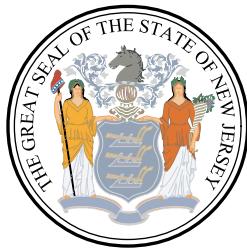


New Jersey
Department of Human Services

Commission for the Blind
and Visually Impaired

*2014 Annual Report
of the
State Rehabilitation Council*



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

2014 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 or visually impaired, their families, and the community.

The Commission recognizes three major thrusts in carrying out this mission, which are:

- (1) Providing specialized services to people with limited vision;
- (2) Educating and working in the community to reduce the incidence of vision loss; and
- (3) Improving social attitudes about blindness and vision-impairment.

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 Ed Sroczynski at 973-648-7504 or via e-mail at edward.sroczynski@dhs.state.nj.us

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State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) - Chairperson

Dear Governor Christie:

In my role of chairperson, I am pleased to present the 2014 Annual Report of the State Rehabilitation Council of the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI). In fiscal year 2014, the SRC continued to expand its outreach to promote public awareness of CBVI's programs and services and the diverse capabilities of blind and vision-impaired New Jersey residents.



The SRC and CBVI are working in partnership to develop a substantive, agency-wide strategic plan to implement practical, innovative strategies that significantly enhance the agency's service delivery system to improve the quality of lives and employment outcomes for CBVI consumers. SRC members played a significant role in arranging and facilitating a Town Hall meeting held at The College of New Jersey as part of a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, to elicit feedback from the agency's consumers and concerned parties about services provided by the agency and to identify unmet needs.

Comments and suggestions were captured and will inform the development of the agency's State Plans for the next three years. SRC meetings continue to be held bi-monthly to build an even closer working relationship between the Council and the Commission.

We welcome your comments and suggestions.

Sincerely,

Nicole Pratt
Chairperson

Executive Director's Report

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI) and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) are pleased to submit the Annual Report for Federal Fiscal Year 2014 (FFY 2014). We welcome this opportunity to update you regarding our programs, achievements, and accomplishments. This Annual Report is required under Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and represents the ongoing teamwork and collaborative effort of the Commission and the SRC. The SRC's support for, and contribution to, the planning and execution of agency programs has resulted in innovative initiatives, yielding yet another productive year for CBVI's mission on behalf of blind and vision-impaired residents of New Jersey.



The Commission and the SRC, with the guidance of an outside consultant, have neared completion of the development of a substantive three-to-five year strategic plan. This plan is expected to transform the Commission's service-delivery systems, creating greater agency-wide consistency and quality services for CBVI consumers. Through six distinct initiatives (a service-delivery re-design, communications improvements, employment program enhancements, education reforms, attention to human resources policies, and cultivation of external partnerships) we are optimistic that CBVI will be greatly positioned to fulfill its mission and historical promise.

CBVI enjoyed a tremendously productive year in helping blind and vision-impaired consumers find integrated, competitive work. During this fiscal year, 331 consumers had their cases closed as successfully employed. This milestone has not been achieved since 2007, reflecting an upturn in the economy and representing considerable effort on behalf of some of our ambitious consumers and dedicated staff.

In an effort to promote a greater spirit of partnership between the Commission and its consumer base, agency leaders joined with members of the National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey during the fall to sponsor an Employment Skills Seminar for blind and vision-impaired job seekers. Additionally, CBVI administrators and members of the elected Committee of Blind Managers affiliated with the state's Business Enterprises New Jersey program, met and carved out the blueprint for a plan to grow New Jersey's Randolph-Sheppard Program, an entrepreneurial initiative that sees legally blind business managers operating vending and other food operations on State and Federal properties.

As usual, CBVI continued its commitment to sponsoring high-quality transition programs for the State's blind and vision-impaired youth. Our innovative Life Skills 101 program, held at the Joseph Kohn Training Center, introduced freshman and sophomore high school students to career planning, skills of independence, college preparation, and information technology. Similarly, our College Prep Experience program, in session from early July to mid-August, was again successful. The program provided rising high school juniors and seniors with the tools and resources for successfully negotiating the transition to post-secondary education. Students attended classes at Raritan Valley Community College with the opportunity to earn upwards of five credits for transfer to the college or university of their choice. They resided at the Joseph Kohn Training Center where they engaged in group sessions covering self-advocacy, independent travel, skills of independence, assistive technology, college preparation, and career planning. Finally, our Work Skills Prep program, in partnership with The College of New Jersey, catered to the needs of transition-age students with complex disabilities, who may not be bound for college, but who may be best suited for other vocational training or immediate employment.

In addition to the Commission's traditional transition programs, during the last year CBVI introduced and began development of several new and creative programs for aspiring youth. We issued a Request for Proposal soliciting the services of a third-party administrator to operate the Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement (EDGE) program, designed to provide blind or vision-impaired students (age 14-21) with transition services to help prepare them for employment and adulthood. The program curriculum will address self-awareness, skills of independence, career exploration, peer-to-peer supports, mentoring, and parent engagement/training. The program will promote full integration of students who are blind or vision-impaired into the mainstream of social and economic life. Further, work has begun on the Student Hands-On Alternatives Re-Enforcement Project (SHARP), a summer, blindness skills program for students in grades 1-8.

In the spring of 2014, The SRC partnered with CBVI to conduct a three-year Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) to identify the rehabilitation needs of individuals with most significant disabilities, minorities with disabilities, those unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program, and individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system. A Town Hall meeting was conducted at The College of New Jersey for this purpose. Additionally, focus groups were conducted to solicit input for the development of a sustainable model for addressing technology needs for seniors, fifty-five years and older. Parents of transition-age students and young adults with vision loss were also consulted to ascertain how CBVI can more effectively serve the needs of this population. The CSNA informs the creation of the Agency's goals and priorities as part of the State Plan forwarded to the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

On October 9, 2014, the entire CBVI staff convened for a state-wide Staff Development Seminar. This day was packed with inspirational speakers, Commission highlights, consumer awards, and afternoon break-out sessions designed to acquaint CBVI staff with the different program disciplines of our agency, infused a renewed organizational commitment to our long-term goals and objectives. This assembly of CBVI staff also served to welcome our newer employees and introduce them to our experienced hands, creating a more unified team.

We are proud of the accomplishments achieved during FFY 2014, in collaboration with the SRC, and we anticipate continuing a close partnership on behalf of New Jersey residents who are blind and vision-impaired. Going forward, CBVI and the SRC will have to navigate the new Federal rules introduced under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act while administering Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living services to blind and vision-impaired consumers, and this will require an enduring and durable partnership.

Please read and enjoy the remainder of this report, which will outline these and other strides made during the previous year. If you would like to learn more about our programs and services, please contact the Commission.

