

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



2020 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

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

2020 Annual Report - State Rehabilitation Council

The New Jersey Department of Human Services' 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 visually 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 visual impairment; and
- (4) Increasing employment outcomes for individuals who are blind, visually 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.nj.gov.

Table of Contents

Letter from SRC Chairperson	4
CBVI Executive Director’s Report	5
SRC Working Principles and Responsibilities	6
SRC Board Members	7
SRC Accomplishments in FFY 2020	8
SRC Goals in 2021	8
Overview of CBVI	9
Statewide Impact of CBVI Services	11
Employment Outcomes in FFY 2020	12
Education Services	13
SHARP	13
Pre-Employment Transition Services	14
Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement (EDGE 1.0)	14
Life 101	14
College Preparation Experience Program	14
Work Skills Preparation Program	15
EDGE 2.0	15
Vocational Rehabilitation Services	16
Youth Employment Solutions	16
Joseph Kohn Training Center	17
Business Relations Unit	17
Deaf-Blind Services	18
iCanConnect – NJ	18
Support Services Providers of New Jersey	18
Technological Support Services	18
QWERTY Program	19
Business Enterprises New Jersey (BENJ)	19
Independent Living Services	21
ASPIRE	21
LEAP	21
SHORE	22
Project BEST	22
Success Throughout the Lifespan – Spotlight Stories	24
Did you know?	31
SRC Meeting Dates 2021	32
Service Centers and Facilities	32

State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) – Chairperson’s Letter

Dear Governor Murphy,

I am pleased to present you with the annual report for the State Rehabilitation Council for the Commission of the Blind and Visually Impaired for 2020. 2020 has been a year like no other, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been acutely felt by New Jersey’s blind, deaf-blind, and visually impaired population. As we all struggled to cope with and adapt to living through a pandemic, you will find in this report that under the leadership of Executive Director Dr. Bernice Davis, CBVI has continued providing necessary services to their consumers with as minimal disruption as possible. The switch to virtual environments has been challenging, particularly for consumers who were in the midst of receiving hands-on rehabilitation training, however Dr. Davis and the staff at CBVI, with the support of the SRC, have continued to find innovative ways to ensure services could continue.

As we all made the switch to virtual platforms for work, the SRC has been no different, continuing our work via Zoom. Many of our members also worked with CBVI staff and management to virtually conduct focus groups as part of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment earlier this summer with great success. Additionally, for 2021 the SRC has committed to prioritizing working with CBVI to plan for what a post-COVID environment will look like, how to keep the positive innovations that have come out of the pandemic, and how to navigate the uncertain fiscal future to come. New Jersey’s blind, deaf-blind and visually impaired community has experienced unique struggles this year, but I look forward to writing a letter in 2021 that highlights how CBVI has helped our community bounce back.

In solidarity,

Evangelia Stone, LSW

State Rehabilitation Council Chairperson

Executive Director's Report

In this, the 110th anniversary of the establishment of the NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, it is my honor to share with you the 2020 annual report of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC).

To celebrate the Commission's anniversary, we chose the theme *#CBVISTrong2020* to reflect upon the phenomenal people who helped shape CBVI, and all the many advancements and changes in leadership, policies and procedures that have come about over the years. We are very proud of how those changes shaped the CBVI of today, but, we are so much prouder of the one thing that has not and will not change – what has primarily kept the Commission strong and at the forefront of what we do and that is an unwavering commitment to our mission to provide quality life enhancing services for people who are blind, deaf-blind and visually impaired.

In March, the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic required us all to quickly analyze service delivery techniques, identify and implement strategies that would enable us to safely continue to vigorously support the expansion of educational and employment opportunities for our consumers, and fulfill our goal of making it possible for them to utilize their talents, strengths, and abilities to achieve their full potential.

Here in New Jersey, we were fortunate to be able to rely upon our robust and productive partnership with our SRC. The membership includes a wide range of volunteers dedicated to the improvement of the lives of people who are blind, deaf-blind and visually impaired. In addition to commitment, each member brings with them a multitude of skills developed through their own education, employment, and other life experiences that have proven to be a valuable asset towards bringing about optimal outcomes in employment for the people it is has been our mission to serve for 110 years.

We hope you enjoy reading this report, which we believe provides a detailed picture of the dedication and creativity of CBVI staff, and how the important work being done in partnership with the Council continues to make it possible for New Jersey residents who are blind, deaf-blind and visually impaired to obtain and maintain meaningful employment, experience community integration, and achieve independence.

