

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



2022 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

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

2022 Annual Report - State Rehabilitation Council

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

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State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) – Chairperson’s Letter

Dear Governor Murphy,

I am elated to present you with the annual report of the State Rehabilitation Council of the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. As you will see throughout this report, it cannot be understated that we are still dealing with the impact of the unprecedented times we have lived through for nearly three years. As we all learn to live with covid and with cautious optimism, the staff and leadership of CBVI have continued to adapt to the ever-changing landscape and innovate to ensure that the blind, visually impaired and deaf-blind consumers could continue to receive services with minimal interruption. You will read about consumers in this report who been able to accomplish everything from the mundane to the extraordinary this year as a result of their determination and the support and encouragement of CBVI staff.

The SRC continued our work virtually (for hopefully the last year) again in 2022 and worked with CBVI as in person services fully resumed. In addition to that goal, we also worked with CBVI to enhance competitive integrated employment outcomes across all consumer populations, to support the increasing availability of vocational rehabilitation services for consumers in the 25-54 age demographic, increasing consumer access to apprenticeship program opportunities in a variety of fields, and assisted in working towards greater interface with one-stop centers. The SRC looks forward to continuing work towards these goals in 2023.

This is my last annual report letter as chairperson and as such I am going to take the opportunity to be a bit self-indulgent and leave you with this parting thought: please continue to do everything in your power to ensure CBVI continues to receive the support and funding needed to adequately serve New Jersey’s blind, visually impaired and deaf-blind populations. As you will read in this report, we are capable of competing with our sighted peers when we develop the independence skills needed to do so, but that can only happen for all of us if the Commission is a well-staffed and well-funded agency.

In solidarity,

Evangelia Stone, LSW

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 thank the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for their continued support and commitment. The Council's strong involvement, engagement, and guidance have enabled NJCBVI to accomplish its essential objective, providing the tools necessary for New Jersey residents who are blind, Deaf-Blind, or visually impaired to achieve greater independence. The SRC's unwavering support has made possible both the Commission's initiatives and the efforts to provide comprehensive, individualized services specific to employment, self-sufficiency, and community integration for the population we serve.

This year, 2022, a year that has been underscored by a multitude of challenges associated with transitioning out of a Pandemic, we will continue our tradition of showcasing CBVI activity by highlighting a selection of the notable successes of our consumers. I hope you enjoy reviewing the following report and gain a greater appreciation of the Commission's Vocational Rehabilitation activities for 2022. As always, we welcome and value your comments and your feedback.

The Commission is extremely fortunate to work with an SRC that has been so supportive and shares the agency's commitment to providing quality life-enhancing services for the people we serve. With the Council's guidance, CBVI will continue to develop innovative new strategies for the enhanced independence of NJ residents who are blind, Deaf-Blind, or visually impaired as we transition into 2023. I look forward to the many future successes of our continued partnership.

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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NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

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SRC Accomplishments in FFY 2022

SRC continued to meet virtually, in continued consideration of COVID-19 precautions, and met four times in FFY 2022. With the support of the Commission and Governor's office, the SRC nominated and appointed new members to replace those whose terms had expired, and elected a new chairperson. The SRC consulted regarding CBVI's return to in-person services. Finally, the SRC provided vital feedback to the Commission on a number of topics pertaining to policy and procedure, consumer programming, and outreach.

SRC Goals for FFY 2023

The SRC will meet four times in Federal Fiscal Year 2023, as well as continue ongoing support to foster the goals of CBVI and its excellent services to the consumer population.

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

SRC will work with CBVI to identify, develop, and provide an on-boarding training for new SRC members, to ensure all members understand the scope and role of SRC membership and the VR program.

SRC will work with CBVI to identify topical presentations that can be presented at each SRC meeting, related to agency performance and compliance;

SRC will enhance and operationalize the role of the subcommittees to align its focus with the core requirements of the SRC, the SRC bylaws, Federal Regulations, and the VR program.

The SRC will work with CBVI to enhance and improve competitive integrated employment outcomes across all VR consumer groups being served by:

- Assisting the commission in identifying and partnering with apprenticeship opportunities.
- Assisting the commission in enhancing partnerships with the local one-stops and larger workforce system.