Respectfully submitted by,

Daniel B. Frye, J.D.
Executive Director



Overview of the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

In April of 1909, the New Jersey State Legislature directed that a single agency be formed to provide any and all means which shall be deemed feasible for ameliorating the condition of the blind. The Commission was established in 1910 under the direction of Lydia Young Hayes, a teacher of the blind, who was blind herself, and through the advocacy efforts of Helen Keller. The formation of a single agency to administer to the needs of New Jerseyans who are blind was the culmination of a wave of social consciousness that swept the country in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

As a result, significant strides have been made toward equalizing opportunities for people who are blind or vision-impaired. The Commission, known as the Commission for the Blind until 1982, was at the forefront of that movement and continues to provide services that will assist people with vision loss to reach their highest personal level of independence and economic self-sufficiency. The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired strives to ensure access to services that enable individuals with vision loss to obtain their fullest measure of self-reliance, while assuring dignity and full integration into their community. This is accomplished by the establishment of goals,

priorities, and the provision of services that address the special needs of people living in New Jersey who are blind or vision-impaired. In State Fiscal Year 2014, the agency operated with a budget of \$27,470,000.

The Commission headquarters is located in Newark, New Jersey, at 153 Halsey Street, with a central administrative unit that includes the Office of the Executive Director, Program Administration, Operational Logistics, Fiscal, and Coordinators of direct service delivery disciplines. The Public Information and Staff Development functions, along with the State Rehabilitation Council and the Board of Trustees, are also part of the Commission's central administration.



Major Service Programs Provided By CBVI

Educational Services

Instructors work closely with the child, family members, and local school personnel to provide educational services that allow students who are blind, vision-impaired, or deaf-blind to participate equally with other students in mainstream classroom activities. These services are provided for eligible children (from birth through high school years) and their families.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Vocational Rehabilitation provides a full range of services to assist persons who are blind, vision-impaired, or deaf-blind with the development, acquisition or strengthening of skills to enable them to secure and maintain employment. This can include working in the labor force or operating a business. This program is a federal-state partnership funded by the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

Independent Living Services

Independent living/training services are designed to help people of any age who are blind, vision-impaired or deaf-

blind gain the skills needed to lead a full and productive life. CBVI provides five general types of assistance/instruction with the program, including: daily living skills, communication skills, orientation and mobility, Braille, and eye health.

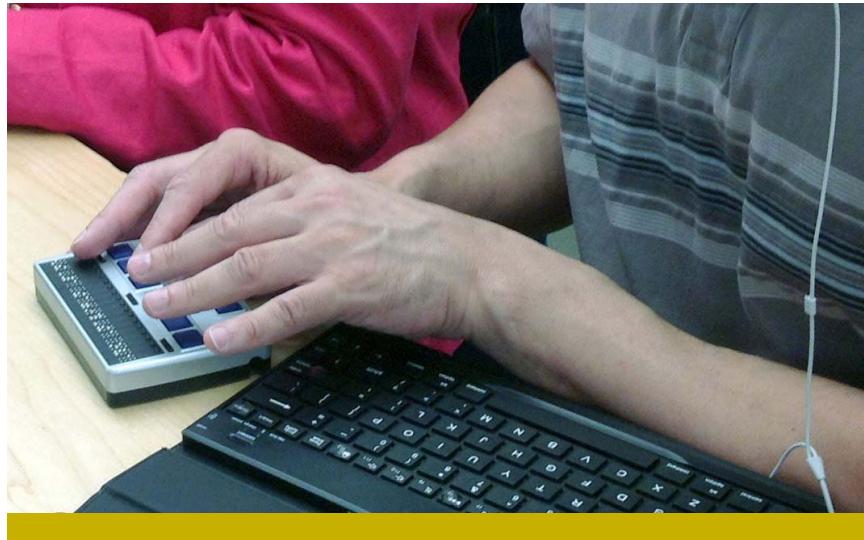
Eye Health Services

The Project BEST (Better Eye-Health Services and Treatment) works to save sight and restore vision whenever it is medically possible. CBVI conducts a variety of educational programs and eye health screenings throughout the state to help detect vision problems and to assist residents of New Jersey with restorative treatment. Annually, Project BEST screens more than 42,000 New Jerseyans.



SRC Working Principles and Responsibilities

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) was established in Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. It gives advice to, and works in partnership with, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency. The members of the State Rehabilitation Council are appointed by the Governor and convene at least five meetings a year. All meetings and public forums are announced, and are open and accessible to the general public. The meetings are held in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meeting Act, NJSA 10:4-6.



The functions of the SRC are to:

- ❖ Review, analyze, and advise CBVI regarding performance of its responsibilities of the agency under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act amendments of 2014;
- ❖ Assist CBVI with the development of State goals and priorities, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the Vocational Rehabilitation program;
- ❖ Advise and assist CBVI with the preparation of the State Plan and amendments to the plan, applications, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations required under the Rehabilitation Act amendments of 2014;
- ❖ Conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of, and consumer satisfaction with, Vocational Rehabilitation services;
- ❖ Prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor and the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) on the status of Vocational Rehabilitation programs operated within the State, and to make the report available to the public;
- ❖ Coordinate with other councils within the State, including the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC);
- ❖ Establish successful working relationships between CBVI, the Statewide Independent Living Council, and Centers for Independent Living within the State; and
- ❖ Perform other functions consistent with the purpose of this title, as the SRC determines to be appropriate.

SRC Board Members

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NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

**Executive Director of CBVI (Ex-Officio)*

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NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Representative
(Ex-Officio)*

SRC Accomplishments in FFY 2014

The SRC met five times in FFY 2014 to foster a collaborative working relationship among members, assist with identifying strategies for improving service delivery to CBVI consumers, advise on the development and implementation of new innovative programs, and provide training opportunities.

The SRC was instrumental in recruiting qualified representatives to expand the expertise and scope of its membership.

In May, the SRC and the Commission conducted a Town Hall meeting as part of a three-year Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. Interested parties from around the State were invited to share their comments and raise issues with the administration of the Commission. Those participants using American Sign Language or a foreign language were provided interpreter services.

SRC members fielded targeted questions designed to solicit input to identify the needs of individuals with vision loss. Participants' comments and suggestions regarding CBVI service delivery were captured and were included in the creation of the agency's goals and priorities as part of the State Plan submitted to the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

SRC members played an active role in the development of an agency-wide, five-year strategic plan to facilitate significant positive change that will impact services and outcomes for the agency's consumers.

Members of the SRC worked closely with the Commission to carry out the fifth annual summer College Prep Experience program, offering high school-aged students the opportunity to earn up to five college credits at Raritan Valley Community College while experiencing dorm life at the Joseph Kohn Training Center in New Brunswick.

SRC membership assumed an active role to increase awareness throughout the community about the unique needs and capabilities of individuals served by the Commission.



