THE COMMISSION EDITION 

Newsletter of the NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

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Dr. Bernice M. Davis Pamela L. Gaston

Acting Executive Director Editor

# From the Director’s Desk

***Happy Spring Everyone!***

CBVI is excited to congratulate and welcome Carole Johnson as the new Commissioner of the NJ Department of Human Services, and Elisa Neira as the new Deputy Commissioner! Both have a tremendous list of accomplishments and have been busy visiting various divisions, getting to know staff and meeting with numerous community partners. In early 2018, CBVI had the pleasure of meeting and hosting a visit from Commissioner Johnson and her Chief of Staff, Andrea Katz. Soon after her appointment, Deputy Commissioner Neira came to meet and greet Newark staff and was quite impressed with CBVI's array of services and its Regional Technology Assistance Center (RTAC). I am confident that each of them will provide DHS and CBVI outstanding leadership and innovation.

In March 2018, I was asked to serve as the Acting Executive Director of CBVI while DHS conducts a search for a new Executive Director. As I have shared with many of you, I am absolutely thrilled to be leading such an incredible organization. As I get to know new staff and reacquaint myself with seasoned staff across our statewide service centers, I continue to be amazed at the level of dedication and passion exhibited by so many of you. My primary goal right now is to listen and learn from staff as well as our many stakeholders and partners. I do know that in CBVI’s 107-year history, the need has never been greater for the type of services and opportunities that we provide to consumers. As in the past, CBVI will continue to work closely with our consumers, stakeholders and community partners to advance its mission of serving blind, deaf-blind and vison impaired individuals across the State of New Jersey.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that CBVI is a truly remarkable organization that has positively impacted the lives of tens of thousands of vision impaired individuals and their families, as well as, recognize those who work tirelessly to advocate for independence and equal opportunities for blind, deaf-blind and vision-impaired individuals. Together, we will confront the challenges that lie ahead and convert them into opportunities to better serve our consumers and constituents.

Be well,

*Dr. Bernice M. Davis*

Acting Executive Director



(Image: Spring is here with butterflies and blossoms)

# Vocational Rehabilitation and Transitional Services – Amanda Gerson, Coordinator

On March 22, 2018, the United States Senate adopted a resolution designating March 22, 2018 as National Rehabilitation Counselors’ Appreciation Day, and commended rehabilitation counselors for their dedication and hard work in providing counseling to individuals with disabilities. The resolution affirms the value of professional rehabilitation counseling training and acknowledges the difference rehabilitation counselors have made and continue to make in the lives of people with disabilities.

On behalf of CBVI, I want to recognize our amazing Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, who every day show dedication and passion to the work of helping blind, vision impaired, and deaf-blind residents of New Jersey achieve success in independence, education, and employment. As the world of Vocational Rehabilitation continues to evolve under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and with positive growth and innovation in our program also comes additional work, please know that you are valued and recognized for the impact you make on a daily basis.

Thank you for all that you do.

# Educational Services – Eva Scott, Director of Blindness Education

*“We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.”* – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Our teachers and their supervisors are hard at work making sure that our students are receiving the instruction in the skills they need to be successful, the tools that allow them to use their skills, and the emotional support needed to motivate them to achieve their highest potential. As always, we maintain a sense of hope for all our students.

**Welcome to Our New and Returning Teachers!**

In mid-January we were happy to welcome **Ryan Vella** as a teacher in the Newark Service Center. Ryan comes to us with great enthusiasm and a wealth of classroom teaching experience. We are delighted to have Ryan working with us, and I know he will have a long and successful career as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) at the Commission.

In mid-March we happily welcomed **Ragan Van Campen** back to Blindness Education in the Newark Service Center. For the last several years, Ragan has been teaching at the Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC), where I know she will be missed. Ragan is an experienced and skilled Braille teacher, and we are very fortunate to have her back.

**Bidding a Fond Farewell to Two of Our Teachers**

In February, two of our teachers in the Cherry Hill Service Center left CBVI. Although we are sad to see them leave us, we wish them all the best life can offer.

**Barbara Ridge** has begun her well-deserved retirement after fourteen years at CBVI. We will miss her skill as a teacher, as well as her humor and her wisdom as a remarkable human being. We sincerely wish her much happiness and many stress-free years of retirement bliss as she embarks upon the next journey of her life.

**Kimberly Mastroianni** has left CBVI to take a position with the Washington Township School District in Gloucester County. Kim is an itinerant road warrior, no more. Her new position will be based in the school district. We will miss Kim’s warm and friendly manner, as well as her creativity in planning Cherry Hill SHARP. We wish Kim much success and happiness both professionally and personally.

