

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



2023 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

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

2023 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 Charles McKenna at 973-648-4300 or via e-mail at charles.mckenna@dhs.nj.gov.

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State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) – Chairperson’s Letter

Dear Governor Murphy,

It is my honor and privilege to present to you the State Rehabilitation Council’s (SRC) Annual Report of the New Jersey State Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

I believe that upon review of this report you will determine that the SRC and the Commission have been able to function fully despite recent challenges created by the pandemic.

The SRC along with CBVI has been able to review various reports so to ensure that Competitive Integrated Employment, (CIE) is the primary outcome for most of the blind, visually impaired and deaf-blind consumers.

Within this report you will learn about a number of consumers that despite their loss have become successful members of their communities and are fully participating in employment and education. Their success is a result of their talents & determination along with the professionals at CBVI who in partnership with the consumer, provided the individualized service needed to succeed.

The 2024 goals for the SRC include continuing to assist CBVI in providing high quality individualized services utilizing informed choice, rapid engagement, and career pathways to assist consumers to reach their employment goals.

It is also my duty to note that many individuals nominated to the SRC, along with those awaiting reappointment have been waiting for an extraordinary length of time. If further SRC members transition out then the SRC would not be able to meet its federally mandated function as detailed in section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act.

The report is submitted with respect.

Vito J. DeSantis

State Rehabilitation Council Chairperson

Executive Director's Report

I am pleased to join the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) of the NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired in presenting the 2023 Annual Report that details our accomplishments from October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023.

It is my privilege to lead the CBVI team who each day do the amazingly transformative work chronicled here in this report. Work which at its core is integral to improving the quality of life for the people it is our agency's mission to serve. Work that affords our consumers the opportunity to live happy, healthy, independent and productive lives.

I am also appreciative of the valuable support we receive from the State Rehabilitation Council, who offer constructive feedback, suggestions and ideas that contribute to keeping CBVI at the national blindness services forefront. I extend sincere thanks to each member for their steadfast commitment to guiding us towards innovating a brighter future for our consumers.

Together, with great pride, we share the stories of success and program highlights found in this report and encourage you to join us in celebrating the drive, capabilities, and determination of the people we serve.

I look forward to continuing the work of assisting people who are blind, deaf-blind and visually impaired in achieving their maximum potential with CBVI's staff, our community partners, and the State Rehabilitation Council members, and thank all for their efforts to make a difference here in New Jersey.

Sincerely,

Dr. Bernice Davis

Executive Director
Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

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 four 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.

2024 SRC Board Member

Vito DeSantis, Chair – Hold Over Status (3/17/23)

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*Representative of Individual w/ Multiple Disabilities

Don Campbell – Hold Over Status (3/17/23)

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*State Independent Living Council (SILC)

Jeanne McMahon – Pending Appointment

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Statewide Parent Advocacy Network

*Parent Training & Information Center Representative

Gwen Orłowski – Pending Appointment

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Disability Rights New Jersey (DRNJ)

* Client Assistance Program (CAP)

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*Community Rehabilitation Program Representative

Lauren Weishaar

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Hudson Community Enterprises

*Community Rehabilitation Program Provider

Ronda Banks – Hold Over Status (3/17/23)

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New Jersey Transit

*Business and Industry Representative

Steven McCoy – Pending Appointment

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*Business and Industry Representative

James Good – Pending Appointment

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*Business and Industry Representative

Gary Robinson – Pending Appointment

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*Business and Industry Representative

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*Advocacy Group Representative

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Commission of the Blind and Visually Impaired
*Executive Director

SRC Accomplishments in FFY 2023

The SRC introduced a hybrid meeting approach conducting in-person meetings at the JKTC in New Brunswick, with a concurrent virtual attendance option through zoom. The approach has proven to be quite effective and will be continued into 2024. The council met four times in FFY 2023 using this method. 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 provided vital feedback to the Commission on a number of topics pertaining to policy and procedure, consumer programming, and outreach. An online training module series for SRC members that covers the roles and responsibilities of the council was introduced. The SRC's standing committees have been defined, the bylaws updated to reflect this update.

SRC Proposed Goals for 2024

- The SRC will meet four times in 2024, as well as continue ongoing support to foster the goals of CBVI and its excellent services to the consumer population.

2024 meeting dates:

February 2, 2024

June 7, 2024

October 4, 2024

December 6, 2024

- The SRC will by reviewing various reports and current and proposed policies will:
 - Work with CBVI to enhance and improve competitive integrated employment outcomes across all VR consumer groups being served.
 - 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.
 - Assisting CBVI in providing services ensuring that rapid engagement is utilized, while ensuring informed choice to the consumer.
 - Assist CBVI in developing career pathways for appropriate consumers who wish to progress from education/training to Competitive Integrated Employment.
- SRC members will continue to participate, as appropriate, in 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. The SRC & CBVI will conduct a yearly SRC Purpose and Responsibilities training annually.
- 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.