Statewide Impact of CBVI Services

COUNTY	ED	IL	IL-OB	VR	PB*
1. Atlantic	65	125	172	120	21
2. Bergen	168	120	226	225	23
3. Burlington	133	77	135	202	13
4. Camden	170	139	171	279	27
5. Cape May	21	25	53	39	7
6. Cumberland	53	70	80	65	11
7. Essex	199	177	269	321	87
8. Gloucester	83	63	96	115	3
9. Hudson	75	113	127	144	48
10. Hunterdon	32	15	20	33	0
11. Mercer	84	58	112	148	14
12. Middlesex	248	160	255	310	42
13. Monmouth	164	136	254	225	1
14. Morris	117	76	104	122	31
15. Ocean	189	107	372	187	6
16. Passaic	123	98	167	172	67
17. Salem	17	18	28	19	2
18. Somerset	79	43	83	94	9
19. Sussex	31	20	16	31	2
20. Union	144	108	195	190	16
21. Warren	17	10	28	14	3

*** Explanation of Abbreviations**

ED-Education (Ages: 0-21 years)

IL-Independent Living (Ages: 54 years and younger)

IL-OB – Independent Living for Older Individuals who are Blind (Ages: 55 years +)

VR – Vocational Rehabilitation (Ages: 14 years and older)

PB – Project BEST (Serving all age groups)

Project BEST (Better Eye-Health Services and Treatment)

Project BEST comprises all eye health services offered by CBVI, a component of which is the screening unit. The primary roles of the Project BEST screening unit are to identify eye disease in target populations of New Jersey residents that do not have access to eye health care, facilitate treatment through community providers, and to serve as a robust source of CBVI referrals for those who meet the various eligibility criteria for blindness training and the other services covered under N.J.A.C. 10:94. Project BEST has provided a growing array of services since 1979. The screening unit continues to meet its statutory obligation to increase access to the community. Approximately 500,000 residents have been screened in the past decade.

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.

Approximately fifty percent of all incidences of blindness are preventable with proper detection and follow up. Project BEST provides, in conjunction with the Department of Health and CDC, a Diabetic Eye Disease Detection Screening, targeting populations with diagnosed diabetes. 43% of those attending these events have active ocular pathology. This program continues to grow, facilitating increased outreach for those with the disease. The grant award has been increased to \$125,000 for each of the past two years. The Early Childhood Screening program (Pre-School Vision Screenings) identifies impediments to education, as well as eye disease specific to that age group. Migrant Worker Screenings and the Adult Vision Screenings target primarily adult populations, but are available to children as well. All venues offer an eye health education component. CBVI staff also advocate for Affordable Care Act enrollment for all eligible residents.

2014 Highlights (Number of people served)

Adult Vision Screening	8,158
Pre-School Vision Screening	24,282
On-Site Screening	6,699
Migrant Screening	871
Diabetic Eye Disease Detection Program*	1,227
Total Individuals Screened	41,237

**Note: 768 consumers with diabetes were screened at venues other than the DEDD Program, bringing the total number of adults with diabetes screened to 1995.*

Total Number of Screening Events	990
Referred for Further Evaluation	3,331
Referred for additional CBVI services	529

Project BEST strives to expand services to address the need for access to eye health care in all 21 counties. Working closely with Federally Qualified educational Health Centers and other community-based medical hubs, and appearing at large public gatherings such as health fairs, Project BEST will continue to return people with vision loss or at risk of vision loss to the workforce, provide education regarding systemic health conditions associated with vision loss, and serve CBVI by identifying residents in need of blindness skills training services.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

The SRC is pleased to acknowledge the contributions of the Commission's staff in assisting our consumers to achieve increased levels of independence and obtain employment. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services are authorized from a federally funded program emanating from the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The VR program is a state-federal partnership with state government providing matching funds.

VR services provided by the Commission under this program are designed to assist individuals who are blind, vision-impaired, and deaf-blind to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain 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;
- ❖ information and support services to assist an individual in exercising informed choice, including referral and services from other agencies;
- ❖ Physical and mental restoration services;
- ❖ Vocational and other training services;
- ❖ Maintenance and transportation related to the rendering of any VR services;
- ❖ Vocational rehabilitation services

to family members to assist in achieving the employment goal for an individual with a disability, e.g., family counseling;

- ❖ Interpreter services, including sign language and oral interpreter services, for individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, and tactile interpreting services for individuals who are deaf-blind;
- ❖ Independent living skills instruction including personal and home management;
- ❖ Orientation and mobility services to instruct in methods of independent, safe 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;
- ❖ 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.

Standards and Indicators

The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) has established evaluation standards and performance indicators for all state Vocational Rehabilitation programs, which include outcome and related measures of program performance. RSA mandates that state Vocational Rehabilitation programs submit performance data on an annual basis. The state-specific and national data is compiled and analyzed for tracking performance success or need for improving performance levels.

The Evaluation Standards assess Vocational Rehabilitation program impact on employment using Performance Indicators. These indicators measure employment outcomes not just in terms of numbers, but also in terms of their impact on meaningful, quality of life issues, such as salaries and placements within competitive work settings.

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired uses the Standards and Indicators to benchmark the quality of services that are provided to consumers. Despite challenging economic conditions, this year the Commission surpassed expectations for both overall Evaluation Standards set by the RSA and exceeded required levels on 6 of 7 Performance Indicators. Below are the RSA standards and the Commission's performance for the Federal Fiscal Years 2012, 2013, and 2014.

Total number of individuals employed:

RSA expects to see a matching or a yearly increase.

FFY 2012	- 284
FFY 2013	- 280
FFY 2014	- 331

Percentage of individuals who are earning at least minimum wage:

CBVI exceeded RSA goals for this standard.

RSA Standard	- 35.40%
FFY 2012	- 89%
FFY 2013	- 94%
FFY 2014	- 95.50%

Percentage of individuals who achieve an employment outcome after the development of an employment plan:

RSA Standard	- 68.90%
FFY 2012	- 71%
FFY 2013	- 69%
FFY 2014	- 72%

Percentage of individuals employed who have a significant disability:

CBVI exceeded RSA goals for this standard.

RSA Standard	-	89.00%
FFY 2012	-	98%
FFY 2013	-	93%
FFY 2014	-	89.60%

Ratio of the hourly wage of individuals employed compared to the state average hourly wage:

RSA Standard	-	0.59
FFY 2012	-	0.56
FFY 2013	-	0.56
FFY 2014	-	0.51

Change in the percentage of individuals employed whose current earnings are their primary source of economic support:

CBVI exceeded RSA goals for this standard.

RSA Standard	-	30.40%
FFY 2012	-	43%
FFY 2013	-	60%
FFY 2014	-	35.10%

Ratio of the service rate minority individuals compared to the non-minority rate:

CBVI exceeded RSA goals for this standard.

RSA Standard	-	0.80
FFY 2012	-	0.86
FFY 2013	-	0.95
FFY 2014	-	0.87

Participants in the Vocational Rehabilitation program attained employment in the following fields:

3.9%	Management
1.5%	Business and Financial
1.8%	Computer and Mathematical
0.9%	Architecture and Engineering
4.5%	Community and Social Services
0.3%	Legal
7.3%	Education, Training, and Library
2.4%	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media
3.3%	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical
5.4%	Healthcare Support
0.9%	Protective Service
6.3%	Food Preparation and Serving
3.9%	Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance
3.9%	Personal Care and Service
9.1%	Sales
13.3%	Office and Administrative Support
0.3%	Farming, Fishing, and Forestry
2.1%	Construction and Extraction
4.8%	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair
5.1%	Production
10.9%	Transportation and Material Moving
3.3%	Homemaker
3.0%	Business Enterprises – NJ (Manager)

Business Enterprises – New Jersey

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI) is the State Licensing Agency (SLA) for the Federal Randolph-Sheppard program. Business Enterprises of New Jersey (BENJ), a unit within CBVI, directly oversees New Jersey's Randolph-Sheppard program. As such, BENJ is responsible for coordinating the operation of fifty-two (52) Randolph-Sheppard food locations across the state. The types of operations include: 7 cafeterias, 2 dry stands, 1 military cafeteria, 27 snack bars, and 15 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 criminal background check, and be a United States citizen. The BENJ unit is comprised of: one Supervising Community Program Specialist, six Field Representatives, and one Administrative Assistant.