**Students Hands-On Alternative Reinforcement Program – SHARP 2018**

Planning for the fourth summer of SHARP is in full swing. Letters and applications went out in mid-January, and just as they did last year, the responses have arrived early. The program is almost filled to capacity. The dates for SHARP 2018 are as follows: Session One (Grades 5 through 8) will occur from July 10through July 26, 2018, and Session Two (Grades 1 through 4) will occur from July 31 through August 16, 2018. This year, the planning teams in all three locations of SHARP (Newark, Freehold, and Cherry Hill) are striving to make the fourth year of the program the best ever. As always, literacy and skills of independence will be a major focus. This year, we will also focus on community service with the dual goal of further developing and preparing the students for the future while promoting the potential of CBVI consumers. It will be an exciting summer of SHARP.

**EDGE Students as SHARP 2018 Helpers**

Last year, seven high school students from our EDGE (Employment, Development, Guidance and Engagement) program worked in SHARP 2017 as high school helpers and role models for our younger students. Their participation in SHARP was a wonderful success that we plan to continue. In February and March, I visited the EDGE Program to interview EDGE students interested in helping out in this year’s SHARP program. The purpose of having these students in SHARP is to help with program activities, but more importantly, their purpose is to demonstrate skills of independence and provide a positive role model for the younger students who attend SHARP.

**The 2018 Annual Teachers’ Symposium**

Our 2018 Annual Teachers’ Symposium will occur over three days in October, with a day for classroom teachers working with Braille readers, a day for classroom teachers working with large print readers, and a day for classroom teachers working with students who are vision impaired with an additional disability. The exact dates of the symposium are October 23rd, October 25th, and October 26th. For the second year, this event will take place at the Department of Children and Families, Professional Center in New Brunswick.

**Time is Flying By**

As I look at the calendar, the first quarter of 2018 is almost over. Time is indeed, flying by. Before we know it, this academic year will be history, and the summer will be upon us. That means, SHARP will begin and end more quickly than we would expect. Then, fall will arrive with the new 2018-2019 academic year. We are approaching the end of the first twenty years of the new millennium. With all the advancements in education, technology and awareness of the potential of people with disabilities I am filled with hope for the future of CBVI students.

# Independent Living & Clinical Services – Elizabeth DeShields, Coordinator

**Assistive Technology/Independent Living: Common Applications - by Eddie Montanez**

As the Assistive Technology Specialist for Independent Living (IL), I work closely with the Rehabilitation Teachers and other IL caseworkers. My duties include conducting assessments, and instruction for our consumers on assistive technology and this also may include recommending the purchase of equipment. I also deliver assistive technology presentations for the groups in our Assistive Support Programs for Independence Renewal and Education (ASPIRE) network and other groups that make requests to IL.

When addressing groups, I am often asked about various applications for IOS systems (iPads and iPhones) and android systems (tablets and android based phones). I discuss various applications and following here are some of the applications that seem to be well received and user friendly. Many of these apps will be well known to you and others may not. This applications list includes a link for easy access. Please note that some of these apps can also be found in the Android Play Store:

**BARD Mobile**

Description: FREE (can also be found in the android play store via Google)

A service of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), Library of Congress. The BARD Mobile app provides access to braille and talking books directly from the NLS Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD). BARD contains nearly 50,000 books, magazines, and music scores in audio and braille formats.

<https://www.applevis.com/apps/ios/books/bard-mobile>

**Dolphin EasyReader**

Description: FREE (can also be found in the android play store via Google)

EasyReader is an accessible reading app for readers with dyslexia, low vision or blindness. Users can browse and download from the world’s largest collection of talking book and newspaper libraries, or copy text from anywhere on your phone and hear EasyReader read it back to you.

<https://www.applevis.com/apps/ios/books/dolphin-easyreader>

**NFB-NEWSLINE**

Description: FREE

NEWSLINE is an information source designed to keep persons who are unable to read conventional newsprint informed about current events locally, nationally, and around the world. NFB-NEWSLINE® Mobile features the text of over three hundred newspapers, forty magazines, plus many more publications.

<https://www.applevis.com/apps/ios/news/nfb-newsline%C2%AE-mobile>

**Be My Eyes**

Description: FREE (can also be found in the android play store via Google)

Be My Eyes is a free app that connects blind and low vision people with sighted volunteers and company representatives for visual assistance through a live video call.

<https://www.applevis.com/apps/ios/lifestyle/be-my-eyes-helping-blind-see>

**Seeing AI**

Description: FREE

Seeing AI is an app that narrates the world around you. Designed for the blind and low vision community, this ongoing research project harnesses the power of AI to open up the visual world and describe nearby people, text and objects. Optimized for use with VoiceOver, the app speaks text as soon as it appears in front of the camera.

