**Blind Field Services Program Report**

**February 2022**

Data in this report references the period 10/1/2021 – 12/31/2022 unless otherwise stated. It is from Aware, Caseload dashboard, and other ad hoc reports.

Pursuant to Senate Bill (SB) 105, Chapter 1102, Statutes of 2002, the California Department of Rehabilitation’s (DOR's) Specialized Services Division (SSD) and Blind Field Services (BFS) were established in July 2003 to provide improved, specialized, and comprehensive services to people with vision loss. It is the vision of BFS to increase the number of successful employment outcomes for consumers seeking competitive employment, and ensure that every blind and visually impaired Californian who wants to work, obtains employment; and every blind and visually impaired Californian who may not believe they can work, is provided the necessary counseling and guidance to overcome their individual barriers to employment.

# **BFS Services and COVID 19**

DOR continues to follow both State and local standards for vaccines, physical distancing, and barrier requirements. Since requirements vary by geographic area, they will not be detailed here. All state employees are required to either be vaccinated or get tested weekly for COVID-19.

All DOR offices are now open full time. Applicants and consumers can choose whether they want to come into the office to meet face to face, have a telephone appointment, or a zoom appointment. This hybrid model supports consumer choice as well as the State’s commitment to robust telework. BFS staff assist with office coverage in their assigned offices. This office coverage is equitable in comparison to coverage provided by Vocational Rehabilitation Employment Division (VRED) staff in each office.

Staff continue to make their best efforts to contact current and potential applicants and to make sure they are aware that BFS continues to provide services. Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) and other vendors continue to be innovative and serve BFS consumers both in-person and remotely.

# **Staffing**

BFS has a total of 107 allocated positions.

1 - Staff Services Manager III - Regional Director (Filled)

1 - Staff Services Manager II - District Administrator (Filled)

9 - Staff Services Manager I - Team Managers (Filled)

1 - Staff Services Manager I - BFS Operations Manager (Filled)

45 - Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors – Qualified Rehabilitation Professionals (SVRC-QRP) (42 filled, 1 hire in process in Temecula, 2 redirected to VRED due to need)

17 - (16) Service Coordinators (SC)/ (1) Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (SVRC) (16 filled, 1 vacant)

4 - Staff Services Analyst – Business Specialists (SSA-BS) (4 filled)

1 - Associate Governmental Program Analyst - Regional Business Specialist (RBS) (Filled)

1 - Associate Governmental Program Analyst - District Contract Administrator (VRCA) (Filled)

1 - Associate Governmental Program Analyst (AGPA) – Lead Operations Analyst (DOS Unit) (Filled)

2 - Office Technicians – Typing (OT-T) (Filled)

18 - Office Technicians - General (OT-G) (16 filled, 2 in process of hiring)

4 - Staff Services Analysts (SSA) – Procurement Analyst (PA) (4 Filled)

2 - Accountant I – Specialists (AIS) (Filled)

Total Allocated: 107

Total filled: 101

Please note that prior reports indicated we had 108 allocations. This was technically incorrect as one of the positions was in the hiring blanket. The blanket is used for temporary allocations. When DOR went to the Team Model several years ago, BFS was over allocated. The extra position went into the blanket. That position has now been moved to a permanent allocation.

One Team Manager has been redirected to Covid contact tracing. That person is expected to return by 6/30/2022.

# **Training**

The 2022 SB105 conference will be in October. Staff will be able to attend in person in Sacramento. It is our hope to be able to live stream the conference for those who are not comfortable with travel. However, if live stream is not possible, the conference content will be recorded and available on our learning management system. The conference will be looking at the accomplishments we've made in the twenty years since SB105 was signed in September of 2002. We will spend most of the time looking at ways to improve services to Californians with blindness and visual impairments with the use of data and a person-centered approach. The save the dates notification will be sent soon and include the BAC

Training is now being completed through a variety of remote options including Teams, Zoom, Blackboard, and other applications. During this past quarter staff focused on completing mandatory training such as Harassment Prevention Training, Ethics Training, Conflict of Interest, Information and Security privacy training, and Health and Safety. Staff have other training options on blackboard to improve their skills.

**Upcoming training**

**Individualized Plan for Employment** – the IPE has been revised to be more user-friendly, person-centered, and less burdensome to DOR staff and consumers. The training will be offered several times in February and March depending on staff location.

**Products and Types of Services** - This will be required training for all appropriate BFS staff involved in the process of procuring assistive technologies goods and services. We are in the process of identifying the dates for this training. Training will be completed by June 30th 2022.

**Guidelines for Procuring Assistive Technologies Goods and Services** – The training will be held on March 15, 2022.

**BFS Statistics for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2021 – 2022 – Second Quarter**

BFS Applications Combined Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Potentially Eligible (PE) - 442 total applications as of 12/31/2021, compared to 346 in 2020, and 492 in 2019. This is a 21% increase over last year, but still 10% less than pre-pandemic applications.

Successful closures - 164 successful closure as of 12/31/2021, compared to 107 in 2020, and 165 in 2019. This is a 53% increase over closures last year. It is essentially the same as successful pre-pandemic closures.