BENJ 2014 Highlights

- ❖ Total gross sales: \$14,940,958
- ❖ Manager average net income: \$45,528
- ❖ Total number of Managers served: 54
- ❖ Total number of consumers evaluated for Small Business Program: 3
- ❖ Total number of consumers evaluated for BENJ: 5
- ❖ Total number of consumers trained: 3
- ❖ Total number of consumers receiving placements: 3



- ❖ Office relocation: Business Enterprise office moved from Mercer County to New Brunswick.
- ❖ Strategic Plan: A plan was created with the participation of the Committee of Business Enterprise Managers, CBVI's Executive Director, Chief of Program Administration, and other interested staff and consumers.
- ❖ New Locations Setup: Veterans Administration Building (Newark), Department of Children and Families (New Brunswick).
- ❖ New Type of Operations: Setup of new Micro Market cashless, expanded vending operations in the New Jersey Public Health, Environmental and Agriculture Laboratory (NJPHEAL) building.

- ❖ The snack bar at the Burlington County Courthouse in Mount Holly, NJ was completely renovated.
- ❖ Vending operations were arranged for a state building populated by staff for the Department of Environmental Protection in Trenton, NJ.

BENJ 2015 Highlights

- ❖ A BENJ training session is underway, with a starting roster of six (6) consumers to be trained.
- ❖ Possibility of computerized vending payment system will be explored. This will allow for buyers to use credit card capacity.

- ❖ Revision of Chapter 97, New Jersey's "mini Randolph-Sheppard" and the governing document of the BENJ, are planned.
- ❖ A continuing education program for Blind Managers is planned.
- ❖ A multi-year program of replacing aging vending machines at postal facilities and other vending locations will be initiated.
- ❖ BENJ intends to explore the possibility of adding other micro markets in locations to be determined.



Disability Mentoring Day

In recognition of Disability Employment Awareness Month, the Commission participated in a Disability Mentoring Day event at CitiBank in Lower Manhattan on October 15, 2014. The event focused on increasing internship and employment opportunities; promoting disability and

diversity recruitment for a more inclusive workforce; and fostering career oriented mentoring opportunities. CBVI job seekers spent the day exploring their career options, learned from business professionals, engaged in mentoring activities, and met with HR Recruiters.



During the morning session, Chris Rosa, Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at the City University of New York, spoke about strategies for assisting students with disabilities to prepare for the workforce and highlighted the University's partnership with Citibank's Inclusion and Diversity Department. During the afternoon, job seekers met with members of the staff to learn, first-hand, the day-to-day operations in the areas of Finance, Technology, Records Management, Event Planning, and HR/Recruiting/Employee Development. HR Recruiters met with job seekers to review and fine-tune their resumes, and these professionals provided practical suggestions for accessing job leads and strategies for negotiating job interviews. Job seekers left the event equipped with recruiter contact for follow-up in their field of interest as employment and internship opportunities become available.

Joseph Kohn Training Center

The Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC) is a state-of-the-art residential facility that offers rehabilitation and employment services for residents of New Jersey with vision loss. Located in New Brunswick, the JKTC accommodates up to twenty-four students. There is no fee for program participants. The mission of the JKTC is to assist blind and vision-impaired individuals to lead full and productive lives by providing a wide range of services designed to facilitate independence and employment. All program participants engage in a two-week comprehensive assessment to establish a baseline of skills and identify areas for improvement. An Individualized Training Plan for each participant targets specific activities that facilitate personal adjustment and career planning. Toward the end of the program, participants engage in a four-week work experience at a business in the New Brunswick area to gain relevant experience in their area of interest and strengthen their skills and work habits in preparation for employment. Participating businesses include the Heldrich Hotel, All American Pet Resort, Best Buy, Alliance Center for Independence, and the Salvation Army. In 2014, opportunities were expanded to include the New Brunswick Police Department, NJ Travel Independence Program, Somerset Patriots, Willow Creek Rehabilitation facility, and Barnes & Noble Bookstore at Rutgers. Program participants' engagement at the work sites serve to educate the business community about the diverse capabilities of people who are blind and vision-impaired, and dispel misconception about vision loss.

The Center's program curriculum is designed to enable participants to become aware of their abilities, harness their strengths, foster their independence, and establish a realistic employment plan. A central tenet of the curriculum focuses on facilitating participants' adjustment to the loss of vision. Each student, regardless of their remaining vision, is required to engage in all areas of training using sleep shades, which is an instructional tool that fosters sensory development and the mastery of blindness skills. The core areas of instruction offered at the Center include:

Braille Instruction: Reading and writing Braille is introduced to all students regardless of their degree of remaining vision, to accomplish day-to-day activities including labeling kitchen items, personal folders, grocery lists, telephone numbers, etc.

Communication Skills: Training focuses on methods of personal communication such as handwriting, use of the telephone, accessible technology for storage and retrieval of information.

Activities of Daily Living: Participants acquire adaptive skills to perform everyday responsibilities such as grooming, clothing management, budgeting, grocery shopping, maintaining their living space, meal preparation, and safe techniques in the kitchen.

Orientation and Mobility: Participants learn to orient to the environment and navigate safely by becoming aware of non-

visual cues and proper cane techniques. Participants internalize skills of navigation through intensive practice at the Center while progressing towards becoming a safe and confident independent traveler.

Technology Skills: Participants' level of proficiency and access to technology are assessed to determine appropriate adaptive computer software and training to accommodate their technology needs. Training is provided to strengthen the necessary skills and technological proficiency for succeeding in a work or educational environment. Participants learn to navigate the Internet, access e-mail as well as the full Microsoft suite of applications.

Nursing Services: Participants are provided with information about their dietary requirements, eye condition, overall eye health, and instruction in adaptive techniques for administering medications safely and independently. Health care needs are addressed in collaboration with the program participants' personal physicians and an in-house dietitian.

Academic Skills: Writing skills, reading and math levels are evaluated to provide targeted instruction to improve academic proficiency aligned with goals outlined in the participant's training plan.

Psychological Services: Consultation with an onsite psychologist assists participants to identify specific adjustment issues related to vision loss. Group discussions, lectures,

guest speakers, and audio-video presentations address participant's adjustment and facilitate their full engagement in the program. This is supplemented by short-term counseling and administration of clinically-oriented instruments.

Career Assessment and Vocational

Counseling: Standardized testing is administered to help JKTC participants become aware of their vocational interests, aptitudes, strengths, and skill sets. Vocational Counselors interpret the assessment results and work closely with each participant to identify a suitable work goal and develop a viable plan for employment.

In 2014, a new Health and Wellness Center was established to facilitate JKTC participants' awareness of protocols for adopting a healthy lifestyle. Additionally, the overall JKTC program curriculum was modified to include extended training sessions to allow for participants to benefit from additional blocks of time for instruction. The Center's philosophy, environment, and curriculum foster a realistic, positive attitude toward vision loss through promoting self-empowerment. This facilitates program participant's access to the necessary tools and knowledge for engagement in an active lifestyle, integration in their communities, and the achievement of an employment outcome.