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 FFY2023

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	91	78	188	76	6	5
2	Bergen	159	59	128	197	10	9
3	Burlington	160	71	172	170	4	11
4	Camden	173	129	213	183	7	10
5	Cape May	20	14	44	19	0	1
6	Cumberland	46	35	80	42	0	3
7	Essex	162	100	207	319	10	40
8	Gloucester	102	61	81	80	1	4
9	Hudson	89	53	88	145	6	13
10	Hunterdon	25	8	18	21	2	3
11	Mercer	100	56	125	115	6	10
12	Middlesex	224	120	208	255	8	20
13	Monmouth	142	96	200	195	12	11
14	Morris	111	39	104	100	4	9
15	Ocean	203	89	300	157	19	9
16	Passaic	112	53	57	143	6	6
17	Salem	25	14	25	16	0	2
18	Somerset	74	45	48	90	2	8
19	Sussex	35	14	21	28	1	2
20	Union	134	71	142	199	10	6
21	Warren	14	5	30	25	1	4
22	Out of State	0	2	0	3	0	0
23	Not identified	10	13	30	13	38	1
	Total	2211	1225	2509	2591	153	187

* 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)

PP – Project BEST (Serving all age groups)

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

Employment Outcomes in FFY 2023

*111 total employment outcomes

Management Occupations	8.1%
Business and Financial Operations Occupations	5.4%
Computer and Mathematical Occupations	4.5%
Architecture and Engineering Occupations	0.9%
Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations	1.8%
Community and Social Service Occupations	5.4%
Legal Occupations	0.9%
Education, Training, and Library Occupations	7.2%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations	1.8%
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	2.7%
Healthcare Support Occupations	9.0%
Protective Service Occupations	0.0%
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	4.5%
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations	2.7%
Personal Care and Service Occupations	0.9%
Sales and Related Occupations	9.9%
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	22.5%
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	0.0%
Construction and Extraction Occupations	0.9%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	5.4%
Production Occupations	3.6%
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	1.8%
Military Specific Occupations	0.0%
Homemaker	0.0%
BEP Operator	0.0%

Education Services

Certified Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs) provided services to all eligible children (from birth through high school years), their families, and other service providers. The TVIs worked 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. In the case of infants and toddlers (birth through age 2 years) services were home-based and are provided in collaboration with private early intervention providers. Infant/toddler services focused on fostering the development of early learning concepts that must be made accessible to blind, deaf-blind, and visually impaired young children. Education Services also included all accessible books and materials as well as specialized devices and equipment for purposes of maximizing each student's full access to instruction and general curricula. Pre-Braille skills development, formal Braille instruction, low vision device instruction, and other forms of specialized instruction, technology support and reinforcement, functional skills assessment, consultation with parents and classroom teachers, and in-class observations form the basis of school-based instruction and support.

Pre-high school Upwardly Mobile Program

PUMP (Pre-high school Upwardly Mobile Program) was conducted for the first time during the end of July and beginning of August 2023. This program focused on middle school students in grades 7 and 8 who will be transitioning to high school in the very near future. The program occurred at the CBVI Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC) in New Brunswick during the last week of the Life 101 Program. Our middle school students had an opportunity to engage in joint activities with the high school students attending Life 101. The students in Life 101 were very generous in sharing both the joys and challenges of the high school experience as a blind or visually impaired student. The theme of their discussions were twofold: 1) Be true to yourself; 2) if you have a problem, seek out a trusted adult. Our middle school students also participated in their own activities that focused on self-advocacy, independence, and celebrating oneself.

Pre-Employment Transition Services

In FFY 2023, 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, STEPS, CREATE, and SUCCESS. In addition, in Spring 2022, an advocacy and leadership workshop series, the ACE Academy program, was offered in partnership with Sky's the Limit Communications, 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. In January 2024, our college students, ages 18-21, will be participating in

Sky's the Limit's PASS program. This program under the ACE Academy umbrella, provides techniques and strategies to thrive as a young adult.

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. As of February 2023, EDGE began holding their monthly in-person workshops at the ARC of Ocean County located in Lakewood, where they hone their professional, advocacy, and independent living skills. In response to continued community health concerns due to COVID-19, EDGE content remained on Zoom for those who felt more comfortable with a virtual option. Weekly meetings led by EDGE staff and/or mentors are held virtually. 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 \(Learning Independence for Future Employment\)](#)

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. In Summer 2023, the Life 101 program returned to a fully in-person format. Eleven 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.

[Students Understanding College and Career Expectations for Excellence in School and Society \(SUCCESS\) at The College of New Jersey](#)

The SUCCESS Program, formally College Prep Experience, is a pre-employment transition residential 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.