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	PP	JKTC
1	Atlantic	90	75	161	74	12	1
2	Bergen	161	60	127	184	1	8
3	Burlington	156	79	167	160	3	8
4	Camden	175	119	226	160	7	11
5	Cape May	20	14	55	23	0	1
6	Cumberland	47	32	74	37	0	3
7	Essex	181	88	186	293	9	24
8	Gloucester	100	55	75	86	1	4
9	Hudson	107	68	74	153	7	8
10	Hunterdon	31	6	22	21	1	3
11	Mercer	112	45	118	112	3	7
12	Middlesex	231	122	191	258	7	15
13	Monmouth	141	105	241	190	7	7
14	Morris	117	40	84	92	5	8
15	Ocean	196	92	331	157	3	9
16	Passaic	132	50	53	136	5	3
17	Salem	24	19	23	14	0	2
18	Somerset	81	49	51	83	1	9
19	Sussex	38	14	27	24	1	1
20	Union	132	66	128	191	4	5
21	Warren	15	7	22	23	1	4
22	Out of State	1	4	0	7	0	0
23	Not identified	15	9	34	11	12	1
	Total	2303	1218	2470	2489	84	146

* 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 2022

*117 total employment outcomes

21.40%	Office and Administrative Support Occupations
12.00%	Community and Social Service Occupations
10.30%	Education, Training, and Library Occupations
6.80%	Management Occupations
6.00%	Transportation and Material Moving Occupations
5.10%	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations
4.30%	Business and Financial Operations Occupations
4.30%	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations
3.40%	Healthcare Support Occupations
3.40%	Production Occupations
3.40%	Computer and Mathematical Occupations
3.40%	Legal Occupations
2.60%	BEP Operator
2.60%	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations
1.70%	Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations
1.70%	Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations
1.70%	Protective Service Occupations
1.70%	Personal Care and Service Occupations
1.70%	Construction and Extraction Occupations
0.90%	Sales and Related Occupations
0.90%	Architecture and Engineering Occupations
0.90%	Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations

Education Services

Certified Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs) work closely with the child, family members, and local school personnel to provide 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. For the duration of the 2021-2022 school year, the vast majority of students were provided with in-person instruction, while a small number of students with underlying health conditions remained on remote instruction at the request of their parents.

Student Hands-On Alternative Reinforcement Program (SHARP)

The SHARP 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 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.

During the summers of 2021 and 2022, the SHARP program was not offered due to increased student participation in their school district sponsored Extended School Year programs, including the continuation of intensive, focused Braille instruction. Students were not available to attend SHARP, even on a remote basis. However, CBVI looks forward to offering the SHARP program again in 2023.

Pre-Employment Transition Services

In FFY 2022, 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 recurring transition programs include Life 101, EDGE (Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement) 1.0 and 2.0, Work Skills Preparation, and College Prep Experience. In addition, in Spring 2022, an advocacy and leadership workshop series, the ACE Academy program, was offered in partnership with Sky's the Limit, to help students gain confidence in identifying as a person with a visual impairment, speaking with others about their disability, and how to communicate accommodation needs in a variety of educational, vocational, and community settings.

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 eighth 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 continued community health concerns due to COVID-19, all EDGE content remained on Zoom, with monthly workshops and weekly meetings led by EDGE staff and/or mentors where they hone their professional, advocacy, and independent living skills. Students were 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, and obtain work-based learning experiences. 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 2022, the program was offered in a hybrid format due to COVID-19, with three on-campus days to allow for hands-on and community-based experiences. 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 blind and visually impaired high school students 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.

In light of COVID-19 precautions, the CPE Program was again facilitated virtually using Google Classroom and Zoom. With the support of Professors, and 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 engaged 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. In light of COVID-19 precautions, the WSP Program was again 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 student's progress in developing the skills needed to be successful in college and provide recommendations to help facilitate their growth.

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. 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. EDGE 2.0 continued to play a valuable role in helping support students navigate pandemic-related changes, with a return to in-person courses and on-campus living.

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 the 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, gym, recreation room, 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 had offered a virtual training program for consumers. As the year began, we had limited number of individuals participate as commuters two days a week. Virtual programming was offered on the other three days. This structure continues to exist for those individuals who choose to attend as a commuter. However, in May 2022, JKTC reopened its' doors to residential students. These consumers attend the program four days a week for in-person instruction and receive virtual instruction one day per week. Instruction is provided on an individual basis as well as in small groups and in whole group formats. Instructional areas include activities of daily living, Braille and communications, keyboarding and technology, orientation and mobility, career exploration, and fitness and health. Other areas that are heavily emphasized include job seeking skills development, soft skills development, technology trends, personal health, creative expression, and social work topics. Consumers participate in adjustment to vision loss groups and, when requested, participate in individual counseling in this area.