Sincerely,

Dr. Bernice M. Davis
Executive Director

SRC Working Principles and Responsibilities

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) was established by 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 2020

The SRC met five times in FFY 2020, in accordance with COVID-19 public health guidelines. With the support of the Commission, the Department of Human Services and the Governor's office, the SRC nominated and appointed new members to replace those whose terms had expired, and elected a new chairperson. In response to COVID-19 social distancing requirements, the SRC consulted regarding a conversion to virtual services and assisted in the facilitation of statewide virtual focus groups as part of the agency's required Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). Finally, the SRC provided vital feedback to the Commission on a number of topics pertaining to policy and procedure, consumer programming, and outreach, which will continue into 2021, as the agency implements strategies from its CSNA.

SRC Goals for FFY 2021

The SRC will meet four times in Federal Fiscal Year 2021, complying with COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines, as well as continue ongoing support to foster the goals of CBVI and its excellent services to the consumer population.

The SRC Chair and membership will assist CBVI in moving toward recovery, reopening, and resumption, aiming to preserve the innovation and creativity that arose with virtual and remote services, when appropriate.

The SRC will work with CBVI to strengthen the Business Relations Unit, to increase business partnerships, with an additional focus on mid- and high-level employment opportunities for individuals with college degrees and significant work experience.

The SRC will contribute to CBVI's quality assurance endeavors by developing activities to review CBVI's performance and successes, compared to agency's past performance, as well as to VR agencies nationally.

The SRC will help CBVI navigate potential fiscal challenges in 2021 resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The SRC will increase outreach and partnership with other NJ councils and agencies, including: Centers for Independent Living, Mental Health agencies, the Veteran's Administration, and agencies serving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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

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 110 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 visually 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 visually 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*	JKTC
1	Atlantic	93	83	135	89	10	7
2	Bergen	175	52	137	215	1	10
3	Burlington	162	71	128	184	4	7
4	Camden	191	114	175	208	9	11
5	Cape May	18	14	51	23	0	2
6	Cumberland	51	33	55	54	0	3
7	Essex	184	74	149	296	15	27
8	Gloucester	88	47	87	96	1	6
9	Hudson	103	75	73	153	7	9
10	Hunterdon	27	6	15	20	0	3
11	Mercer	112	37	90	136	3	9
12	Middlesex	237	101	179	298	10	14
13	Monmouth	157	105	209	205	8	7
14	Morris	107	34	80	133	7	8
15	Ocean	186	66	326	162	7	5
16	Passaic	139	50	74	153	6	6
17	Salem	20	15	17	22	0	2
18	Somerset	76	35	61	113	1	11
19	Sussex	36	10	21	33	1	2
20	Union	135	52	96	185	4	6
21	Warren	14	4	23	26	1	5
22	Out of State	1	3	0	10	0	0
23	Not identified	1	3	0	10	0	1
	Total	2325	1096	2216	2825	134	161

* 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)

JKTC – Joseph Kohn Training Center (VR consumers 18+)

Employment Outcomes in FFY 2020

*161 total employment outcomes

13.0%	Office and Administrative Support Occupations
9.3%	Management Occupations
8.7%	Education, Training, and Library Occupations
8.7%	Sales and Related Occupations
8.7%	Transportation and Material Moving Occupations
6.2%	Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations
5.6%	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations
5.6%	Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations
5.0%	Business and Financial Operations Occupations
4.3%	Community and Social Service Occupations
4.3%	Healthcare Support Occupations
3.7%	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations
3.7%	Production Occupations
1.9%	Protective Service Occupations
1.9%	Personal Care and Service Occupations
1.9%	Business Enterprise Program Operator
1.2%	Computer and Mathematical Occupations
1.2%	Architecture and Engineering Occupations
1.2%	Legal Occupations
1.2%	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations
1.2%	Construction and Extraction Occupations
0.6%	Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations
0.6%	Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations

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, visually 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. In March 2020, when all New Jersey schools were ordered to close, TVIs began providing remote services to all students. These services included Braille instruction, technology support and reinforcement, remote assessment, consultation with parents and classroom teachers, and in-class observations during full class remote instruction. Accessible books and materials continued to be provided through no-contact delivery to students' homes. At the start of the 2020-2021 academic year, remote services continued, and the majority of students were following either a hybrid or full-time remote instruction.

Student Hands-On Alternative Reinforcement Program (SHARP)

The SHARP Program is a summer program that provides an innovative approach to summer learning. This program enables participating students in grades 3 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. During the summer of 2020, a fully remote SHARP program was provided to 63 students statewide. In addition to focusing on summer learning, remote SHARP focused on keeping students connected with their peers and CBVI teachers through activities that were designed to reduce isolation through cooperative music, art, and literacy activities.

Pre-Employment Transition Services

In FFY 2020, the Commission continued to develop and expand its Pre-Employment Transition Services, in alignment with Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. 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, three 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.

