017, Tony learned about a peer support group for people with vision loss offered by the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI). The group is part of Assistive Support Programs for Independence, Renewal, and Education (ASPIRE), an extensive network of peer support groups designed to assist individuals experiencing visual impairments. In monthly meetings, participants find emotional support, solutions to challenges related to vision loss, and new ways of doing things. They also find they are not alone, which can be of great comfort to members.

At the very first meeting Tony attended, he learned about an application for his iPhone that solved his reading dilemma. He also learned about CBVI’s other Independent Living (IL) services and programs that would prove crucial in his rehabilitation. Tony immediately took steps to open his case with CBVI, and in a short time a Rehabilitation Teacher (RT) was visiting him at home. Through their sessions together, Tony learned how to manage and write bills with the use of a closed circuit television (CCTV), and was able to optimize the value of his iPhone by downloading applications that have proven extremely useful to people with visual impairments. The RT even arranged for Tony to receive new magnifying glasses which allowed him to work on his beloved model trains once again.

In addition to his visual impairment, Tony also is a person with hearing loss, which is greatly improved by his use of hearing aids. One day Tony arrived at the support meeting very upset, because his daughter’s dog had somehow managed to get a hold of his hearing aids and destroyed them, causing Tony much anxiety. Unable to afford new hearing aids, and not able to function well without them was very stressful. Fortunately, Tony was able to take advantage of another CBVI program under Deaf/Blind Independent Living services and received

new hearing aids that allow him to hear much better than before. The hearing aids are paired with his iPhone, which makes them exceptionally easy to adjust and much more efficient.

Since Tony had an open/active case with CBVI, he was also able to apply and be selected for a Senior Hands – On Retreat Experience “A SHORE Thing” program. The “SHORE Thing” is an opportunity for participants to gather together for six days, five nights at a hotel located at the Jersey shore, and concentrate on intensive blindness skills with the help of trained professionals from CBVI as well as others from the community. Through his participation in the program Tony began using a white cane to travel safely and was able to gain a great deal of confidence. He also learned how to manage medications, pour a cup of coffee without spilling, organize closets, clothing, household items, and chop an onion without getting cut, along with countless other skills which sparked a new positive attitude.

Due to the services and programs provided by CBVI, Tony has been able to move “full steam ahead” independently with his life. He is extremely grateful for the services he has received from CBVI, and passionate about giving back to the blindness community. He now facilitates a support group in the ASPIRE network where he assists numerous individuals who are undergoing the adjustment process. When asked how Tony feels about the services provided by CBVI, he said, “I am 76, with a loving wife, three children and eight grandchildren, and now am volunteering to help my fellow senior citizens. That is the impression this organization has had on me! “

Assistive Support Programs for Independence Renewal and Education (ASPIRE)

Established in 2015, 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. The ASPIRE Program has increased the number of Peer Support Groups in its network from 23 groups to a total of 55 groups, four of which are established groups specifically for Veterans. ASPIRE connects with groups in all 21 of New Jersey’s counties. Training for group facilitators is held annually.

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.

For more information about support Groups in the ASPIRE Network, please contact the Support Program Coordinator at 973-648-2821.

Library Equal Access Program (LEAP)

The LEAP initiative, sponsored by CBVI, targets adults 55 years of age and older, provides basic computer skills training on how to use assistive software, such as magnification and audio reading tools, to help vision impaired users with reading websites, emails and other documents. Training also includes an introduction to using assistive technology features now available on iPads. LEAP represents a unique partnership between

CBVI, the State Library's Talking Book & Braille Center (TBBC), and our third party contractor, Advancing Opportunities. Classes are provided in nine local libraries across the state. The collaborative libraries are located in Atlantic City, Cherry Hill, East Brunswick, Hackensack, Mays Landing, Morris Township, Newark, South Orange, and Toms River. With assistive technology available now in local libraries across the state, blind and vision-impaired seniors may visit their hometown library and take advantage of the classes offered and the library's resources. When classes are not in session, the equipment provided - computers (with speech and magnification software), iPads, and a Closed Circuit Television System (CCTVS) - may be used by library members.

Senior Hands-On Retreat Experience (SHORE)

Bi-Annually the Independent Living Older Blind program provides specialized comprehensive training to a group of 12 blind, visually impaired or deaf-blind seniors that are age 55 and better. These participants and their companions are invited to attend a week-long overnight program sponsored and staffed by the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Our Senior Hands-On Retreat Experience (SHORE) provides rigorous independent living skills training and fun, from 8:00 AM to 7:00 PM throughout the week. A Support Service Provider (SSP) is available every evening from 5:00 to 11:00 PM to assist the participants as needed.