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.

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.

Throughout the pandemic, SSP-NJ was able to continue providing 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. In 2022, CBVI returned to providing in-person SSP services, while continuing to allow a remote option for those who requested it.

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.

The past few years have 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. It has been successful in opening up options for training and is now an option that continues to be offered to clients for those who prefer it.

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. Solid typing skills are an important, fundamental skill consumers need before learning additional Assistive Technology and the QWERTY program is the first step in Assistive Technology Training success.

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 thirty-nine (39) Randolph Sheppard food locations across the state. The types of operations include: 7 cafeterias, 4 single person sites (dry stands), 2 military cafeterias, 7 snack bars, and 19 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.

Many of our vending locations were transferred to our State Contract Vendor and the majority of our snack bars were converted to vending locations

BENJ 2022 Highlights

- Total gross sales: \$ 15,371,764
- Manager average net income: \$ 69,700
- Total number of Managers served: 36
- Total number of consumers evaluated for Small Business Program: 1
- Total number of consumers received assistance for their Small Business Program: 0
- Total number of consumers evaluated for BENJ: 2

- Total number of consumers training: 4
- Total number of consumers receiving placements: 0

New Locations Setup:

- Opened a new vending location Public Defender's Office-New Brunswick
- Opened a new vending location Department of Corrections- Trenton
- Opened a new vending location Marijuana Expungement Unit- Ewing
- Opened a new vending location Jones Corrections-Ewing
- Opened a new vending location Juvenile Justice-Trenton
- Opened a new vending location Department of Children & Families- Randolph

BENJ 2023 Initiatives:

- BENJ is working to establish an internship program with transition-aged students of the Commission
- BENJ is working on having additional vending machines offer cashless options
- BENJ will continue to attend national trainings for Randolph-Sheppard
- BENJ continues to work with the General Services Administration (GSA) for new locations and a newly updated Permit Agreement
- BENJ continues to work with the elected Committee with developing marketing for the program to obtain additional participants and new locations.

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 and 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.

By October 2021, all IL staff were providing services in-person unless remote lessons were specifically requested by the consumer. Currently as COVID-19 restrictions have waned, the IL staff have been out in full force.

Our Assistive Support Programs for Independence Renewal and Education (ASPIRE) has grown to include more specialized groups and groups serving those that are ages 21-54. The Library Equal Access Program (LEAP) resumed and began providing lessons as of November 2021. Six weeks of basic iPad lessons were developed and implemented. The Senior Hands-On Retreat Experience (A SHORE Thing) was much more difficult to resume this year given the population and the nature of the program itself. We look forward to reinstating A SHORE Thing May 2023.

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 60 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. Other specialized groups have named themselves, Guide Dog Handlers, Tech. Geeks, and the Parents group (a support group for Parents who are blind raising small children). 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. Groups may meet either in-person, virtually, or via teleconference.

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 or Songwon Oh-Lorenzo at 973-848-3267/ songwon.oh-lorenzo@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 advocate 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.

2022 Highlights

Adult Vision Screening	1,103
Pre-School Vision Screening	6,203
On-Site Screening	1,673
Migrant Screening	258
Diabetic Eye Disease Detection (DEDD) Program	120
Total Individuals Screened	9,357
Total Number of Screening Events	349
Referred for Further Evaluation	1391
Referred for additional CBVI services	39

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 also at various times throughout life, as success occurs each time an individual overcomes barriers, makes significant progress, and achieve their 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.

Cecily Cassell

Cecily Cassell is a long time congenitally blind consumer who has received services on and off through grade school, college and beyond. After choosing to be unemployed for a few years in order to raise her newborn child, she returned to CBVI for help obtaining employment. She has a Bachelor's degree in Marketing and has experience working both in Marketing and Human Resources. She also has been evaluated for Assistive Technology (AT) and Low Vision (LV) aids. While she was arranging her AT and LV evaluations, Cecily applied for and was offered employment as an HR coordinator with a large international media company, Hearst International, located in NYC. Cecily works three days a week from home and commutes to NYC two days a week. Her commute requires a Lyft ride to the bus station, a long bus ride into NYC, and a subway ride to the office. Although the two day a week commute to NYC from South Jersey seems daunting and unrealistic, she has made it work and has been employed since April 2022.