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

Now in its sixth year, the EDGE program helps prepare blind and visually impaired high school students receiving transition services from the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired to become successful professionals. In response to community health concerns due to COVID-19, nearly all EDGE content has been successfully converted for presentation on a virtual platform. Monthly workshops once held at the Joseph Kohn Training Center are now conducted remotely through Zoom. Between sessions, students participate in weekly virtual meetings led by EDGE staff and/or mentors where they hone their professional, advocacy, and independent living skills. Additionally, the students are given opportunities to speak with and learn from successful blind professionals from a variety of fields to better develop their path to a future career. The program is run and staffed by successful blind and visually impaired individuals, who understand the importance of instilling blind youth with the independence and confidence necessary to become successful adults, professionals, and members of their communities.

Life 101

Life 101 is a two-week Pre-Employment Transition Services program designed for ninth and tenth grade students, conducted by staff at the Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC) in late July and early August. Though typically a residential program, in Summer 2020, the Life 101 program was offered in a virtual format due to COVID-19. Six high school students participated in a variety of group classes that were designed to promote independence, develop and improve social skills and skills related to self-advocacy, spark career planning and decision making, and prepare students for the world of college, work, and life after high school. Each student worked with a peer mentor who assisted them as needed throughout the program, and each student completed a workbook designed to help solidify the learning activities.

College Prep Experience at The College of New Jersey

The College Prep Experience (CPE) is a pre-employment transition program designed to provide high school students who are blind and visually impaired with college experience in preparation for entry into college or

university. The program staff of the Center for Sensory and Complex Disabilities at The College of New Jersey strive to prepare students for their adjustment to college life.

This year, due to COVID-19, the CPE Program was facilitated virtually using Google Classroom and Zoom. With the support of College Professors, College Staff, and Program Staff, students participated in virtual college-related academic workshops, facilitated activities and opportunities to assess self-advocacy, independent living, networking and peer mentoring, community integration, and career and college exploration. Students also had an opportunity to engage in Person-Centered Planning workshops and activities to help create a vision and plan for the future. Throughout the program, staff collectively evaluated the students' skills necessary for a successful college life and provide a description and recommendations for the development in the aforementioned areas

Work Skills Preparation Program (WSP)

The Work Skills Preparation Program (WSP) is a pre-employment transition program facilitated by the Center for Sensory and Complex Disabilities at The College of New Jersey. This program is for high school students (ages 16-21) who are blind and visually 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 and are able to do so with or without supports. WSP prepares consumers for life after high school by providing opportunities to practice work-related academic and soft skills, employment skills, and independent living skills. This year, due to COVID-19, the WSP Program was facilitated virtually using Google Classroom and Zoom. In addition to the aforementioned skills, students had a chance to create resumes, begin the Customized Employment Discovery process, experience virtual community-based instruction, engage in recreation and leisure activities with their peers, and begin to plan their future with the support of Person-Centered Planning workshops and activities. Students also had the unique opportunity to practice independent living skills in their home environments, which allowed for the creation of supports tailored to each student's specific needs. Throughout the program, staff collectively evaluate the students' skills necessary for a successful college life and provide a description and recommendations for the development.

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

EDGE 2.0 serves over thirty college undergraduates across New Jersey and Pennsylvania who are blind and visually 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. At the end of the Spring 2020 semester, EDGE 2.0 played a valuable role in helping support students navigate an unprecedented challenge, when college campuses were closed due to COVID-19, and classes were unexpectedly converted to virtual formats.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

VR services provided by the Commission under this program are designed to assist individuals who are blind, visually impaired, or 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.

Youth Employment Solutions (YES) Program

The Youth Employment Solutions (YES) Program is conducted in partnership with TCNJ to serve post-high school youth with disabilities, ages 18-25, who have previously attended the Work Skills Prep Program. 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 person-centered strategies that prove effective for individuals with developmental disabilities. The Support Specialist will communicate with VR Counselor, and all those who provide support for the jobseeker, and tie all communication together. They will then 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. The Support Specialist will provide technical assistance to assist in any transitions (i.e. new job coach, new supported employment agency, etc.) in order to help the job seeker reach their goal of employment. It's a win-win-win, with YES Support Specialists working with CBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and teaming up with the Supported Employment agency to support job development and coaching, to lead to greater outcomes.

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. Consumers participate in a range of classes, and may meet with the staff social worker, psychologist, and guest presenters. In the evenings, students engage in recreational and learning activities in and outside JKTC. Finally, near the end of the program, students participate in a community-based work experience program, where they are able to sample different job sites and practice their skills.

The mission of the JKTC is to assist blind, deaf-blind, and visually 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 (assessment only) to 20 weeks or more.