Success Story...Adam Anthony

Ahen Adam Anthony began the JKTC program, he was reserved and reluctant to participate in program activities. Adam rarely engaged in light conversation, choosing to express his opinions in a negative and often inappropriate fashion. He demonstrated limited ability to navigate the environment, read basic Braille, and perform skills of independence. Adam often treaded closely to the line of unacceptable behavior for the workplace with his language and creative expression. In summary, he was not a soft and fuzzy, or happy guy. Adam's potential to succeed in the program was questionable. As the weeks and months progressed, Adam became more open to new ideas, exercised patience with himself and others, and was less frustrated and impulsive. His independent skills significantly improved. Adam mastered the Braille alphabet, words, phrases, and sentences. His computer skills and his ability to safely navigate the environment also improved. Adam was observed giving other program participants words of advice and encouragement, or just making someone laugh to improve their stressful day. He became president of the JKTC Student Advisory Board.

Adam battled anxiety, fear, and lack of confidence daily. As he tackled the smaller challenges, he was proud, but still anxious about the larger ones. In spite of his reservations, Adam accepted the challenge of residing in the JKTC independent apartment for two weeks where he practiced maintaining his living space, preparing meals, grocery shopping in the community, and handling a budget. He was extremely anxious at the prospect of navigating to the



grocery store and shopping alone. However, he was successful to the point of having to often ask other participants he entertained to leave the apartment after they had stayed too long and eaten everything that he cooked. As he mastered his ability to independently read and write, Adam engaged in additional Braille lessons and often spent extended time journaling about his experiences. Even after graduating the program, Adam returned to the JKTC to share his experience to inspire his fellow participants to transform their lives by accessing all the JKTC has to offer. At the CBVI Statewide Training Seminar in October, Adam was awarded the "Transformation Award" in recognition of his accomplishments during the JKTC program. Adam is diligently working with his VR Counselor to access a job in retail. His long-range plan is to pursue his childhood dream of managing a Comic Book Store.

Technological Support Services

CBVI offers New Jersey residents who are blind and vision-impaired support to acquire assistive technology that is necessary to gain or retain 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 to have direct access to computer equipment and other information technology. The goal of the unit is to minimize barriers to task performance by taking into account the consumers specific needs. Technological Services Specialists (TSS) are responsible for maintaining and staffing five comprehensive and up-to-date Regional Technology Assistance Centers (RTAC) located throughout New Jersey. Each RTAC is stocked with a variety of assistive technology devices and is open to the public by individual or group appointments. Three of these labs are located in CBVI's Service Centers (Newark, Freehold, and Cherry Hill), the fourth is operated in partnership with the NJ State Library Talking Book and Braille Center, and is located in Trenton, and the fifth is located at the Joseph Kohn Training Center in New Brunswick.

In addition, the regional TSS staff perform technology assessments and skill evaluations for consumers who are seeking employment and require equipment adaptations to assist in carrying out their work and/or tasks in an educational environment. The specialists make recommendations suitable for each



consumer's unique situation, such that it would enable the individual to efficiently address his/her professional or academic responsibilities. Following the evaluation, both in the regional offices and at the JKTC, a comprehensive report is completed by the TSS, which includes recommendations for equipment, software, integration and/or training. Recommended training is time limited and goals are specifically linked to tasks and learning objectives via vocational training or on the job. The report details the number of training hours anticipated for the consumer to reach proficiency in the needed skill sets. Training services are provided by a service provider under contract with the Commission serving the Northern, Central, and Southern regions of the State. Training is provided one-on-one with consumers in their home, at training locations, or work-site. Contracted agencies provide periodic progress reports and a final report when training is completed.

The TSS staff installs, sets up, and configures recommended equipment for consumers on-site and provides brief instruction on proper utilization of assistive technology. TSS work with outside agencies, businesses, and institutions to evaluate work environments with respect to accessibility for vision-impaired employees. The specialists also suggest appropriate solutions to outside agencies that would make these workplaces and the software applications they use more compatible with assistive technology.

TSS staff located at the Joseph Kohn Training Center conduct an initial skills assessment to determine the appropriate adaptive computer software and training goals suitable to the consumers' needs. Training is then provided to strengthen the necessary skills and technological proficiency that facilitates the opportunity to succeed in a work or educational environment. The TSS staff also provide technical support, evaluation, and training during CBVI summer pre-vocational programs for transition-age consumers.

In 2014, TSS assessed the skill level and assistive technology needs of students referred to the College Prep Experience program held at Raritan Valley Community College. They configured the students' laptops to the college web portal, provided support and short term training with navigating the computer, and helped students to access textbooks in electronic formats. TSS staff provided instruction on basic computer navigation for students with complex disabilities attending the Work Skills Prep program at The College of New Jersey. TSS were instrumental in developing a curriculum designed to introduce freshman and sophomore high

school students attending the Life Skills 101 program to computer concepts and tools using both mainstream and assistive technology. The students were given an overview of assistive technology equipment and software for accessing the computer. Students were instructed to navigate keyboard shortcuts to access Internet Explorer and MS Office including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. They were introduced to methods and procedures for downloading books in accessible formats. Accessibility features of the iPad were reviewed as well as internet safety and internet research tools.

The Adaptive Technology Loan Program is a CBVI funded project, managed on a day-to-day basis by the Talking Book and Braille Center. The loaner program is intended to provide computer access and allow for technology training to CBVI VR clients as they move toward job readiness. Equipment available for loan includes desktop PCs, laptops, adaptive software, printers, scanners, and CCTVs. Laptops are only available for students enrolled in remedial college courses.



College Prep Experience

BVI partnered with Raritan Valley Community College (RVCC) for the fifth annual College Prep Experience. During the program, blind and vision-impaired high school students engaged in academic and independent living activities that enhance their potential to succeed as they transition from high school to college. Students were enrolled in courses at RVCC with the opportunity to earn five transferable credits to a college or university of their choice. Eleven students engaged in this innovative project, which took place from July 7 through August 15, 2014. All students participated in the RVCC College Experience course, collaboratively taught by a Raritan Valley faculty member and a Commission teacher of blind and vision-impaired students. The course provided a comprehensive overview of tools and strategies for negotiating college life including: using campus and technological resources, time management, critical thinking, study skills, note taking, test taking strategies and organizational skills. Each student was also enrolled in a course of their choice selected from the RVCC Summer Course Catalogue.

The students resided at the Joseph Kohn Training Center in New Brunswick, where they participated in a variety of activities to supplement their experience at RVCC. The activities included individual and group lessons covering communication skills, independent living skill development, travel skills,

assistive technology and career exploration. Each activity incorporated an experiential educational component that resulted in a meaningful learning experience for the students. The students engaged in panel discussions on a variety of topics; these topics included transitioning to college and adulthood, self-advocacy, self-determination, and career planning. Discussion panels included Commission staff, current college students, Commission college counselors, former Commission consumers who are successfully employed, and representatives from the American Foundation for the Blind and the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce. At the program commencement, each student received a certificate of participation and reported that they were more confident and better prepared for their transition from high school to college.