<https://www.applevis.com/apps/ios/utilities/seeing-ai>

**Just Press Record**

### Description: Cost $4.99

This app is not free but I find it very helpful. Just Press Record is a simple, professional audio recorder that brings the ultimate convenience of one-tap recording and instant syncing via iCloud to all your devices. Perfect for capturing ideas, thoughts and memos on the go. It provides speech to text transcription, high quality audio playback and effortless sharing via Notes, Messages, Mail or any of your favorite apps that support audio or text. Available for iOS 10, watchOS 3 and macOS.

<https://www.applevis.com/apps/apple-watch/utilities/just-press-recordIn>

To find more useful apps, you can view the entire list by going to:

<https://www.applevis.com/apps/ios-apps-for-blind-and-vision-impaired>

If you are interested in more information about AT/IL services, contact Eddie Montanez at Edwin.montanez@dhs.state.nj.us or Elizabeth DeShields at Elizabeth.deshields@dhs.state.nj.us

# Joseph Kohn Training Center – Del Basha, Manager

# Hopefully the first quarter of the 2018 year has been progressing well for everyone. Thirty years earlier, back in 1988, the Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC) first opened its doors in the city of New Brunswick. Since then, the center has been opening doors for individuals who are blind and vision impaired with the goal of enabling them to increase their independence and self-sufficiency. Students enroll in the JKTC program to learn core skills that are emphasized in the various classes. One of these classes is the Careers class, which is taught by Ed Kawalec, VRC under the supervision of Maria Beras.

**JKTC Careers Class – by Ed Kawalec and Maria Beras**

At the Joseph Kohn Training Center, “Vocational Readiness” is a concept that is put into action throughout all the instructional classes, socialization opportunities, community engagements, work experiences, and speaker presentations. Of course the class called “Careers” is no exception to this vocational effort.  In Careers, JKTC students focus on the steps they will take to obtain a job or to launch a career.  Self-assessment, combined with occupational research, job seeking practice, resume development, networking strategizing, and learning about relevant sources of help, both locally and on-line, all are ingredients of the Careers class.  Aligned with the overall JKTC and CBVI philosophy, the Careers class emphasizes self-empowerment as the key to achieving independence and productivity.

As of January 2018, the Careers class has been further enhanced by the efforts of a Rutgers University graduate student intern, who is contributing her knowledge and talents to our JKTC students’ readiness for the world of work. This continues a long tradition at JKTC of serving as a training site for Rutgers graduate students in the Rehabilitation Counseling Master’s Degree program.  Previous interns have benefitted from their stimulating learning experience at the Center, and have subsequently continued their invaluable contributions to CBVI by joining our organization as new VR staff members.

More recently, on March 13th, the JKTC was visited by 12 graduate students from the Rutgers University Master of Science, Rehabilitation Counseling program, who wanted to gain information about the Joseph Kohn Training Center. They toured the facility, observed classes in action, and met with JKTC students and staff.  This learning experience is intended to raise awareness, within this group of soon-to-be rehabilitation professionals, about the focus of training, the variety of staff specialties, and the diversity of consumers, that all come together at the JKTC.  As always, a highlight for the visitors is to hear directly from JKTC students about their skill development and their satisfying interactions with their fellow JKTC learners.

(Image: Flowers breaking through the snow)

# Business Enterprises of New Jersey – Deacon Truesdale, Manager

The National Automatic Merchandising Association (NAMA) was founded in 1936 and is the association representing the $25 billion United States convenience service industry. Many of the world’s most recognized brands are members of NAMA, which provides advocacy, education and research for its members. BENJ is currently a member of NAMA.

This year NAMA held their annual show from March 20-23 at the Las Vegas Convention Center. The National Association of Blind Merchants (NABM) and RSA Management Group held a Pre-NAMA training session on March 20th. The training session included information on digital vending machine advertising, a strategy for increasing revenue by using vending machine locations for product marketing; security of cashless payments; utilizing Management Suite a software package for creating reports that can be downloaded and customized; a discussion of the changing needs of customers including the increasing demand for healthy choices; equipment innovations; new business opportunities for blind vendors with private companies; how vendors can maximize rebates from approved vendors, and finally, a presentation from Nick Gacos who is the Chair of the BENJ Committee of Business Enterprise Managers and also the President of NABM.

# Regional Service Center Updates

# Southern Region – Jack Thompson, Manager

**New Support Group in Southern Region by Rachel Pichette**

We know that vision loss can be very isolating and can have a devastating impact on the person experiencing it. I have seen this firsthand and wanted to share an experience I had with a consumer and how an O&M lesson soon turned into the founding of a new support group in Marlton, which is in Burlington County.