During the pandemic, JKTC has been offering a virtual training program for consumers. Participants take part in a variety of interactive groups throughout the week using the Zoom platform. These groups cover numerous topics including career exploration, job seeking skills, soft skills, mobility, health and fitness, activities of daily living, and adaptive technology. Consumers also participate in an adjustment to vision loss group run by our psychologist and a newly added creative expression group. In addition to these groups, program participants receive remote individual lessons in all instructional areas including keyboarding/technology, Braille, orientation and mobility, and activities of daily living. Optional recreational activities and a book club are also offered two evenings a week. It is expected that this format will continue until we can safely resume in-person training.

Business Relations Unit (BRU)

The Business Relations Unit (BRU) 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 visually impaired. The BRU endeavors to present an alternative pool of candidates to businesses, while attempting to break down any barriers to employment for people with disabilities, including assistive technology and accessibility consultation.

In light of the obstacles to in-person job fairs and job shadowing opportunities this past year due to the pandemic, the BRU has hosted a number of virtual trainings and meetings, including with some of CBVI's business partners, to continue to assist with employment search and skill building.

In addition, we have had success in placing a few individuals at Amazon through a pilot partnership with VISIONS of New York, and continue to build on that relationship so that we may facilitate future opportunities.

Deaf-Blind Services

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>.

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 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.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the SSP-NJ has been able to pivot to a fully remote option while continuing to provide high-quality support and access. Through the use of assistive technology, consumers have the ability to utilize the support of an SSP while still maintaining health & safety measures.

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 for equipment and training 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.

This past year has resulted in new options and challenges as the Technology Services Specialists adapted to providing services during a pandemic. Staff quickly adapted to using remote options to continue providing training and support to clients. Assessments have also been adapted where possible to continue being able to

support the needs of clients in the ever changing environment. Remote training has proven to be a successful tool in delivering services to our clients and an option that is expected to continue

QWERTY Program

Technological Support Services introduced a new program in 2019 for VR consumers, to help fill a needed gap in typing instruction called QWERTY (Quality Work Experience Related To You). This program supplements training for those who need to increase or develop their typing skills before they can successfully begin additional training. Participants are provided instruction on how to use 1 of 2 typing programs and receive support and guidance from a QWERTY mentor throughout their participation. The program is self-directed to meet expectations while being supported by the QWERTY mentor. Individual expectations for practice and improvement are reviewed and participants commit to meeting those expectations so they can progress to other technology training upon completion.

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 52 Randolph Sheppard food locations across the state. The types of operations include: 7 cafeterias, 5 single-person sites (dry stands), 2 military cafeteria, 20 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 2020 Highlights

- Total gross sales: \$1,737,743.00*
- Operator average net income: \$61,977.00*
- Total number of Managers served: 41
- Total number of consumers evaluated for Small Business Program: 4
- Total number of consumers received assistance for their Small Business Program: 1
- Total number of consumers evaluated for BENJ: 2
- Total number of consumers training: 1
- Total number of consumers receiving placements: 0

During the COVID pandemic the higher earning locations such as the military facilities and US Postal Distribution Centers were the main locations to remain open affecting total gross sales and operator average net income

New Locations Setup:

- Opened a new military food services cafeteria at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst
- Opened a new vending location at USPS Cherry Hill
- Opened a new vending location at Department of Children and Family (DCF) Morris

- Opened a new vending location at DCF Passaic
- Opened a new vending location at DCF Atlantic

BENJ 2021 Initiatives:

- BENJ is looking to navigate through the COVID-19 Pandemic and reimagine what new services that can be provided
- BENJ will look to have additional cashless options for its locations
- BENJ will continue to attend national trainings for Randolph-Sheppard
- BENJ will be continuing pursuits for various vending opportunities with the NJ Department of Environmental Protection's state parks and other national 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 2021.
- BENJ is looking into various ways to market the program for 2021

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, visually 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.

During this unprecedented time that we have been experiencing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our Independent Living services are continuing to be provided, albeit remotely. Our staff have become extremely creative and efficient in delivering services virtually. Videos, teleconferences, and other virtual platforms have been designed to demonstrate and reinforce skills in all areas to our consumers and their families. Though the SHORE and LEAP programs were suspended in March due to the pandemic, CBVI looks forward to resuming these programs as soon as possible.

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 to a total of 68 groups, four of which were established specifically for Veterans. There are also new groups serving individuals age 21-54, and two specifically for the deaf-blind population. 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 its groups are mostly 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, exchange useful information, and 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, Susan Vanino at 973-648-2821 / susan.vanino@dhs.nj.gov.

Library Equal Access Program (LEAP)

The LEAP initiative targets adults 55 years and older and provides basic computer skills training on how to use assistive software, such as magnification and audio reading tools, to help visually 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 Assistive Technology Specialists. Classes are provided in nine libraries across the state, with a tenth location at the Talking Book and Braille Center. The other nine 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 visually impaired seniors may visit a local LEAP library location 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. 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.

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.