Work Skills Prep Program

This summer marked the ninth anniversary of CBVI's partnership with the School of Education at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) to offer the innovative Work Skills Prep program (WSP). This two-week residential program offers extended school year service and vocational assessment for high school students who are blind, deaf-blind, or vision-impaired, ages 16 to 21 with complex educational needs. The goal of the program is to give students the opportunity to learn and/or enhance their skills to enable them to engage in the competitive job market.

Twenty-four high school students participated in the program that was conducted July 7th through August 3rd. Each student attended one of the two consecutive two-week sessions. Students lived in dorms and attended classes on the TCNJ campus. They also engaged in work experiences in the community such as The Talking Book and Braille Center, NJ Manufacturers Insurance Company, Barnes and Noble, Hampton Inn/ Hilton Hotels, Trenton Thunder/Riverfront Stadium, and Sodexho food service facilities on the TCNJ campus. Classroom activities focused on person-centered planning, functional academics including Braille/print literacy and assistive technology skill development. Additional topics included resume development, effective communication skills, dressing for success, and team work. Each student worked at least a half day during weekdays to sample various job sites and explore their career interests. Students spent two hours each day learning the "soft skills"(social skills) that are essential for obtaining and maintaining gainful employment.

Student's vocational interests and aptitudes, assistive technology skills, and functional academics were assessed. Life Skills Training exposed students to alternative methods for performing activities of daily living, access to assistive technology devices, and methods for refining their skills to accommodate low or no vision. Each student was interviewed by staff to develop a profile for implementing "Person-Centered Planning."

Even with a very busy schedule, there was some time for extracurricular activities. In the evenings, students attended an audio-described movie, went bowling, out for ice cream, made use of the many facilities of the TCNJ campus, or developed their own evening events. Students also presented a talent show and participated in various arts and crafts projects. In addition, students traveled to the Quakerbridge Mall and engaged in other related community activities.

All students were required to create a portfolio and PowerPoint presentation detailing what they learned during the program and the supports needed to achieve their short and long term goals. Students made a formal presentation for their peers, instructional staff, and guests on the final day of classes. A graduation ceremony was held to celebrate the students' talents and accomplishments. Program reports were shared with students and their family/guardian, the local school district case manager, and CBVI Education and Transition caseworkers.

Success Story...Brian Altamura—WSP Alumni

Brian was first referred to the Work Skills Preparation (WSP) Program at The College of New Jersey in 2011 by his CBVI Transition Counselor. At first, Brian was reluctant to attend because he was uncertain about how he could engage in and benefit from the program. When he turned 21, Brian recognized that the program would give him the supports and guidance he needed for planning his future, so he decided to apply.

Brian arrived at the program motivated to work, and expressed his desire to earn a paycheck in the near future. The WSP staff helped Brian to draw out the skills he already possessed and made him more aware of how he can apply his strengths and talents in his adult life. He came to the program with a goal to work with computers, but left with skills that could be applicable to multiple opportunities and a broader view of the possibilities that could earn him that paycheck!

After the WSP Program, Brian was actively engaged with exploring work possibilities. He met and communicated with his VR Counselor on a regular basis. The counselor quickly recognized Brian's potential and submitted a referral to secure supported employment services. The counselor spotted a help wanted



ad for a warehouse position at the Toys R Us Distribution Center in Mount Olive, and she knew Brian would be a strong candidate for the position. Brian was well prepared for the interview, with his updated resume and work portfolio he created while attending the WSP program. Not only did Brian land the job, but he only required the direct support of the job coach for the first two weeks on the job due to his strong initiative and level of independence!

Life Skills 101

The Commission conducted the second annual Life Skills 101 program at the Joseph Kohn Training Center from July 14 through August 7, 2014. This innovative program is designed to provide freshman and sophomore high school students who are blind and vision-impaired with a hands-on learning experience to gain the necessary tools and self-awareness to facilitate their preparation for life after high school graduation. Life Skills 101 is a day program in session at the Joseph Kohn Training Center on Tuesdays and Thursdays over a four week period. The curriculum consists of experiential learning activities that maximized the students learning experience in the areas of Career Exploration, Skills of Independence, College Preparation and Information Technology. The program is staffed by Commission employees who have expertise in the subject matter for each of the program areas.

Career Exploration: This module incorporated staff lectures, group discussion, audio-video presentations, guest speakers, interactive games, homework assignments, student presentations, and interviewing exercises. Topics covered included career themes, informational interviews, occupational research, job interviews, resume preparation, self-disclosure and how personal values influence vocational choices. Students were encouraged to ask questions about job seeking skills and labor market issues, and services offered by the Commission to assist with vocational planning.

Skills of Independence: Students acquired skills and knowledge essential for living in a dormitory setting or apartment away from home. Topics included money management and budgeting, clothing management, food planning and preparation, and orientation and mobility. Students learned to board a bus, pay

their fare and alert the driver when they needed to disembark. A variety of games, role plays, discussions, and practical experiences were used to illustrate the concepts included in this module.

College Preparation: Students were introduced to college concepts, the difference between high school and college, and how to research and select an appropriate college or university. Students learned how to navigate the college application process. Topics included college application terminology, writing a college application essay and gathering needed documents, and other essential items for completing the application process. Time management skills and self-advocacy skills were also covered.

Information Technology: Students were given an overview of assistive technology equipment and software used to access the computer. Keyboard shortcuts were taught for navigating Windows, Internet Explorer and MS Office. Students were given instruction in navigating MS Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. They were introduced to websites, applications and equipment for downloading books in accessible formats. The iPad and its accessibility features were also reviewed as well as Internet safety, Internet research tools and tips. Other topics included email navigation and scanning documents.

Life Skills 101: Provides clarity for determining the students' next step for negotiating transition planning. A report charting the students' progress during the program is available for review by CBVI Education and Transition caseworkers, the students' families, and other professionals working with each student.

Deaf-Blind Services

The CBVI Deaf-Blind unit provides transition and Vocational Rehabilitation services to individuals with dual sensory impairments, i.e., the combination of hearing and vision loss. The agency employs two Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (Deaf-Blind Specialists), one located in the Newark Service Center serving the northern region of the State and the other in the Cherry Hill Service Center serving the southern half of the State. A full range of services are provided to

assist individuals with hearing and vision loss to reach their highest level of independence and prepare for, obtain, or retain employment.

Special attention is given to the unique communication needs of individuals who are deaf-blind. Interpreter services and special equipment may be provided to help individuals maximize their independence and achieve their employment goals.

Support Service Providers of New Jersey

Into its fifth year, the Support Service Providers (SSP) program continues to assist adults who are deaf-blind to gain access to and integrate in their communities. SSP's relay visual and environmental information and serve in the role of sighted guides to facilitate communication and provide support. CBVI deaf-blind consumers eligible to receive Vocational Rehabilitation services may be eligible to receive up to sixteen hours per month of SSP services. By promoting and supporting employment for adults who are deaf-blind, SSP-NJ encourages community integration through the development and implementation of a statewide network of Support Service Providers.