In light of a broken down air conditioning unit that affected many of the dorms and academic buildings, the Program was facilitated as a commuter program for 6 days. The first day of the program was implemented virtually to allow for students and staff to get to know each other and Q&A related to the sudden format change. With the support of College Professors, College Staff, and Program Staff, students participated in 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.

Successful Transition Experiences Preparing Students (STEPS)

The STEPS Program, formally 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 the program have a desire to work and are able to do so with or without supports. STEPS 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 a broken down air conditioning unit that effected many of the dorms and academic buildings, the Program was facilitated as a commuter program for 5 days. The first day of the program was implemented virtually to allow for students and staff to get to know each other and Q&A related to the sudden format change. 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 description and recommendations for the development.

Career Research Exploration and Awareness for Transition to Employment (CREATE)

Our new program, CREATE is a pre-employment transition program facilitated by the Center for Sensory and Complex Disabilities at The College of New Jersey. In light of a broken down air conditioning unit that effected many of the dorms and academic buildings, the Program was facilitated as a commuter program for 6 days. The first day of the program was implemented virtually to allow for students and staff to get to know each other and Q&A related to the sudden format change. The CREATE program allow students ages 16-21, who were unsure of their career path, to further explore their own strengths, abilities, capabilities, and interests in order to identify or better define their employment goal and next steps upon completion of high school. Career assessments, such as interest inventories, were administered to assist students with understanding how their interests relate to possible career options using the Holland code. Additionally, exposure to various employment opportunities via in-person presentations, tours with various local businesses, and internet research were conducted throughout the program.

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.

The Fellowship Program

The Fellowship Program was offered by CBVI for the first time this year. It is a mentorship program designed to address the needs of individuals with vision loss residing in New Jersey, and is a collaboration between CBVI and a community agency or organization serving as facilitator of the program. Individuals are identified and referred to the program by CBVI, and must be active consumers who are also receiving services from the agency.

The goal of the program is to create a sense of community and mutual mentorship by building meaningful connections between individuals 18-21 years of age and individuals over 21 who are experiencing vision loss. Objectives foster mutual respect, independence, resilience, and advocacy through a series of educational and skills-based activities.

Project Objectives

1. The program provides adults over 21 with the opportunity to meet and share knowledge, communication skills, professionalism, and life experiences with younger individuals.
2. The program provides individuals ages 18-21 with the opportunity to meet and share knowledge and interests such as technology (assistive and other) as well as their life experiences with vision loss.
3. There are virtual meetings hosted twice a month and two in-person meetings held at the agency hosting the program twice per year.
4. The meetings serve up to 20 participants consisting of both large and small group activities, as well as supervised discussions related to living life with vision loss.
5. Program evaluations are completed with each participant. The first, a pre-participation survey, in order to gain baseline information, interests, and goals from participants, and the second, a post-participation survey, in order to gain feedback from participants on their experiences and progress towards personal goals.

Examples of Virtual Activities

- Meet and Greet of Participants
- Emotional Aspects of vision Loss
- Accepting Your Vision Loss
- Developing a Positive Self-Image
- Self-Advocacy Skills Training
- Building Healthy Relationships
- Identifying and Developing Personal and Professional Goals
- Managing Social Anxiety and Peer Pressure
- Socialization and Communication
- Accessing Social Media
- Resume Building and Practicing Interview Skills
- iPhone/iPad Accessibility
- Smart technology
- Computer Accessibility

Examples of In-person Activities

- Orientation and Mobility
- Cooking Skills
- Yoga, Mindfulness, and Meditation
- iPhone/iPad Workshop
- Helpful Apps for iPhone/iPad

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 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 Solution (YES) Program

The Youth Employment Solutions (YES) Program is conducted in partnership with TCNJ to serve students in transition to adult life. Through person-centered approaches, a YES Support Specialist will work with and on behalf of the consumer to assess/improve work readiness as well as provide technical assistance while supporting the consumer's transition to employment; once they have attended one of the Summer Transition Programs. The YES Support Specialist communicates with CBVI and connects all service providers to ensure the goals of the consumer (and family) are guiding the process.

Additionally, deliverables are created and shared to communicate the outcomes in the following topic areas:

1. Discovery Process/Exploration: (Get to know the consumer)
2. Job Developing/Job Exploration/Job Carving (“Pounding the Pavement”)
3. Job Acquisition/Transition
4. Job Retention/Short Term Follow-up

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 at JKTC and also throughout the community. Finally, near the end of the program, students participate in a community-based work experience related to their interests and abilities. At this point, consumers also have the option of participating in an independent living experience in the JKTC independent apartment.