During the Covid-19 pandemic Project BEST has developed educational materials about prevention of diabetes and eye disease in both English and Spanish languages

<https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/cbvi/services/prevention/diabetes.html> and has continued to assist individuals obtain eyeglasses at no cost through our partnership with New Eyes.

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.

2020 Highlights (Number of consumers served) from 10/1/19-3/16/20

As these community-based services occur in a congregate setting, due to the public health emergency, community eye screenings were put on pause to ensure the safety of all involved. CBVI is hopeful to resume these services in the upcoming year in alignment with COVID-19 Health and Safety guidelines.

Adult Vision Screening	3,064
Pre-School Vision Screening	14,186
On-Site Screening	2,279
Migrant Screening	66
Diabetic Eye Disease Detection (DEDD) Program	344
Total Individuals Screened	19,939
Total Number of Screening Events	443
Referred for Further Evaluation	1,998
Referred for additional CBVI services	33

Success Throughout the Lifespan - 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.

Julianna YoungEun Lee

Julianna YoungEun Lee graduated as Salutatorian of the class of 2020 from Northern Valley Demarest High School in Demarest, NJ. She has a visual impairment, is a Braille reader, and travels with her trusty guide dog, Maggie.

Julianna was born completely blind, and at 5-6 months old, got a little bit of vision back. As she describes it, she can see things that are close to her, with a very narrow field of vision. She moved to New Jersey in 8th grade from Virginia, and since her first day in 8th grade, CBVI has been in her life; it was a seamless transition. She was provided with a braille note taker right away, received technology instruction, and from there, she used braille for all her school materials. Additionally, she received mobility training, which later led to her getting a guide dog.

Julianna explains, "As a visually impaired student, it critical to have all the materials needed on time and all the training needed to succeed; if you are not prepared, and don't have all the accessibility, you won't be able to succeed. With the incredible people I have met over the years, especially my CBVI teacher, and all the connections to technology training etc. Just learning how to be an independent person was so helpful in making me the person I am today."

Julianna brings much to the extra-curricular table as well. Julianna has started two groups which she felt were both fundamental and imperative to the lives of visually impaired persons in NJ. The first, The VIP Club, is a social group connecting local visually impaired teens with each other for social gatherings and friendship. The second, VITA (Visually Impaired: Total Access), was born of necessity. Julianna and her parents were denied access to a local restaurant that was not properly educated in the NJ laws regarding guide dogs and access. Julianna took it upon herself to start VITA to educate the community regarding federal laws such as the ADA. In addition, she is very involved in her church, traveling with them on a trip to Guatemala. She also interned with a state assemblyman, and worked on a few campaigns.

Following a gap year due to COVID-19, Julianna will be attending Princeton University in the Fall of 2021 and plans to study Political Science. Julianna has also garnered the coveted Calvin Coolidge Foundation Scholarship and was awarded a four-year, full-ride scholarship to the university of her choice. In May 2020, Julianna was recognized as a U.S. Presidential Scholar, an accolade so exclusive that only 161 students nationwide were selected.

John Downing

John was born 23 weeks premature, resulting in retinopathy of prematurity that left him with only light perception in his left eye. CBVI came into his life around the age of 3, and he got his first braille writer from CBVI at around 4 years old. Since then, he has received a full range of CBVI services, from Education and Braille, to Assistive Technology, Orientation and Mobility instruction, and Pre-Employment Transition Services, such as EDGE. He also plans to attend the JKTC and obtain a guide dog in the near future.

At the age of 5, John started his adventure into the world of music; he taught himself how to play piano, and later began taking lessons at age 11. In addition, he plays guitar, mandolin, and ukulele, and has a song called “John Dowling, Jr.” on Spotify, Apple Music, iHeart Radio, and Pandora. A goal of the EDGE program is to work with students to explore career options they may have avoided as a result of the low expectations placed upon blind youth. John Dowling has used his experiences in the EDGE program to build confidence in performing, make connections in his field, and learn about his future in college and music. Recently, John released his first song on services like iTunes and Spotify, giving him the chance to be competitively employed in the music field. He intends to continue releasing music, but also has a lot of other plans for his future.

John began taking piano and voice lessons when he was eleven years old. As he became more engaged, he realized he had perfect pitch, allowing him to be able to hear a note and reproduce it instantly. This allowed him to excel in the music field very quickly, and as he rehearsed, he began to realize he also had an interest in the technical aspect of music. In 2014 John began mixing music using an application on his computer called Logic, and he used these skills to release his first single. He explained that the process of producing his first song was not difficult. He played the different parts on the keyboard, mixed the music on his computer, and then added in the vocals. He utilized connections in the industry to polish the song, and then uploaded it using a service called Distrokid which places the song on iTunes and other streaming services. He emphasized that writing, performing, and producing a song for the first time was “a very exciting experience.”