Mr. N was seen for a first orientation and mobility lesson. He was new to his apartment and was fearful of walking outside of his door to enter the hallway. This led to a great dependency on his family and Mr. N told me that it made him feel guilty because he knew they were very busy with their own lives. During O&M lessons he learned to use a long white cane and was oriented to his hallway. Each door had the name of the resident on it. I read each name to him as he felt the difference between the wall and the difference of sound of each door with his cane. He was very excited to learn that the people who have talked to him in the lobby and sent him a welcome gift when he moved in were his direct neighbors. We practiced the route to all the exits and even walked outside on the garden path in front of the apartment building. This was a feat he doubted he could do, but he was very happy when he realized he was able to navigate using his long white cane.

Although, our goals were small and included locating the garbage room, the mailbox and finding the office and recreation room, this created a great sense of independence for Mr. N and he was noticeably excited and proud of these accomplishments. I suggested Mr. N ride the community transportation offered from his facility and thought that maybe he could attend a support group. There was a vision loss support group about ten minutes away from him but he was not ready to ride the bus independently. I spoke with his apartment management about this issue and she told me that there were four other residents with vision impairments in the same building who receive or received CBVI services. She also provided me with a social worker’s name from the Jewish Federation of Cherry Hill, who was willing to lead a vision loss support group. Although still in progress, Susan Vanino and I are in the process of having the support group open to the public for others in the Marlton area.

Through support groups like this one, participants can share resources and information with each other, provide emotional support, establish connections to reduce isolation and participate in conversations they can all relate to on the things that they have in common.

# New or Noteworthy

**New Jersey’s First Blind Public School Graduates**

Educators and parents of students who are vision impaired began advocating for advancements in educational opportunities and inclusive programs over 185 years ago. It is significant to note that the field of education of blind students was the first to develop a range of educational options beginning with specialized schools in 1829 and extending to inclusive (including "full inclusion") public school programs since 1900.

The Commission’s first Executive Director, Lydia Young Hayes and teacher, Janet Gilchrist Paterson, established the state's first integrated class for blind and sighted students within the Newark school system in 1910.  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. There were ten students in that first class, including the Commission’s first students to graduate from public school, sisters Mary and Louise Curcio.

Mary Josephine Curcio was born on July 10, 1901 to parents Eva Bender and Paul Curcio, in Newark. Blind from birth, she entered public school for the first time at the age of nine when the first integrated class for blind and sighted students was launched in Newark’s Washington Street School in 1910. Before being integrated with sighted students Mary had to master reading, writing braille and typing. She was a successful student who frequently made the honor roll. Mary graduated from grade school in 1917, becoming the first blind person to graduate from a public school in NJ. She attended South Side High School (now Malcolm X. Shabazz High School) and graduated in 1921. She then briefly attended Newark Junior College, and later graduated Douglass College (Rutgers) in 1925, with honors. Mary was also the first blind person to graduate from an accredited college in New Jersey. She then became a Commission employee where she worked as an executive secretary until she retired.

Mary’s sister, Louise Curcio was born in 1904 and was, like her sister, blind since birth. She also attended South Side High School and later graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Music from Douglass College in 1926. She became a noted piano teacher and eventually went on to head the piano department at the Newark Community School of the Arts for 30 years. Louise was also a published author who wrote more than 30 books on piano instruction. She was inducted into the Douglass Society (for distinguished alumnae) in 1974.

Both Curcio sisters passed away in 1987.

**“40” – Submitted by Joseph Ianuzzelli, Sr. Office Appliance Operator, Meyer Center**

My involvement with CBVI began back in 1978, when I became a student at what was then called the “Rehab Center”, located on Broad Street here in Newark.

After that, from 1980 to 1982 I was employed at the Commission’s Contract Workshop, which was also located in Newark on Frelinghuysen Avenue. When the contract shop closed, I was offered the opportunity to work at the Meyer Center in the Large Print Department. I finally became a full-time, permanent state employee in 1983.

April 2nd marks my anniversary with CBVI. I’m glad to say I am still here at the Meyer Center, but I find it interesting and sort of remarkable that I am right here in a building across the street from where it all started 40 years ago.

[**comments**](http://www.nj.com/monmouth/index.ssf/2016/06/nj_girl_to_compete_in_national_braille_competition.html#comments)

# The Last Words

“*Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without Hope and Confidence.”* – Helen Keller

**Please send items or suggestions for the next issue of the *Commission Edition* by or before 11 a.m., Monday, May 21, 2018 to:**

**Pamela.Gaston@dhs.state.nj.us** **and** **Christine.Cooper@dhs.state.nj.us**

(Image: Tulips)



Enjoy the Season!