In accordance with program guidelines, Deaf-Blind program participants select when and how they want to use SSPs, and their SSPs of choice. If asked to match, the skills of the SSP are considered as well as the needs of the consumer and the community location

of both individuals. SSPNJ program policy includes priority training for applicants recommended by program participants. For new program participants who may not know those in the SSP network, SSPNJ provides community events where everyone can get to know each other in a neutral community activity, such as shopping in a mall. This way, program participants and SSPs can spend time "testing each other out" for compatibility before committing to working with each other. SSPNJ Advisory Council meetings are held quarterly, and are also attended by the SSPNJ business manager, program director, and regional managers.

The number of assignments completed in the FFY ending September 30, 2014, was 860, an increase of 301 (154%) over the 2013 figure of 559 assignments. Further, in 2014, SSPNJ completed 224 assignments directly related to community integration, an increase of 133% over the 2013 figure of 168 assignments.

iCanConnect/NJ

The iCanConnect/NJ program is a partnership between the Commission and the Center for Sensory and Complex Disabilities at The College of New Jersey to provide services, devices, and software to increase access to telecommunications and the internet for individuals who have a combined hearing and vision loss, and who meet income criteria, i.e., deaf-blind and have income less

than 400% the Federal poverty level. The program is mandated by the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 and established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Program staff members provide assessments, equipment and related training for eligible individuals throughout the state.



State Rehabilitation Council Goals for FFY 2015

- ❖ The SRC will continue to meet at least five times in FFY 2015 to maintain its effective working relationship among members and the CBVI Administration.
- ❖ The SRC Chair will work collaboratively with agency administration and the SRC Chair for the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, to develop training protocols to educate new Council members on the role and responsibilities of the SRC membership.
- ❖ SRC members with vision impairments will participate in Commission sponsored programs and activities to share their knowledge base and expertise with consumers, and to serve as mentors and role models.
- ❖ The SRC will continue to be involved in public outreach so that agencies and individuals will better understand the capabilities of persons who are blind and vision-impaired.
- ❖ The SRC will assist CBVI with the implementation of a College Prep Experience for high school students with vision loss in conjunction with the Bonner Fellowship Program at The College of New Jersey.
- ❖ The SRC will assist CBVI to expand the new Life Skills 101 program designed to assist freshman and sophomore high school students to develop basic life skills that facilitate the next step of their transitional plan.
- ❖ The SRC and CBVI will collaborate to implement a program that enables high school students who are blind and vision-impaired to develop skills of independence, expand their career awareness, and facilitate their transition to adulthood through the implementation of career preparation, mentoring, and independent living services.
- ❖ The SRC will assist CBVI with the implementation of protocols outlined in the agency's three-year Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment to address VR service needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, minorities with disabilities who are un-served or underserved by the VR program, as well as individuals served through the statewide workforce investment system.
- ❖ The SRC will continue to collaborate with the Commission to facilitate the development of a three-to-five year plan to incorporate innovative and practical measures to ensure the ongoing provision of quality services to enable CBVI consumers to achieve their rehabilitation and employment goals.
- ❖ The SRC will revamp and expand SRC sub-committees to foster collaboration to address the agency's VR initiatives.
- ❖ A designated SRC sub-committee will review and analyze CBVI policies and procedures to recommend any necessary improvements to the agency's administration of services and programs.

Success Story...Stacey Bertonazzi

I am 33 years old, and have been totally blind since birth due to retinopathy of prematurity. At first, my parents had difficulty adjusting but soon learned that anything was possible. CBVI provided early intervention and consulting services for me and my parents. Throughout my childhood, I received instruction from teachers of the vision-impaired who patiently taught me to read and write Braille, calculate math, learn to type and access computer applications. I developed safe travel skills and learned to be independent with my self-care.

CBVI offered guidance to help me achieve my employment goals. The agency provided financial support and adaptive equipment, which enabled me to successfully complete my Bachelor's Degree. Before finishing college, I became a volunteer at the Margaret Winchester Center for the Blind. I loved going there! The Director, Margaret Winchester, blind herself, was always kind and understanding, and became my inspiration. After two years I was hired as a Braille and computer teacher at the Center.

Six years later, I accepted the position of Independent Living Specialist at Resources for Independent Living in Vineland, NJ. The Commission provided a laptop, instruction to upgrade my computer skills and mobility training, which helped me to easily acclimate to my new role. Serving in this role continues to be rewarding to this day.

My love of music inspired me to become a member of the high school choir, the Vineland Singing Ambassadors, and Our Lady of the

Blessed Sacrament Choir. The directors of these groups were extremely willing to adapt any music to suit my needs. These affiliations enabled me to develop lasting friendships.

I was the recipient of the Dr. J.P. Cleary Award for the highest average in elementary school. I was proudly given the Buena Unsung Hero Award and the Principal Leadership Award. At my high school graduation, the principal noted that I helped my sighted peers to develop a new awareness. In college I became a member of the National Honor Society and received the Guidance Award. In addition, I received an outstanding service award from the Margaret Winchester Center. All of these awards are reminders that I can do anything.

My plans for the future are to continue working for Resources for Independent Living. Maybe someday, work for the Commission for the Blind. I believe that helping others achieve their goals and showing them how to look on the bright side of life is my destiny. I would advise anyone who is faced with challenges to convince themselves that anything is possible. I have sometimes become stubborn with not accepting "no" for an answer. My drive and determination is a catalyst for a happy life. Who knows, someday I may drive a car!



Success Story...Tim Brunemeyer

In his early childhood growing up in Pennsylvania, it became clear to Tim Brunemeyer's parents that their son experienced problems with his vision. They observed that while other children were developing eye-hand coordination, he was not. Tim recalls, "I was told I had a weak left eye, was dyslexic, had poor eye-hand coordination, and bad night vision, but there was no official diagnosis." Throughout his childhood, Tim's visual difficulties went undiagnosed and as a result he did not receive the services and tools needed to negotiate visual tasks and function adequately in the classroom. He struggled through high school, had three unsuccessful attempts at college, and was not able to sustain employment. It was at age 32 when Tim was finally diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, an eye disease that causes a gradual loss of vision.

Upon receiving his diagnosis, Tim informed his employer, and was promptly fired. Feeling defeated, Tim drove home and put his car up for sale. He applied for Social Security benefits and acquired a computer repair certificate, participated in an internship with the IRS, and worked as a porter for Staples in Venice, Florida. After about nine months Tim flew back to Pennsylvania and was confused about his next step. After two years, Tim relocated to Hoboken, New Jersey, to become a nanny in exchange for room and board, while continuing to look for work.

Tim registered with CBVI to receive travel training to better negotiate an urban environment with a cane. Subsequently, he moved to Pine Beach, New Jersey, where

he lived in his parents finished basement. Again, Tim reached out to CBVI, met VR Counselor Joette Dodds, who discussed career possibilities and available services.



Tim applied for a part-time retail sales office manager position at East Coast Flag & Flagpole Inc. Twelve years and three months later he is still employed at East Coast. He works 24 hours a week, managing the office, selling flags and flagpoles, maintaining inventory, shipping packages, administering the company web site, and answering phones.

In 2012, Tim's vision diminished and he once again reached out to CBVI for assistance. He was provided with a CCTV, Zoom Text software, and magnifiers, which improved his work performance. He also began Braille training. In the spring of 2014, Tim was seen for a low vision examination and received reading lenses that improved his ability to carry out his work duties. Tim states, "Though I don't know what's to come, I feel blessed to live in a state where I can get the help I need, when I need it. When I've hit the depths of despair and hopelessness, the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired has been there to assist."