John is a senior in high school and plans to continue work on his album this summer. After high school he would like to continue producing songs as well as increase his public performances. He stated that performing and being able to tour around the country “would be his ultimate dream.” Additionally, he is thinking about attending college to receive training to work as a music therapist. He explained that using his skills to help other people would be a nice direction to pursue on top of producing albums and touring.

The EDGE program has given him opportunities to gain confidence in performing. John performed several times during the EDGE open mic night recently and has attended multiple informational interviews with people in the music industry. He enjoys any learning experiences that may help him be successful in the music field someday. His humble and approachable attitude also benefits him greatly, allowing him to relate to peers, connect with others in the industry, and follow through on his musical aspirations.

John shares, “I am planning to move to Nashville to pursue my music career. During the pandemic, school has been difficult learning remotely, but my teachers at CBVI helped me push through that. CBVI was there for me and they will be there to help you too.”

Marissa Gold

Marissa Gold has been a CBVI consumer since 2013. At the onset of her vision loss, she began utilizing CBVI services to adjust to her new reality. Marissa is fully blind with no light perception and experiences moderate hearing loss. She also experiences balance impairment associated with neurological reasons.

A range of CBVI services have aided Marissa to learn Braille, assistive technology, and mobility training. Braille and JAWS (screen reader) technology training have helped her to carry out all aspects of life. As technology advances, her training did as well, which helped her feel comfortable with new adaptations. Similarly, mobility training was extremely beneficial because it is always changing, and revisiting techniques are essential.

Working with CBVI, Marissa was able to learn Braille, assistive technology, and safe, independent travel techniques. Braille and JAWS (screen reader) technology training have helped her to carry out all aspects of life. As technology advances, her training did as well, which helped her feel comfortable with new adaptations. Similarly, mobility training was extremely beneficial because it is always changing, and revisiting techniques are essential. Finally, the Support Service Providers of New Jersey services are fundamental because the access to a trained and consistent professional who understands the nuances of her diagnosis helps her face the different aspects of her life and supports upholding independence.

After receiving a range of CBVI services, Marissa was able to return to work full-time as a school counselor, carrying a caseload of 210 students, as she had prior to her visual diagnosis. With the help of CBVI instructors, she has learned how she can successfully do her job, just with a different approach. Since working with CBVI, Marissa has been living independently, purchased a home, and was placed with a guide dog from Freedom Guide Dogs in NY.

In addition to her full-time career as a school counselor, Marissa is currently taking online professional development courses. She also volunteers weekly at the national suicide hotline in Union county, co-facilitates the Imagine Grief support group in Mountainside, NJ, and is looking to volunteer with the NFB National Homework hotline to support visually impaired students navigate tools for accessibility to meet their educational needs.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Marissa notes her CBVI services did not stop. She adds, “You’re forced to use the technology differently. You know it intellectually, but this pandemic has forced you to use it in a practical application. It has sped up the learning and the level of comfort with it.” She mentions how CBVI quickly pivoted and offered remote services to maintain access. She has received technology and mobility training consistently once a week.

Her advice for an individual considering CBVI services is to do their research to learn what services will work best. CBVI offers many valuable services, but Marissa emphasizes that the consumer is their own best advocate. Marissa adds, “You are a person of worth with the potential to do all the things a typical sighted person can do, and you can do it with tools from CBVI and the belief in yourself.”

Omar Adnan

Omar Adnan is a resident of central New Jersey who experiences vision loss due to macular dystrophy and hyperopia. These conditions cause blurry vision, reduced central vision, and extreme far sightedness. As a result, his ability to view images and read were compromised. However, Omar never stopped believing in his own potential. The Commission for the Blind supported Omar's dream of graduating college by offering tuition assistance, funding for books, and assistance with filling out the FASFA form. Omar also obtained a laptop, scanner, printer, braille, and CCTV from the state agency. But this hardware would not have been so beneficial if the vocational rehabilitation agency had not invested in thorough assistive technology training to ensure that Omar could maximize these tools.

These efforts leveled the playing field and paved the way for Omar to complete his Bachelor's degree. This year, he graduated from William Patterson University with a major in Health Sciences. Now, Omar is confident and engaged in the community, and works as a Pharmaceutical Sales Representative for Primed.

Edwin Vega

Edwin Vega is a resident of northern New Jersey and has been engaged with the Commission for the Blind for many years. At age 8 he was diagnosed with Congenital Glaucoma and although he retains light perception, he does not possess any usable vision. He benefitted immensely from completing the 20-week training program and Work Experience Program at the Joseph Kohn Training Center. He has also been the beneficiary of mobility training, job placement services, and assistive technology training. Edwin speaks very highly of the services he received, particularly the mobility and technology training. He gained immense confidence using the cane and says "I just feel so much more comfortable overall," especially when it comes to crossing streets and traveling independently."