Hearst International has a commuter transportation benefits program which makes her commute more affordable. Her employer also provides full medical benefits, paid vacation, sick time, and holiday pay. When asked if having such a commute is worth it, she emphatically stated yes! This is exactly what she wants to do with her career. There are significant opportunities to be promoted and ultimately reach her goal of being the Director of HR.

Nimisha Rana, LSW

Nimisha, is a career advisor in the EDGE 2.0 program working with blind and low vision college students to achieve their academic goals. She spends her time encouraging her students to take advantage of all the opportunities afforded them so they can be successful and she serves as a "possibility model" for what they can become. Nimisha was not always so confident in herself and her blindness skills; however, she credits her time at the Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC) for helping her become the person she is today.

Nimisha arrived in the United States in December of 2011, a decade after she experienced sudden vision loss. She had no blindness skills and was not sure where to turn. After getting connected to the Commission for the Blind, her counselor, Fanny, recommended she attend the JKTC in order to develop her skills and pursue her dream of becoming a social worker. She notes that she was nervous, "the first day I was there I wanted to run away." Finding the courage to stick around, Nimisha thrived at the Center. She learned the entire braille code in 6 weeks, learned proper cane skills, and developed skills in technology and independent living. Nimisha continued to learn following her graduation with encouragement and support from the staff at the JKTC. She was set up with communication courses at the Hadley School to help her improve in her English and she continued her technology instruction with an Assistive Technology Instructor provided by the Commission. Her

hard work and determination paid off and she went on to receive her Bachelor's and Master's degree in Social Work from Rutgers University in Newark, NJ.

Following her graduation in the spring of 2020, she was hired as an Intensive in-community Counselor working with at-risk youth, before finding her way to the EDGE program in July of 2021. In addition to her work she volunteers her time facilitating an ASPIRE peer support group. Nimisha is thriving as a confident blind adult and says she would have never been able to achieve her goals if she did not have the opportunity to receive blindness skills training at the JKTC.

Zora Stover

Education Success Story – Braille Reader Extraordinaire

Zora Stover is a fourth-grade student who has been learning Braille since preschool. Zora mastered the full Unified English Braille (UEB) code quite easily. She has become a very proficient reader thanks to her natural ability, her mother's support, and the skill of her TVI. Zora has participated in the Braille Institute International Braille Challenge since 1st grade. In this competitive event, she tested her skill in all aspects of braille literacy against other Braille readers in her age group from all over the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The Braille Challenge was conducted virtually during the 2020-2021 school year when Zora was in second grade. Zora placed second in the Apprentice Division, an age group comprised of first and second-graders. The following year, when Zora was in third grade, she was a finalist in the Junior Division, a highly competitive age group comprised of third and fourth graders. It is unusual for a third grader to be one of the finalists. In July 2022, Zora and her mother traveled to California for the final competition. Zora has achieved great success in total Braille literacy and many achievements in all her school subjects. Additionally, Zora has also demonstrated mastery of technology and independent living skills. Everyone who knows her is eagerly awaiting the next significant accomplishments of this wonderful and remarkable young lady.

Amisha Shah

Amisha Shah was employed by the Bank of India until her vision did not allow her to continue. Amisha had also worked as a caterer. She attended the Commission's 20-week program at the Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC), where she learned blindness skills for independence. Due to family obligations, including caring for her elderly father, Amisha commuted daily to JKTC. She would take the train to New Brunswick and walk from the station. JKTC staff said she would arrive with a smile and a positive attitude and was always ready to work.

After graduation from the JKTC, she enrolled in the Business Enterprise of New Jersey (BENJ) program. Amisha studied and passed the online Business Enterprising Program Licensing Training and completed her On-the-Job Training. With all BENJ facilities closed due to the pandemic, she had to wait until restrictions were lifted and facilities were open again. Amisha completed the BENJ On-the-Job Training and was placed at the Veterans Home in Paramus. Her BENJ Representative, Joseph Sheroff, reported that administrators at the facility were extremely pleased with her performance. Joseph also noted that Amisha had reorganized the space and added products. BENJ said Amisha's work was outstanding and she was awarded an operator's license. Amisha continues to work with a positive attitude and has been used by the BENJ program to help evaluate other prospective program candidates.

