# Item 9 SSD Report – Blind Field Services

**Blind Field Services Program Report**

**Fourth Quarter 2021-22**

**April 1, 2022 – June 30, 2022**

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. All DOR offices are open and BFS Applicants or consumers can choose whether they want to come into the office to meet face-to-face or have a telephone or video appointment. Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) and other service providers are also continuing to serve BFS consumers in-person and remotely.

## BFS Staffing

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 vacant and 2 temporarily redirected to VRED due to need)

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

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

4 - Staff Services Analyst – Business Specialists (SSA-BS) (3 filled, one vacant)

1 – AGPA - District Contract Administrator (VRCA) (Filled)

1 – AGPA – Lead Operations Analyst (DOS Unit) (Filled)

1 – AGPA – (Vacant)

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: 108

Total filled: 103

An AGPA position has been transferred from OCB to BFS and OIB. This position will be shared by BFS and OIB and supervised by the BFS DOS Operations Manager.

The Team Manager assigned to Covid contact tracing has returned to DOR as of July 1, 2022.

One AGPA has been temporally redirected for a significant percentage of her time to assist with VR Connection and the Demand Side Employment Initiative (DSEI).

## Training

Training continues to be offered through a variety of remote options including Teams, Zoom, Blackboard, and other applications. Staff continue to complete mandatory training such as Harassment Prevention, Ethics, Conflict of Interest, Information and Security Privacy, and Health and Safety. Staff are getting an increasing amount of training options in blackboard to improve their skills.

## BFS / Orientation Center for the Blind (OCB) Immersion training

Five BFS staff attended immersion training at OCB. Attendance was much lower than expected due to Covid. Participants stayed in the dorms. Staff were encouraged to use sleep shades to simulate the experience of being newly blind. They participated in assistive technology assessments. Some of the staff also visited other programs in the area such as Hatlen and the Lighthouse. Overall, the staff felt the experience was beneficial.

## Assistive Technology Training for the Blind - Part 1

Assistive technology training was held remotely on June 21. The trainer was Barbara Manipod who is an Assistive Technology Instructor at OCB. The subjects covered included the use of PC vs Mac in a variety of settings; computer related tasks (i.e. reading, writing, virtual meeting etc.); discussion of software, and a brief overview of assistive technology devices such as note takers and CCTVs. Part 2 of this training will be scheduled for September.

## Individualized Plan for Employment Training (IPE)

The IPE is being revised to be more user-friendly, person-centered, and less burdensome to DOR staff and consumers. IPE Development Training for QRPs and Team Managers was completed during the last week in April. Topics covered included; benefits and positive impact of adopting a person-centered approach when collaborating with jobseekers throughout the vocational rehabilitation process: Developing an IPE from a person-centered approach ensures jobseekers are provided opportunities to exercise informed choice and fully participate in vocational exploration and labor market research; how a person-centered approach provides opportunities for a jobseeker and their counselor to co-create an IPE with goals of helping the individual realize their unique vision of their world, including achieving meaningful employment with family-sustaining wages.

## Self-Employment Training

BFS had two managers trained by DOR to be subject matter experts in Self-employment. In addition to being a resource to the BFS staff, they participate in a “Community of Practice” group quarterly.

## 2022 SB105 Conference

BFS was excited and planned to have this annual conference in person in Sacramento in October. Unfortunately, due to the recent increase in COVID cases in California , more than half the staff now do not want to attend in person.  The in-person training has been cancelled and will be rescheduled for the Fall of 2023.  In the meantime, BFS leadership will be working on alternate training consistent with SB 105 requirements.

## Electronic Records of Services (eROS) for Vocational Rehabilitation Services

DOR staff is transitioning to a paperless electronic records of services management system. On July 1, 2022, records of services for all new applications or requests for services will be opened and maintained in Aware with no hardcopy folder. Existing hard copy records of services can be maintained until the record is closed or hard copy documents in the folder are uploaded into Aware. The BFS DA participated in the work group that developed this policy. All aspects of accessibility were considered. It is anticipated that eROS will allow for better accessibility for blind and visually impaired staff. An all-staff training was held on June 23.

## Changes in Post-Employment Services

RSA has recently clarified that WIOA requires VR agencies to provides post-employment services under an amended IPE after an individual achieves an employment outcome, but while the individual still meets the definition of a “participant” and before the individual is reported as “exiting” from the VR program. Please see the attached REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION March 11, 2022, FAQ 22-03, Frequently Asked Questions. Post-Employment Services.