Throughout the week seniors participate in an all-inclusive program that demonstrates real life experiential learning. While at the retreat, participants receive intensive independent living instruction in, safe travel, health and wellness, assistive technology, communication and self- advocacy skills. Consumers also obtain information about and/or participate in coping with vision loss, community integration, and leisure activity options. Some of the specific activities/lessons include, but are not limited to: overall eye health and nutrition-diabetic education, community travel, food preparation /kitchen safety skills, dining at restaurants and music and relaxation therapies. The week ends with a graduation ceremony, that is preceded by a dinner dance for past and present participants.

Orientation and Mobility

CBVI Orientation and Mobility Instructors Provide Professional Development Training for New Jersey Transit Access Link Management Personnel

On Thursday November 8, 2018, several groups of people wearing blindfolds, goggles that simulate poor vision, and some using white canes, could be seen traveling through parts of downtown Newark. They were members of the NJ Transit team that provide services on ACCESS LINK, the NJ Para transit system. They were being guided through the streets and on the transit systems by Certified Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Specialists who work for the NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI).

The NJT personnel included members of the certification and assessment departments, among others, who work for NJT, as well as some members of partner agencies. This was the third time CBVI has provided this In-Service Training designed to help NJT personnel better understand the specific needs of riders with blindness or low vision.

After traveling several pre-determined routes by either bus or light rail, the participants returned to the NJT offices and shared their experiences of traveling with either no vision or a simulation of partial vision. Their

comments were those of empathy and experiences of discomfort at not being able to see when crossing street, to awareness of how much more they began to rely on their hearing and other senses. Everyone in the group expressed how overwhelmed they all were when they encountered the noisy construction area inside the bus terminal at Newark Penn Station They voiced having a real feel for what is needed, and how to aid and guide individuals who may be blind or visually impaired. Feedback from the O&M Specialists overwhelmingly included gratitude for the opportunity to meet and interact with the NJT personnel and share information about the services provided by each agency.

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. Providing a growing array of services since 1979, the screening unit continues to meet its statutory obligation to increase access to the community.

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 Center for Disease Control, a Diabetic Eye Disease Detection Screening, targeting populations with diagnosed Type II Diabetes. This program hopes to continue to grow, facilitating increased outreach for those with the disease. The Early Childhood Screening program (Pre-School Vision Screenings) identifies impediments to education, as well as eye disease specific to that age group. The number of Pre-School Vision screenings allows for earlier detection of vision problems leading to earlier intervention. 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 and may be able to assist those that self-identify as having diabetes. CBVI staff also advocates 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.

2017 Highlights (Number of consumers served)

Adult Vision Screening	7184
Pre-School Vision Screening	20,938
On-Site Screening	5,307
Migrant Screening	754
Diabetic Eye Disease Detection (DEDD) Program	1,337
Total Individuals Screened	35,455
Total Number of Screening Events	865
Referred for Further Evaluation	3,828
Referred for additional CBVI services	165

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 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

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

NFB-NEWSLINE is a free service available to anyone who is blind, deaf-blind, vision impaired or print-disabled. Funded by state sponsors, NFB-NEWSLINE offers over 400 publications to choose from, including ten national newspapers like the Wall Street Journal and USA Today, sixteen breaking news sources such as CNN, BBC, and ESPN Online, fourteen international newspapers including Financial Times and Vancouver Sun, and countless state newspapers, as well as fifty magazines like Family Circle, time, Consumer Reports, Jet, Guideposts, Smithsonian and more. **The Commission may be able to assist with*:**

*Based on eligibility

- 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 (CAP) can assist you in resolving any disputes regarding provision of Vocational Rehabilitation services by calling: 1-800-922-7233. The CAP program is administered by Disability Rights New Jersey.

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 – 2019

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 1 April 26 June 7 October 4 December 6

Service Centers and Facilities

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

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Coordinator
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NEWARK SERVICE CENTER (NSC)

153 Halsey Street, 5th Flr. – Newark, NJ 07101
Phone: (973) 648-2111 Fax: (973) 648-7674

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aaliyah.dent@dhs.state.nj.us

FREEHOLD SERVICE CENTER (FSC)

100 Daniels Way, Freehold Township, NJ 07728
Phone: (732) 308-4001 Fax: (732) 308-404

Manager: John Reiff
john.reiff@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: Diana Cortez
diana.cortez@dhs.state.nj.us

ATLANTIC CITY SERVICE CENTER (ACSC)

1300 Atlantic Avenue, 3rd Fl. Atlantic City, NJ 08401
Phone: (609) 441-3074 Fax: (609) 441-3079

DEAF-BLIND SERVICES

153 Halsey St, 6th Flr, Newark, NJ 07102
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Supervisor: Ed Sroczynski
edward.sroczynski@dhs.state.nj.us

JOSEPH KOHN TRAINING CENTER

130 Livingston Ave, New Brunswick, NJ 08903
Phone: (732) 937-6363 Fax: (732) 247-6628

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BUSINESS ENTERPRISES NEW JERSEY

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130 Livingston Ave, New Brunswick, NJ 08903
Phone: (732) 937-6363 Fax: (732)247-6628

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GEORGE F. MEYER INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

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