Edwin demonstrates a commitment to self-improvement and self-determination. As a result of vocational rehabilitation services, and a—as he puts it—"great relationship" with his VR counselor, Edwin has obtained employment as a Community Resource Specialist for 2-1-1. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has changed his life in many ways, Edwin is still gainfully employed. Like many members of the workforce, Edwin's company shipped a computer to his house so that he can continue performing his duties from home.

Adewale Ogunkanmi

Mr. Adewale Ogunkanmi is a fun spirited, responsible, motivated, and caring person who has worked with the NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired to succeed in the competitive work field. In 2014, he lost his sight after suffering from Diabetic Retinopathy and high blood pressure, along with a retinal detachment in both eyes, leaving him with only light perception in one eye. Though he regularly passed the Joseph Kohn Training Center in his travels, he didn't know about CBVI and its services. A friend saw the sign and phone number out front of the Center, and he reached out to the agency for services.

Mr. Ogunkanmi attended and graduated from the Joseph Kohn Training Center's 20-week training program, including participation in the Center's work experience program. He took full advantage of all the JKTC had to offer, including career exploration and counseling, and training in assistive technology, orientation and mobility, daily living skills, and braille instruction. Following graduation from the center, he was provided job development and job coaching services, a low vision evaluation, and low vision equipment.

With the training and tools from CBVI, he was able to learn how to do many things he did not think he'd be able to do again independently. Initially, he was afraid of going out and even crossing the street. Now, he can go

anywhere without assistance, taking buses, trains, and moving freely about his community. With assistive technology and orientation and mobility training, he was able to reclaim his independence.

In June 2019, he began working as a popcorn maker at a popcorn factory called Popcorn for People. He operates heavy machinery, as well as makes a variety of different flavored popcorn. With the assistance of CBVI, along with his own perseverance and dedication, Adewale has achieved so much and developed confidence and respect in both the blind community and at his workplace.

Despite the COVID pandemic, Adewale has continued to work 3 days a week, for 5 hours a day, stating "COVID has not stopped me from completing my goals." His end goal is to become a business owner and a food stand operator.

Michael Bynum

In 2018, Michael Bynum worked as a head cook for Popeyes Fried Chicken, working 12-hour shifts from Monday through Friday, for a total of 60 hours per week. He was busy, and he loved it. "Twelve hours," he said, "seems like six."

Then out of the blue, everything went black. He came to work one day and could not see the fryers, could not see the chicken, could not see at all. He told his boss and was sent home. A few days later, after his condition remained unchanged, he contacted Wills Eye Hospital in Philadelphia. With a baby on the way and no health insurance, Michael was distraught, unsure how he was going to support his family.

Wills Eye reached out to The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired for help. Michael had a retinal tear that was too far along in his right eye, so surgery was not an option. However, it was determined that some vision in his left eye could be saved with surgery.

A Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor met with Michael after he returned from Wills Eye. Michael was ready to work. Michael's wife, and the counselor, reminded him of what the surgeons instructed, that the eye needed six months of rest to heal properly. With the Rehabilitation Teacher's help, Michael used that time to develop skills he would need to adjust to his vision loss. She marked his appliances with tactile marks, which enabled him to touch-locate his oven temperature gauge, his microwave minute gauge, his thermostat, and his washing machine/dryer settings.

Over this time, he also met with an Orientation and Mobility (O&M) instructor. She introduced him to his white cane and taught him how to navigate different environments. The Eye Health Nurse discussed diabetes and how to manage it through diet and exercise. She marked his medications and taught him how to measure his blood sugars through the use of a talking glucometer. She also assisted him in applying for Medicaid.

After six months, he was itching to start his new life. CBVI arranged for him to attend a Job Shadowing event at Shoprite. Michael had the opportunity to try several behind-the-scene jobs in bakery, produce, and maintenance. Shoprite hired him, but for only 10 hours a week. With the counselor's help, Michael created a resume, filled out job applications at the local library, and visited several fast-food establishments seeking work. CBVI secured a job coach to help him complete employment applications and drive him to interviews.

After only two weeks of searching, Michael obtained full-time work with McDonald's, first in maintenance and later as a cook. His boss has high confidence in him, praising his versatility and work ethic, which he likened to the work of three people. Michael has made a home for himself at McDonald's

Michael shares, “CBVI was there for me [when I first lost my vision], they kept calling and checking on me. With their services, they will not give up on you and will continue to fight for you to achieve your goals. For anyone that comes through CBVI, they will be successful.

I would like the community know, how excellent the services at CBVI are. They heled me with my medical bills and with orientation and mobility training to be independent. I go out by myself and with a cane, it alerts people that I am visually impaired. I thought I wouldn’t be able to do anything without my vision, but because of CBVI and their training, I was able to learn that I could do things as before. I am happy they were able to help me.”