Santiago Toro

In 2009 a 14-year-old boy stood at the sliding doors of the Newark International Airport and looked out at this new world with apprehension. He had just flown in from his native country of Colombia, where he was loved and cared for by his family. What does this new country have in store for him? How will he fit in? He had no English language skills and was born legally blind. Could he grab onto the American dream and hold on?

His stepmother always told him, "if you can dream it, you can achieve it." With those words, he gained the strength to move forward. He was fortunate to find The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI), who supported him throughout his journey. The Commission played an instrumental role in Santiago's life story by providing him with the appropriate services that enabled independence and the ability to adapt to his vision loss. With the support of his family and CBVI, Santiago earned an Associate's Degree in Social Work from Bergen County Community College. He went on with the encouragement of his Vocational Counselor to earn a Bachelor's degree in Social Work from Rutgers University. And then, yes, you guessed it! A Master's degree! Santiago feels without the encouragement and support of CBVI he would not have accomplished as much. He is very grateful and would like to leave the reader with these words: "Dreams come true for those who work while they dream."

Brooke Matalenas

When Brooke Matalenas was ten years old, her parents and teachers started noticing some vision loss; however, her visual difficulties went undiagnosed through her teenage years. They went to several ophthalmologists until they found Wills Eye, where she was diagnosed with Macular Dystrophy, a degenerative condition, and Brooke's vision had decreased significantly. This new diagnosis was crushing for a girl just out of high school.

Wills Eye referred her to CBVI. She met with her Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and was given the opportunity to ask questions and address disability-related barriers. Together they created a plan of action that would lower barriers and enable her to achieve her goals of furthering her education.

CBVI provided her with an Assistive Technology assessment. ZoomText, a computer software for the visually impaired, was recommended. Training was provided, and Brooke took it from there. This software allowed her to use a computer while attending college. During this time, handheld digital magnifiers were also provided for reading printed material such as mail, price tags, labels, and menus. Brooke graduated from college and is now a paralegal at a law firm.

One day her mother was looking around on the web when she found Dr. Siwoff's website. An appointment was made. She received glasses that miraculously improved her functional vision from legally blind to 20/40. Brooke says Dr. Siwoff performed a miracle!

Candice Donaldson

Candice was born with bilateral congenital cataracts and was diagnosed with glaucoma at eight. Her parents had the foresight to ensure she began to gain the skills she would need, as her vision would decrease over time. Candice attended a school for the blind in Canada for a few years, gaining skills in Technology, independent living, education, orientation and mobility, and braille. Candice began to have a corneal issue in her teenage years, leading to three transplants. At the age of 23, she lost her left eye. Candice continued to pursue her

education despite numerous medical setbacks. She earned two undergraduate degrees and a Master's in Special Education.

Candice married and raised two daughters. Candice said, "Being able to maintain my home and raise my children despite my vision loss was one of the most important things in my life. I cannot thank my parents and teachers enough for having the insight to ensure I would have the necessary skills to maintain my independence." Candice taught children with autism and severe behavioral concerns for 13 years before further vision loss. She began to worry about her effectiveness as a teacher of children with autism and felt it was time to change careers.

Candice was then diagnosed with a severe case of Lupus that affected her in various ways. The inflammation that resulted only sped up the deterioration of her vision despite continued medical treatment and surgeries. Within two years, she went from being able to read using glasses to having little more than light perception. The transition was not easy; Candice found herself extremely frustrated and easily overwhelmed. She connected with CBVI and began technology training through the Vocational Rehabilitation program. Candice said, "Technology was definitely my biggest obstacle. I found I could do little more than type. I could no longer order items online or navigate websites to access the needed information. The Technology Specialist that worked with me was amazing; she was patient and adapted her teaching to my personal learning style."

Gradually, she began to regain the confidence and independence she had previously. After two years of not working, Candice was hired as a Rehabilitation Teacher with CBVI, where she continues to spread the knowledge and experience she has gained. Candice shares, "I have a unique opportunity: I understand what clients are experiencing and empathize with their feelings around vision loss. I can teach them hands-on skills to assist with their independence and increase their confidence, but I can also validate their feelings and assure them they are not alone."