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. The majority of our consumers are residents. However, consumers do have the option of commuting to the program. At this point, consumers attend the program four days a week for in-person instruction and receive virtual instruction one day per week. Instruction is provided individually as well as in small groups and whole group formats. Instructional areas include activities of daily living, Braille and communication, 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. As vocational services are provided, JKTC is currently working in conjunction with the Business Relations Unit (BRU) to enhance services and follow a progressive employment model.

Business Relations Unit (BRU)

The Business Relations Unit (BRU) provides services to public and private sector businesses 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.

While we often share employment opportunities with our referred consumers, they do not always result in successful hires. Along these lines, we have drafted a Job club proposal where we will work with the consumers virtually in a group setting to discuss not only improving the basic skills, resume writing, application procedure,

interviewing, etc., but also facilitate sharing experiences and discussing concerns and solutions to common scenarios, encouraging individuals to be more assertive and positive in their job searches.

Over the spring/summer, six college students were accepted into the NextGen Leadership sponsored by Disability In. Disability In is an opportunity for college students or recent graduates to be mentored by national corporations for six months. As a result of participating in this mentorship, some individuals are invited to attend an in-person conference in July. We had one of the six attend this conference.

The Business Relations Unit is also formulating on the job training and internship policies to assist and encourage employers to hire our consumers. This past summer, we worked with the EDGE program and facilitated an internship program with the Business Enterprise Program. Then, BRU also worked with and implemented the Progressive Employment Pilot sanctioned by the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI). The Progressive Employment Pilot is a program that believes there is some job for everyone. It assists individuals in exploring employment opportunities even when they are still determining what type of work they want to pursue, and this is accomplished through informational interviews with employers, job tours, job shadows, and/or short-term employment.

In 2023 the business relations unit began collaborating with the Joseph Kohn Training Center on a project called Progressive Employment. The Institute for Community Inclusion, a part of UMass Boston, designed this project as a dual-customer, team approach that uses work based learning strategies to meet the needs of both local businesses and job seekers. The idea is that students at Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC) will participate in many smaller experiences such as informational interviews, mock interviews, job shadows and tours, and mini work experiences to help prepare them for future employment. Due to this project the business relations unit has gained many new employer contacts in a variety of industries including social services, music, and medical. Student experiences have included an informational interview with a DJ, an informational interview with the Family Resource Network, and a job shadow/tour at Hudson Community Enterprises. Students have expressed enthusiasm for the project because it allows them to explore their interests on a smaller scale, before needing to be ready to enter the job market. So far, two students have received offers of employment based on connections made from the Progressive Employment project. The business relations unit and Joseph Kohn Training Center look forward to continuing this collaboration to create more employer relationships and opportunities for career exploration for students.

Deaf-Blind Services

iCanConnect NJ

The iCanConnect NJ Program has provided various types of assistive technology and telecommunication devices to over 150 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.

Technological Support Service

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 five comprehensive and up-to-date Regional Technology Assistance Centers (RTACs) located throughout New Jersey in Newark, Freehold, Cherry Hill, Atlantic City, and New Brunswick.

The past four years have seen a number of new challenges and innovative solutions as the Technology Services Specialists adapted to providing services both during and after a pandemic. Staff quickly adapted to the successful implementation of remote instructional options to continue providing training, support, and assessments to CBVI clients through the Pandemic. As this approach has proven to be quite effective in providing service, it now remains as a possible option to be offered to those clients for whom virtual instruction is a good fit. CBVI clients may now receive technological services either in-person, or virtually.

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 has proven quite effective in supplementing 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. We are pleased to offer this program for the sixth consecutive year.

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-eight (38) Randolph Sheppard food locations across the state. The types of operations include: 6 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.

BENJ 2023 Highlights

- Total gross sales: \$ 16,236,051
- Manager average net income: \$ 78,320
- Total number of Managers served: 34
- Total number of consumers evaluated for Small Business Program: 5
- Total number of consumers received assistance for their Small Business Program: 0
- Total number of consumers evaluated for BENJ: 3
- Total number of consumers training: 1
- Total number of consumers receiving placements: 0

New Locations Setup:

- Opened a new vending location Department of Children & Families- Randolph
- Opened a new vending location Unemployment Office- Jersey City
- Opened a new vending location NJ Department of Transportation Training Center- Bordentown
- Opened a new vending location Department of Corrections- Trenton
- Opened a new vending location Marijuana Expungement Unit- Ewing
- Opened a new vending location Juvenile Justice Office- Trenton
- Converted a snack bar into a micro market: Department of Community Affairs- Trenton

BENJ 2023 Initiatives:

- BENJ is working on developing a partnership with New Jersey County Colleges for vending.
- BENJ is looking to continue the internship program with transition-aged students of the Commission.
- BENJ will continue to attend national trainings for Randolph-Sheppard
- BENJ continues to work with the elected Committee of Business Enterprise Managers to develop training opportunities for the Blind managers.
- 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.