As of 12/31/2021 there are 3,931 consumers open in BFS. One year ago, we had 3,853 open cases. In 2019 we had 3,923. Statistically this is a very minor increase over the past two years

Of the open consumers, 492 are Students with a Disability (SWD). This is down from 543 in 2020, and 502 in 2019. SWD is defined by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) as “…in general, an individual with a disability in a secondary, postsecondary, or other recognized education program who is not younger than the earliest age for the provision of transition services …and is not older than 21 years of age; …”

Hourly and Median Wage Information

* Blind Field Services has the highest average hourly wages compared to all DOR districts. The average is $27.21, with 165 successful closures.
* Blind Field Services has the highest average weekly wage of $857.65 with an average of 33 hours worked per week.

Sample of successful placements for the second quarter:

* Management Analysts
* Lawyers
* Special Education Teachers, All Other
* Magnetic Resonance Imaging Technologists
* All Other Postsecondary Teachers
* Registered Nurses
* Web and Digital Interface Designers
* Media and Communication Workers, All Other
* Marriage and Family Therapists
* Human Services Workers
* Agricultural And Food Scientists
* Software Quality Assurance Analysts and Testers
* Financial Managers
* All Other Managers and Administrators
* Writers And Editors
* Social Workers, Except Medical And Psychiatric
* All Other Teachers And Instructors
* Human Resources Managers, All Other
* Food Preparation and Serving Related Workers, All Other
* Mechanical Engineers

**Personal Goal Cases**

The allocated amount is $150,000 for fiscal year. We have encumbered a total of $87,986 (59%) as of January 14, 2022. Requests range from AT assessments, O&M training, AT training, tactile and interpreting services, cane and tip, Braillenote, iPhones, Victor Readers, Laptops, CCTVs, Ruby, IL Aids and other AT equipment.

**Adult Work Experience**

DOR (including BFS) will stand up Adult Work Experience services statewide by September 30, 2022. This will focus on individuals who do not have prior recent work experience (within the last 5 years). This can include paid or un-paid work experience.

**Student Services Work Experience**

As indicated above, student applications are slightly down from last year. This is in part due to restricted access to schools because of COVID 19 conditions. Team Managers and QRPs are contacting the Visually Impaired (VI) teachers at high schools to ensure that all eligible students are encouraged to apply.

With DOR re-allotment funds, we are anticipating additional student services opportunities this year. Work experience is one of the highest predictors of a good employment outcome.

The Orientation Center for the Blind OCB was used as a work site last year. It was very successful in providing five students the opportunity to work in areas such as janitorial, gardening, landscaping, and cooking. This year we hope to expand this opportunity to many more individuals including adults.

**VR Connections (Portal)**

The VR Connections portal released the Contact Request feature on January 24, 2022. The Contact Request feature offers interested persons the option to initiate a contact request from Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) online through a link on the public-facing website. The Contact Request feature asks for basic contact and select demographic information, as well as provides space for any open-ended questions a person may have. There is a spot where the individual can indicate that they want to work with staff with a special skill such as Student Services, Blind Field Services, Deaf or Hard of Hearing. The Team Manager of the selected office (by zip code) receives an email from the Portal about the new referral. The interested person’s information is automatically populated into the Aware Referral module. The Team Manager can choose how to delegate incoming referrals, either by email or staff going into Aware and finding current referrals for their units.

During the first weekend of operations BFS received four contacts from interested individuals. Statewide DOR received 50 total.

**Activity Dues Report**

During this reporting period the BFS District Operations Services (DOS) team was operating with three Procurement Analysts. The Procurement Analyst hired in June is still in training but picking-up very quickly. The data below reflects the sum average of their work activities and with part-time support from Contracts and Procurement (C&Ps) and the Lead Operations Analyst.

Data covers the period from October 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021. The numbers reflect a decrease in the number received weekly and monthly but no change in the number of ADs completed daily, weekly and monthly.

* Average Number of ADs received per week PA: 27
* Average Number of ADs received per month per PA: 127
* Average Number of ADs completed per day per PA: 6
* Average Number of ADs completed per week per PA: 27
* Average Number of ADs completed per month per PA: 128
* Average Time to process an AD (business days from assignment to Procurement Analyst): 29 days

Key Points regarding Performance:

* Processing time has slowed due to staff scheduled leave time adding to those assigned to cover and assist while maintaining their own assignments.
* The Procurement Unit was originally allocated 3 procurement analysts and has been allocated an additional Procurement Analyst position to support with the increase volume of ADs received.
  + The increase in the dollar threshold for the Fair & Reasonable (F&R), from $5,000 to $10,000, has decreased the time needed to obtain bids.
  + Number of ADs received with a dollar threshold that exceeds the $10,000 F&R has increased due to cost increases in the equipment being requested.

**Plans for improving AD processing time**

1. The fourth procurement analyst started on January 25, 2022. The additional analyst will allow for better distribution of workload and processing times.
2. Temporary support from four of the VRED districts is still being provided to assist with the backlog.
3. Office technicians have been provided guidance and supports to be able to process schoolbooks starting with Spring 2022 as well as other smaller and simpler purchases. This will allow the Procurement unit to focus on the more complex requests.
4. Training has been provided and continues to be provided as needed for completeness of ADs before routing to the procurement unit.