Luis Valladares

When Luis Valladares began receiving CBVI Independent Living services in 2015, he had a range of service needs, and was homeless at the time. Shortly after Luis began receiving Vocational Rehabilitation services, he began attending the Joseph Kohn Training Center’s 20-week program. Luis shared that while he was at the JKTC, he was inspired by CBVI Rehabilitation Teacher Laurel King, a fellow blind individual and someone who was a major source of encouragement to him. He indicated that at JKTC, he learned everything he needed to learn in order to become an independent person.

Luis is currently living independently in his own apartment. He shared that at this point in time he wants to focus on playing all the sports that he has been participating in. Luis travels across the country to compete; some of the sports that Luis is fully engaged in includes Beep Baseball and Track and Field. He has won first place and broke the national record in Long Bar competition, and traveled to Houston to compete in a marathon, where he was able to meet other blind individuals from around the world.

Luis concluded that 5 years from now, he hopes to still be playing sports and living independently.

Naaisha Pettiford

As a Type 1 Diabetic, diagnosed at age 5, Naaisha’s disease progressed and her sight gradually became worse, leading to a diagnosis of diabetic retinopathy. Naaisha has had a visual impairment for more than 12 years, and now only has limited vision in the left eye. After going through a difficult divorce, she was trying to learn how to be independent and gain the skills to become more independent. It was then that she contacted CBVI.

Naaisha was referred for orientation and mobility services in December 2019, and started receiving services from the Independent Living program. She currently resides in Hudson County with her adult son. Upon beginning orientation and mobility instruction, Naaisha expressed an interest in becoming more independent, having to rely less on her son and other family members, and increase her safety while traveling. In 2019, when she first engaged with CBVI, the main source of training was from the mobility team; since she had multiple sensory issues, she needed to get more assistance utilizing the mobility training with limited sensory in my fingers. CBVI was understanding of these multisensory challenges and able to assist her in learning new ways to be independent.

To assist Naiisha in reaching the above mentioned goals, the orientation and mobility specialist provided the client with her first white cane, and aided in the process of signing up for Access Link services. Prior to receiving the white cane, Naaisha required full physical assistance from her son when walking down the

sidewalk, ascending and descending the stairs to her apartment, and navigating over surface changes. Once Naaisha began O&M instruction with the white cane, she demonstrated the ability to independently walk down the sidewalk, identify curbs and ramps, and independently walk up and down the stairs to her apartment. Naaisha demonstrated an immediate leap in independence once she received her white cane. She expressed excitement and joy in beginning her journey towards furthering her independence.

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 973-648-3161.

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 – 2021

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 in 2020:

February 7

April 3

June 5

October 2

December 4

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

Dr. Bernice Davis, Executive Director
bernice.davis@dhs.nj.gov

Amanda Gerson, Coordinator of Vocational
Rehabilitation and Transition Services
amanda.gerson@dhs.nj.gov

Eva Scott, Director of Education Services
eva.scott@dhs.nj.gov

Elizabeth DeShields, Statewide Independent Living
Coordinator
elizabeth.deshields@dhs.nj.gov

JOSEPH KOHN TRAINING CENTER

130 Livingston Ave, New Brunswick, NJ 08903
Phone: (732) 937-6363 Fax: (732) 247-6628
Manager: Susan Engstrom
susan.engstrom@dhs.nj.gov

BUSINESS ENTERPRISES NEW JERSEY

Joseph Kohn Training Center
130 Livingston Ave, New Brunswick, NJ 08903
Phone: (732) 937-6363 Fax: (732)247-6628
Manager: Deacon Truesdale
napoleon.truesdale@dhs.nj.gov

GEORGE F. MEYER INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

375 McCarter Highway, Newark, NJ 07114
Phone: (973) 648-2547

NEWARK SERVICE CENTER (NSC)

153 Halsey Street, 5th Fl. Newark, NJ 07101
Phone: (973) 648-2111 Fax: (973) 648-7674
Manager: Aaliyah Dent
aaliyah.dent@dhs.nj.gov

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.nj.gov

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.nj.gov

ATLANTIC CITY SERVICE CENTER (ACSC)

1300 Atlantic Ave, 3rd Fl. Atlantic City, NJ 08401
Phone: (609) 441-3074 Fax: (609) 441-3079
Manager: Diana Cortez
diana.cortez@dhs.nj.gov

DEAF-BLIND SERVICES

153 Halsey St, 5th Fl, Newark, NJ 07102
Phone: (973) 648-7504 Fax: (973) 648-7674
Supervisor: Joy Atin-Shark
joy.atin-shark@dhs.nj.gov