All IL services are provided in-person, unless remote lessons are specifically requested by the consumer. The IL staff has been out in full force in 2023.

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) provides assistive technology training to seniors 55 and up, interested in honing their iPad or iPhone skills. 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 November 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, including 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 New Jersey counties. Training for group facilitators is held annually.

ASPIRE is administered by the Independent Living Unit of CBVI, and although its groups are mostly geared towards those with vision loss 55 years or older, groups are 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 Community Outreach Supervisor, 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 outreach and prevention screening unit, comprises all eye health services offered by CBVI. The primary role of Project BEST is to via vision screenings identify eye disease in target populations of New Jersey residents, with a concerted effort to provide these services to historically underserved sectors of the population.

CBVI's Project BEST program works to save sight and restore vision whenever it is medically possible by working with individuals to facilitate treatment via a network of community providers. In addition, the unit serves as a source of CBVI referrals for those who meet the various eligibility criteria for blindness training and the other services.

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 Centers 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. CBVI staff also advocates for Affordable Care Act enrollment for all eligible residents.

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

Providing a growing array of services since 1979, the screening unit continues to meet its statutory obligation to increase both access and awareness of the importance of eye health to the community.

2023 Highlights

Adult Vision Screening	1,639
Pre-School Vision Screening	12,768
On-Site Screening	3,141
Migrant Screening	274
Diabetic Eye Disease Detection (DEDD) Program	248
Total Individuals Screened	18,070
Total Number of Screening Events	532
Referred for Further Evaluation	1704
Referred for additional CBVI services	135

Success Throughout the Lifespan – Spotlight Stories

Consumer JRDA was referred for orientation and mobility services in February 2023, and was placed in the Independent Living Older Blind Program. JRDA has light perception in both eyes due to her diagnosis of Retinitis Pigmentosa. During her first orientation and mobility (O&M) lesson JRDA was provided a white cane and instructed in the constant contact cane technique. Julia expressed excitement and delight in receiving the white cane. She was eager to get moving outside and is interested in learning how to independently navigate through her community. Traveling from her home to the corner store is her ultimate goal! During her second OM lesson, JRDA demonstrated the ability to independently use the white cane to navigate over surface changes and around obstacles. JRDA continues to demonstrate an eagerness to learn and increase her level of independence and comfort with outdoor navigation. JRDA's daughter found her mother practicing walking outside on her own. She felt extreme happiness that her mother increased her independence and was able to leave the house on her own. JRDA continues to demonstrate a positive outlook and she looks forward to continued O&M instruction.

Consumer BB was referred for orientation and mobility services in March 2023, and was placed in the Independent Living Older Blind Program. BB has limited vision in the left eye and light perception in the right eye due to her diagnosis of Glaucoma. Before her vision loss she would walk all over her town crossing large intersections independently. BB stated she was always on the move and missed her independence. After losing vision she limits her outdoor navigation and is fearful of crossing intersections. Due to difficulty with depth perception BB would walk in the street to avoid the uneven sidewalks. During her first orientation and mobility (O&M) lesson BB was provided a white cane and instructed in the constant contact cane technique. O&M instructed BB how to navigate the sidewalks safely using the white cane. After receiving lessons with her white cane BB was excited to get outside. Other pedestrians have assisted her, and vehicles are more likely to yield to her when crossing. BB has expressed excitement in continuing her orientation and mobility instruction and increasing her independence when navigating throughout her community.

My name is Naquela Wright Prevoe. I have been a consumer of NJ CBVI for 13 years. Within this time, I have completed training at JKTC. I am a certified massage therapist. I live independently as a wife and mother raising my children. In 2014, I co-founded a local nonprofit called Eyes Like Mine Inc. Our mission is to share awareness about the abilities and potential of individuals with vision loss through community service initiatives, comprehensive empowerment workshops, and innovative social change awareness events. I presently serve as the vice president. Over the years, I have continued to pursue opportunities to perform with my non-profits' dance recital dancing with the blind. In 2016 I was a featured blind cast member for Facebook's artificial intelligence commercial which displayed my use of assistive technology skills. The Commission for the Blind help me gain the knowledge and skill set to obtain and maintain employment at Everest Community services as a telecommunications specialist. With assistance of the agency's services I was able to obtain my vision without vision and I will forever be grateful for their life changing services.

Consumer RL asked for a mobility referral as he wished to be able to take the bus to work. His girlfriend had little understanding of how poor his vision was and had encouraged him to cross an uncontrolled highway to get to the nearest bus stop, but thankfully RL decided to ask an Orientation and Mobility (O&M) instructor before the attempt. The O&M instructor met with RL and performed a timing method for limited detection with him at the crossing and together RL and O&M instructor determined that it was not safe for him to cross mid-block. The instructor was able to show RL a nearby intersection he could walk to instead, only taking him a few more

minutes out of his way. The O&M instructor taught RL safe street crossing techniques and after several lessons, RL was able to walk to the intersection and cross safely to his bus stop, enabling him to get to work independently.