Therefore, from this point forward, if an individual needs services after being closed by DOR, the individual will need to apply for services again and be determined eligible for the VR program, work with the VR agency to develop and sign a new IPE and begin receiving services under that IPE. BFS staff were directed to finish serving current cases in Post-Employment Services (PES) status and not to open new cases in PES status. As of early July, BFS only had three cases left in PES status. Training has been given to BFS staff to quickly open cases when individuals are working and need to maintain their employment.

## BFS Statistics for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2021 – 2022 as of 6/30/2022

BFS has had one of its best years since SB 105 was put into place. There were 1,074 applications as of 6/30/2022, this number includes both Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Potentially Eligible (PE). In 2021 there were 758 applications. In 2020 there were 921 applications. This is a 42% increase over last year and only 1% less than pre-pandemic applications.

There were   373 successful closures this year, compared to 253 closures in FY 20/21, and 336 closures in FY 19/20.  This is a 47% increase over closures last year, and 11% increase over the prior year’s closures. This is the second highest number of successful closures since SB 105 was put into place with the highest being 376 in 2016.

There are 3,996 consumers open in BFS. One year ago, BFS had 3922 open cases. In FY 19/20 BFS had 3899.

Open consumers include 444 Students with a Disability (SWD). This is 11% of all BFS consumers. This figure is particularly interesting considering that the total percentage of SWD across all populations in DOR is at 40%. The SWD population in BFS has been steadily decreasing. It was 501 in FY 20/21, and 589 in FY 19/20. 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

* BFS has the highest average hourly wage of $27.39
* BFS has the highest average weekly wage of $863.89 with an average of 32 hours worked per week
* BFS average wages at employment have consistently been the highest of all districts.

## BFS Contract Participation

44 students in TPP

30 students in other youth contracts such as FCCC

10 students in We Can Work (WCW)

29 individuals in WA III

12 individuals in WA IV

## Job Retention Closures

Fourth quarter data has not been calculated. It will be added to the annual SB105 report to BAC in the fall.

## Personal Goal Cases

The annual budget for PG cases is $150,000 per State fiscal year. All funds have been expended. Requests range from A.T. assessments, O&M training, A.T. training, tactile and interpreting services, canes and tips, BrailleNote, iPhones, Victor Readers, Laptops, CCTVs, Ruby, IL Aids, Eyedaptic AR glasses, OrCam and other A.T. equipment.

## Adult Work Experience

DOR (including BFS) has started offering Adult Work Experience (AWE). The target population are individuals who do not have prior or recent work experience (within the last 5 years). AWE can include paid or un-paid work experience. Most of the work experience is expected to be paid. It will be at the rate of no less than minimum wage in the County where the experience is completed.

## Student Work Experience

The OCB provided student work experience to four students this quarter. An additional four students will be starting in August and September. BFS is expanding this opportunity to more individuals including adults.

## VR Connections (Portal)

The Request for VR Services is fully operational. Staff report an increase in applications due to the portal. BFS will attempt to obtain complete numbers by the yearend report.

## Activity Dues (AD) Report – Fourth Quarter

* For this last fiscal year, BFS had the highest amount of completed invoices compared to all other districts. This was just under 13,000. The next closest district was approximately 3,000 lower. The BFS DOS unit continues to be extremely busy and has been pushing hard to meet demand. This is part of the reason for the additional Purchasing Agent being added this last year and the new AGPA who will be working part time with the DOS unit to help with this heavy load.
* Average Number of ADs received per week: 31 (approximately 4 of the ADs are incomplete and returned to staff for additional information)
* Average Number of ADs received per month: 127
* Average Number of ADs completed per day: 6
* Average Number of ADs completed per week: 30
* Average Number of ADs completed per month: 123
* Average Time to process an AD (business days from assignment to Procurement Analyst): 26

## Key Points regarding Performance

* + 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.
	+ Some staff are consistently requesting specific vendors which makes it difficult to process timely.

## Update on plans for improving AD processing time

1. BFS was allocated a fourth Procurement Analyst to support with the volume of ADs received as noted above.
2. Office Technicians are now doing the purchasing for schoolbooks and simpler purchases. This is making all purchasing timelier.
3. Training has been provided on the need to have complete ADs.
4. BFS is working on ways to have more uniformity in ADs which is expected to make purchasing go more smoothly.
5. BFS had excellent support from VRED to help BFS process ADs. This support has ended due to the addition of the fourth procurement analyst.