Miracle Robinson

Miracle Robinson has always loved a sweet tooth - yours! Since she was young, Miracle loved baking beautiful confections and creating unique, delicious goodies. She loved the idea of working all day in a kitchen, so the Business Enterprise New Jersey program suited her perfectly. Step one, earn her GED. The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI) set her up with a tutor out of RCBC, and Miracle met with the tutor three times a week for several months. She passed her exam with flying colors. While attending school for her GED she learned how to use JAWS, a computer software for the blind. CBVI loaned her a computer which included JAWS and tutored her on using the computer and the JAWS software. The next step, attend the Joseph Kohn Training Center for the 20-week program. During this time, she learned independent living skills and flourished as a leader. The tears shed during graduation were a clear indication of how other students viewed her. Step three, study and pass the online Business Enterprising Program Licensing Training (BEPLT). That brings us to where we are now! Miracle has started her On-the-Job-Training. This will consist of nine weeks of hands-on training where she will learn the ins and outs of running a business. Once this is over, she will be ready for her own stand. Keep an eye out for the Randolph Shepard food stands in New Jersey. You may run into Miracle and her delicious goodies!

Breeana Douglas

Breeana Douglas doesn't give up. Even though she has retinitis pigmentosa - a degenerative condition that causes vision loss, she never used it as an excuse. "High School was the hardest," she said. She would stay up

all night, making sure her homework was done. Breeana and her family were unaware of the Commission and the services it provides. As such, high school was a challenge and she labored over her school work. Through sheer determination and a strong desire to learn, Breeana graduated high school with a 3.7 GPA.

Finding CBVI gave her the answers to her vision loss. College was easier, and she credits CBVI for the difference. Breeana had never met another blind person before coming to CBVI. She met peers through the Employment Development Guidance & Engagement (EDGE) program, which promotes independence and self-awareness in preparation for college. Breeana points to the EDGE program for much of her success. “I learned about the resources available to me, how to advocate for myself, how to use the computer software for the blind, how to navigate different environments through orientation and mobility, interviewing skills, and learning to dress for success,” she says. Through networking and help from EDGE, she landed two internships which she attributes to providing experience and building her resume. Today, Breeana is working as a Tax Associate with Price Waterhouse Cooper; she commutes daily to Manhattan for work. Her hard work and determination put her where she is today.

Luisa Idrovo

Luisa is an Essex county resident who has been a recipient of CBVI services since childhood. Blind from birth, Luisa’s family worked tirelessly to ensure she could get the best, most accessible education possible. While still living in Ecuador, Luisa and her mother would travel by bus three hours each way to a school for the blind, where Luisa was able to learn to read Braille in Spanish. After a few years, Luisa, her siblings, and her parents migrated to the United States for better opportunities. With the support of family already residing in the US, Luisa and her family could learn English and Luisa could be enrolled in school. At that point, Luisa was introduced to CBVI’s education services and started working with a Teacher for the Visually Impaired, which ignited her path to the success she was able to achieve in the years to come. The journey toward Luisa’s success was not easy, and it would not have been possible without support from her family. Luisa’s parents encouraged her and her siblings to become educated and independent, which Luisa says is not the case in all immigrant families due to the barriers and challenges that come with those efforts. Witnessing her siblings go on to get college degrees inspired Luisa to do the same. Luisa did not want to be viewed as different because of her disability but because she actually impacted the world. She became very successful in college, achieving high honors while working toward her Associate’s degree at Bergen Community College. She earned her Bachelor’s degree in Social Work at Rutgers University while in CBVI’s college unit.

Despite her Social Work background, Luisa decided last year to pursue a career as an Assistive Technology Specialist. In April of this year, while in the Vocational Rehabilitation Unit, Luisa, her Vocational Counselor, and the Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor were able to coordinate an internship placement for her at the Vision Loss of Alliance of New Jersey (VLANJ) in Denville. She has been teaching students technology skills on a one-to-one basis; furthermore, Luisa has co-developed a typing class curriculum that will be implemented for future terms at VLANJ. Through this internship, Luisa is able to accrue the hours needed to become a Certified Assistive Technology Professional, which is her ultimate goal. In the future, Luisa hopes that as an Assistive Technology Specialist she would be able to help others. Luisa noted that she once needed that help and would not be who she is today without it. For her, achieving success would mean being the helper, teacher, and motivator for someone in need. Luisa is proud of all she has been able to overcome and is excited about her future. Her best advice for someone looking to become successful is to have a clear vision of what they want their future to look like, take risks, and go for it!

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 – 2023

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 2023:

February 3

June 9

October 6

December 1

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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