Mr. Ikechukwu John has been one of the biggest success stories in VR Counselor Steve Hornikel's time with the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Going by the nickname "Ike," this gentleman has utilized many of the services offered by CBVI and has worked with dozens of CBVI staff members over the last ten years.

Ike immigrated from his native Nigeria to South Jersey, Atlantic County, in August 2011. He attended college in Nigeria and had a successful career working in the Hydrogeology and Petroleum Geology fields. Ike ran his own business in the Petro Geology field, where he employed several staffers and oversaw all aspects of the business, including accounting, HR, sales, and actual geologic work. While running this business, he was diagnosed with glaucoma and rapidly lost his vision. Once he arrived as a legal resident in the US, he made contact with CBVI. His first meeting with CBVI staff was in January 2012, when VRC (Steve Hornikel) arrived for the intake at the client's home. It was clear even then that this client was driven to succeed. Ike had been diagnosed as legally blind and would need to learn all the skills necessary to resume his daily living activities and then proceed to find a new career. A new career was essential since his geology background did not suit the job market or his remaining vision. Initially, the case was based on physical restoration, with physicians trying to slow the advancing glaucoma. Referrals were made for Orientation & Mobility, Rehabilitation Teaching, Nursing, and the JKTC residence program. These services all worked in harmony to ensure the client had the skills necessary to start the JKTC 16-week program, which he began in the fall of 2013.

While attending JKTC, the client changed his initial vocational goal from teaching to counseling, as the client wanted to work with other people who, like himself, had suffered visual loss or other conditions that limited their abilities. Staff at JKTC further honed Ike's skills and provided valuable training and guidance.

Once Ike graduated from the JKTC program, he returned to college. Ike was still receiving valuable JAWS and other tech training at this time. Going back to school was a whole new adventure for Ike. Getting his college credits transferred from his university in Nigeria to the States proved to be a real challenge. His VRC was able to find an educational credit evaluation company to look at his transcripts to help with this determination, but only after Ike was able to get the transcripts sent from Nigeria, which took some hard work (and bribes to the right people, as Ike told his VRC at the time). Ike started at Atlantic Cape Community College in the fall Semester of 2014. During his time at ACCC, Ike went from part-time to full-time student status, necessitating a transfer to the College Unit, where he would work with several other CBVI staff members. Ike worked hard with staff in the Disabilities office at ACCC and again persevered and accomplished all the educational goals he set for himself, graduating with an Associate in Liberal Arts after the fall of 2016 semester. In the spring of 2017, Ike started a 4-year degree program in Psychology at Stockton University. He graduated in the spring of 2018 before commencing a Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling program at Rutgers University. Once more, Ike persevered through personal crises, having to move to several new homes, ongoing eye health issues, and the difficulties that were so common during the 2020 COVID pandemic and shutdown.

During his final year in the Master's program, Ike got a valuable internship placement with NJ's Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) in Pleasantville. During this time, he could see Vocational Rehabilitation from the other side, as a provider, after years of receiving services himself. As Ike told his VRC,

"This is what I want to do with my life!" Ike graduated with his Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling in the spring of 2022.

After an exhaustive and intense job search, Ike was hired as a VRC with Pennsylvania's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) in their Philadelphia office. Since Ike was living in Atlantic City, he needed to relocate closer to his new office in Philadelphia. CBVI staff worked diligently with Ike to teach him how to get from Atlantic City to Philadelphia using Access Link to the trains through the PATCO train line. His VRC assisted in finding a new apartment for Ike in Haddonfield.

VR funds were utilized to help Ike put the housing deposit and other financial issues in place. Ike is working through his probationary period with OVR. He enjoys the job and its challenges, such as learning to use his laptop with screen-reading software to facilitate a counseling session with his consumers.

This has been a long, tiring, and inspiring success story for Ike! He is living independently and proudly helping others to reach their vocational goals. But it is also a success for CBVI. This case has involved dozens of CBVI staff, including administrative staff, vocational counselors (traditional and college), O&Ms, RTs, Eye Health Nurses, drivers, and the entire JKTC unit. The fiscal department and executive management were committed and ensured that services and payments were timely and approved.