Success Story...Kristen Diaz

Khen my mother found out that I, her three-year-old daughter, was legally blind, she cried, imagining that I would never drive a car, enjoy fall foliage, or learn to read. But, thanks to the NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI) and other helpful organizations and individuals, my current life couldn't be farther from her vision of an isolated, joyless existence. The Commission has supported my family and me during each step along the road to employment and quality of life: education, independent living skills, assistive technology, and vocational services. The gradual atrophying of my retinal cells due to Leber's Congenital Amaurosis has progressively blurred my central vision, making it difficult to distinguish colors, facial features, text, and small or distant objects. This impacts how I travel, identify others, cook, match clothes, and read—not if I do these things, but how, since my father taught me from a very young age that I could do anything my younger brother did; I just had to do it differently.

My story of success is largely a story of asking and receiving help to do things in a way that worked for me. My family preferred the homeschooling option, and I am extremely grateful that the Pennsauken School District funded IEP, vision testing, and itinerant teacher services at home during my preschool, elementary, and high school years. The Commission teacher enlarged my schoolbooks, provided tactile educational games, introduced us to the NJ Library for the Blind, and proctored my SAT test. During college, the Commission helped pay for books, tuition, and reader services. My mother

also researched and joined other helpful organizations, such as The Little Rock Foundation and the National Federation of the Blind, (NFB) division for parents of blind children that provided information, support, and even scholarships.



I learned adaptive techniques and independent living skills through CBVI and the NFB. I still remember my first cane lesson in the snow with a CBVI orientation and mobility instructor at the age of nine and my most recent lesson, practicing a route to a new job destination at age twenty-six. I received Braille training; a skill that I use every day and I am convinced has given me the competitive edge in job performance. The most helpful training experience was at the NFB Independence Training Program in Denver, Colorado, thanks to Commission funding. The program skyrocketed my competence and self-confidence, especially with cooking and using public transportation. Now I regularly cook for myself and my family, take the bus every day, and know that I can continue doing it all, no matter how much vision I lose, since I learned it all under sleep shades.

Of course, assistive technology has played a major role for me in obtaining education and employment. The Commission has both provided and trained me on technology from low tech solutions such as magnifiers, monoculars, and locator dots to high tech CCTVs, screenreading software, and braille notetakers. As the first blind student at the small private college I attended, it was up to me to convince the admissions counselor that I could do the coursework using the CCTV and braille notetaker, and educate the professors on the assistive technology I would use in their classrooms. During the interview for my current job, my confident demonstration of assistive technology clinched the deal. I am so grateful for all the provision and training the Commission did to make these steps possible.

Finally, CBVI has opened doors to employment for me ever since I was fifteen. My first job, besides babysitting and yard work, was tutoring a blind student in braille as a summer employee for the Commission. After college, a year at the Independence Training Program, and a year of freelance

employment, Commission Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors recommended a job opening and job fair that resulted in employment for the last four years. I held two positions at a non-profit center for independent living, teaching self-advocacy and life skills to youth with disabilities, and I now work as a secretary for the U.S. Department of Labor.

Next month, within a year of gaining employment with the federal government, I will be promoted to working as a benefits advisor, informing the public of their rights under retirement and healthcare law. On weekends I teach Sunday School and attend book club. Praise God, I have actually done everything my mother feared I would not--except for drive my own car. But, with a drive to find alternative ways to get things done, the advances in technology, and agencies like the NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired ready to provide the requisite resources and training, you just might see me someday cruising in a yellow Volkswagen Beetle—with a tactile or voice command interface!

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 some 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

If you are blind or vision-impaired you may be entitled to:

- ❖ Newspaper reader services from NFB – NEWSLINE, sponsored by CBVI at 1-888-882-1629
- ❖ A telephone accessed listing of employment opportunities over NFB – JOBLINE at 1-800-414-5748

The Commission may be able to assist with:

- ❖ Vocational Rehabilitation to help you obtain employment
- ❖ Rehabilitation teaching to help you perform daily living tasks
- ❖ Orientation and Mobility instruction to assist you in traveling independently
- ❖ Referral to community resources for housing, financial assistance and other supported services
- ❖ The Commission will respond to your concerns if you are dissatisfied with the services you receive. Call the Office of the Executive Director at 973-648-2325
- ❖ The Client Assistance Program can assist you in resolving any disputes regarding provision of VR services by calling 1-800-922-7233
- ❖ 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 – 2015

The public is invited to all meetings, which will start at 9:30 a.m. on the following dates:

- ❖ February 6th
- ❖ October 2nd
- ❖ March 27th
- ❖ December 4th
- ❖ June 5th

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.

Service Centers and Facilities

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

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE:

153 Halsey Street, 6th Floor P.O. Box 47017
Newark, NJ 07102
Phone: (973) 648-3333 Fax: (973) 648-7364

Daniel B. Frye, Executive Director
daniel.frye@dhs.state.nj.us

John C. Walsh, Chief of Program Administration
john.walsh@dhs.state.nj.us

NEWARK SERVICE CENTER (NSC):

153 Halsey Street, 5th Floor Newark, NJ 07101
Phone: (973) 648-2111 Fax: (973) 648-7674
Manager: Jose Morales
jose.morales@dhs.state.nj.us

FREEHOLD SERVICE CENTER (FSC):

100 Daniels Way
Freehold Township, NJ 07728
Phone: (732) 308-4001 Fax: (732) 308-4104
Manager: John Reiff
john.reiff@dhs.state.nj.us

CHERRY HILL SERVICE CENTER (CHSC):

2201 Rt. 38 East, Suite 600 Cherry Hill, NJ 08002
Phone: (856) 482-3700 Fax: (856) 482-3770
Manager: Jack Thompson
jack.thompson@dhs.state.nj.us

HAMMONTON OFFICE (HSC):

40 N White Horse Pike Hammonton, NJ 08037-1894
Phone: (609)704-6000 Fax: (609) 704-7109

DEAF-BLIND SERVICES:

153 Halsey Street, 6th Floor Newark, NJ 07102
Phone: (973) 648-3549 Fax: (973) 648-7504
Supervisor: Ed Sroczynski
edward.sroczynski@dhs.state.nj.us

JOSEPH KOHN TRAINING CENTER:

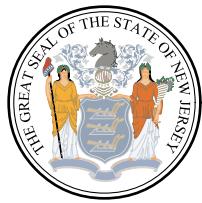
130 Livingston Avenue New Brunswick, NJ 08903
Phone: (732) 937-6363 Fax: (732) 247-6628
Manager: Diana Cortez
diana.cortez@dhs.state.nj.us

BUSINESS ENTERPRISES – NEW JERSEY:

Joseph Kohn Training Center
130 Livingston Avenue
New Brunswick, NJ 08903
Phone: (732) 937-6363 Fax: (732) 247-6628
Manager: Del Basha
delavar.basha@dhs.state.nj.us

GEORGE F. MEYER INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE CENTER:

375 McCarter Highway Newark, NJ 07114
Phone: (973) 648-2547
Manager: Amelia Ricciardi
amelia.ricciardi@dhs.state.nj.us



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