I, KA have been a consumer with the NJ Commission for The Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI) since I was 16. CBVI services gave me my introduction to the possibilities of establishing my independence and shaping my identity as a person who is visually impaired. After my vision loss, I was trained to use assistive technology and to navigate a computer. I learned adaptive independent living skills that guided my motivation to travel abroad to Tokyo, Japan, at 21 years of age and move into my first apartment at the age of 24. These are all skills I acquired while a consumer at NJ CBVI! They encouraged me to pursue areas I did not know could be achievable, especially during the pandemic. I returned to college and successfully graduated as a first-generation college graduate. This includes my siblings, parents, and grandparents on both sides of my family. I became an author of an anthology sharing my story about seeing beyond my vision loss while empowering others experiencing similar loss. The agency's services represent life-changing, impactful opportunities that offer many personal and professional growth options. I can attest to this since I am using the skills, education, and experience I learned as a consumer of NJ CBVI. I am employed as the agency's community outreach specialist. This role brings me great joy. It allows me to dedicate my service to the consumers who live in NJ. I'm in the trenches at NJ community events and hosting monthly resource calls connecting staff, consumers, and providers with valuable services. My self-esteem has become stronger. I'm now involved with public speaking clubs and a plus-size model in Newark and New York. Wherever I travel, I use my cane skills. This allows me to exercise my independence and share my story with others. Today, I am proud to share that I was accepted to enroll in the Rutgers University Newark School of Social Work in fall 2023. NJ CBVI empowered me to believe and achieve!

Betty Sterlin Frederic, age 59, is currently in VR Status but started out with an Eye Health Nurse from the Independent Living, Older Blind unit. An Eye health nurse was assigned to this case just after she was discharged from a lengthy hospital stay. Unemployed and homeless, due to vision loss, Betty also lacked health insurance. She lived with various friends, whenever possible. Upon the initial intake she was unable to afford her medications and was without prescribed insulin, blood pressure and heart medications. She was not eligible for emergency shelter, which requires an individual be able to live independently. Her daughter had difficulty

working to support the two of them. She could not be with the consumer to help manage her health issues and daily living activities.

The client received restorative services and a low vision evaluation, which provided some improvement to her vision. The Eye health nurse was able to assist with enrollment into a health clinic and Betty obtained much needed clinic services. With instruction from ancillary services the consumer is now able to live independently, manage her daily living activities and medications. The client was eventually referred to VR and secured employment as a bus aid.

Unfortunately, she lost her position as a bus aid when she was on medical leave for a health issue. The consumer continues to live independently and is pursuing employment at this time with the help of her VR caseworker.

Project BEST met 12-year-old David at a migrant farm screening held at West Avenue Elementary in Bridgeton, NJ. David was unsure about attending the screening and quickly informed us, upon entering the room, that his vision has been very blurry for quite some time. He noted that he would not be able to make out much of the vision chart because they already look pretty blurry. After completing the visual acuity assessment David indeed was not seeing well at all. His acuities were 20/100 and 20/80. Project BEST screeners then tested his vision with a pinhole occluder, which is an eye shield with several small holes that allow light rays to directly reach the retina. The purpose of using this pinhole during a visual acuity test is to differentiate the cause of decreased visual acuity; it helps to answer whether there is a refractive error or some underlying pathological conditions of the eye causing a decrease in vision. With refractive errors, there is a drastic improvement in the ability to see due to the refocus of light into the retina. Almost instantly, David, lit up stating he was able to see much better.

After completing the initial exam, David got to see the doctor for a better assessment of his overall eye health. Our screening doctor was able to provide him with a pair of prescription glasses. David, could not stop smiling from ear to ear when he wore the trial frames which held the prescription he would receive through Project BEST's partnership with New Eyes. Via New Eyes, Project BEST is able to provide two free pairs of glasses to anyone under the age of 18 and one free pair to adults, on a yearly basis. David asked questions regarding how he should wear and take care of them. He overflowed with pure excitement to know that he would get them soon enough. Project BEST reached back out to David and his parents to ensure he received his glasses and sufficed to say, for David, everything has been wonderful since getting his new glasses.

Consumer JB, an 80-year-old blind client moved from NYC to Bergen County, with her husband, who is also blind, during Covid-19. Her brand new apartment was equipped with inaccessible digital appliances. Faced with the challenge of learning her new and unfamiliar surroundings, JB requested O&M training. Her goal was to become a safer and independent traveler. The client was oriented to her apartment building including emergency exits/stairwells and elevators. In addition to the mailbox, mail room, lounge area, garbage area etc. JB learned and understood the layout of her outdoor surrounding via a tactile map this instructor made for her. Client is able to understand the street names, stores nearby with cardinal direction info. Client found the O&M training to be extremely helpful and professional. Client is no longer living in fear of the unknown and everything makes sense. Now, when family or friends refer to landmarks in her neighborhood, she is familiar with them. She safely navigates her residence with confidence and her sense of independence has increased dramatically. Client is able to take advantage of living next to the Hackensack Public library, and participated in their technology training.

I, Joanna Benthall, was born and raised in Jersey City, NJ, and have endured and overcome various challenges. At the age of 10 months, I was diagnosed with near-sightedness and macular degeneration. Due to the diagnosis, I was prescribed bifocals. My mother was consistent with all of my ophthalmologist appointments. Therefore, we thought my vision was stabilized. However, one day, on my way to work, my sight faded as I crossed the street, causing me to be nearly hit by a public bus. A stranger assisted me by using my phone to call my mother. After reaching her, we went to several doctors before arriving at UMDNJ. The Ophthalmologist informed me that the sight in my right eye was gone 15 years prior, and the vision in my left eye was fading as well due to glaucoma, cataracts, and retinal detachment. Throughout my life and into adulthood, I had nine different eye surgeries. The end result was me becoming completely blind. By the time I reached adulthood, I had been through more traumatizing situations than one person should have to endure in a lifetime. Life at this point had taken me through so many valleys. With love and support, I eventually accepted that my vision was gone, and I still had to live. In time, I learned to accept the woman that I was. I not only reclaimed my life, but I was better than ever! I learned to truly love myself and be confident in the woman that I was. Becoming a client of the NJCBVI in 2006, I was assigned a mobility instructor and a V.R. counselor.

There were still days I was in denial, and at times, I didn't feel like living anymore. However, a praying family and knowing how to pray for myself was my only form of salvation. Today, I am surprising those around me with my accomplishments and living a life I never dreamed possible. With God as my Shepherd, I have started my own organization, 'Unique Eyes,' which distributes blessed field storage bins, bags of non-perishable food, and household items to families throughout Hudson County. I have contacted facilities and organizations to obtain a list of clients to distribute them accordingly throughout the year. I have become a motivational speaker, sharing my story in hopes of helping others who are going through what I've gone through. I was appointed over the Youth Committee at my church, Renew Life Tabernacle, in Elizabeth, New Jersey. I went through training and received my license to become a Licensed Resource Parent, the first visually impaired foster parent in my county.

I am a member of the Northeast, the At-Large Chapter, and several state-wide divisions of the National Federation of the Blind NJ. I have been appointed to the Resolutions Committee. I have been working with NFBNJ leadership and Assemblywoman Yvonne Lopez to protect the civil rights of blind foster and adoptive parents, in addition to assisting those who care for blind or visually impaired individuals. I have also embarked on the endeavor to become a Plus-sized model, becoming the first visually impaired Brand Ambassador for a modeling company 'Butterfly Rhythm'. I am also a member and employee of Heightened Independence and Progress (H.I.P.). I facilitate the Jersey City peer support group. My responsibilities are making calls to remind members of the meetings, answering questions, and providing information about their vision loss. Also, I research topics and secure speakers for the support group. I also set up and direct the transportation for H.I.P. consumers who attend the meetings. Formally, I have assisted with the NFBNJ Bell Academy mentoring and tutoring program for visually impaired students ages four to twelve. I have mentored high school students through the NJCBVI EDGE program for the last three years, offering them guidance with activities of daily living, academic, athletic, self-advocacy, social/emotional development, and several other life skills. My most recent endeavor was completing the Child Development Associate Credential course (C.D.A.) given by the C.D.A. council organization through the Hudson County Urban League Department. May 25, 2022, was my completion date. My observation date was May 05, 2023, which I passed. My exam was on June 05, 2023, which I also passed, and now I am the first blind person in the nation to have received my C.D.A. Here I stand as an early childhood educator, and I vow to continue thriving for inclusion, acceptance, and assisting the minds

of our young children today. The sky's the limit for me, and I intend to reach it! "I may have lost my eyesight but didn't lose my VISION."

Consumer S is a CBVI client who has been visually impaired due to glaucoma. He had received mobility cane training in elementary school, but he stopped using the cane after he became familiar with the school surroundings. He did not use the cane during COVID-19, and his cane skills could have been better. This client entered middle school last year and started to experience more difficulties getting around in a bigger school environment. His Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) talked him into accepting an Orientation and Mobility (O&M) assessment and using a long cane. This client was praised for his decision to accept a long cane as a safe mobility tool. The benefit of using a long cane was further discussed with S during O&M instruction. S realizes that he needs to grow up physically and mentally. A mobility-long cane helps him to become a safe and independent traveler. S took pride in using it in school, demonstrating his maturity and independence. This client is no longer afraid of tripping into obstacles and bumping into other fellow students in school. Since receiving the white cane, he no longer relies on his aide to assist him. S also found out that using a cane alleviates his stress and allows him to use his residual vision more effectively. He has also learned to explain his eye condition effectively to his friends. S has gained much confidence in himself at such a sensitive age. Kudos to his newfound freedom and success, all because of a mobility-long cane!

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 – 2024

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 2024:

February 2

June 7

October 4

December 6

Service Centers and Facilities

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

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