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ORIENTATION CENTER FOR THE BLIND

Orientation Center for the Blind

400 Adams Street

Albany, CA 94706

(510) 559-1208

ocbinfo@dor.ca.gov

Revised May 2022

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# I. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) operates the Orientation Center for the Blind (OCB) to assist individuals to adjust to vision loss and prepare for employment through immersion in an environment that is respectful, knowledgeable, and empowering. Credentialed teachers and qualified rehabilitation professionals provide a full curriculum of classes and experiences tailored to assist each participant to reach their full potential for self-sufficiency and employment.

All participants are evaluated and provided the following training and services:

* Independent Travel: also known as Orientation and Mobility
* Daily Living Skills: includes cleaning, grooming, laundry care and other tasks essential to independent living
* Cooking: includes tasks associated with meal prep, clean-up and food shopping
* Braille and Communication Skills: instruction available in UEB Braille and Nemeth code, also includes foundational skills such as money handling and time and schedule keeping, etc.
* Computers and Related Technology: includes assistive technology hardware and software, as well as iPhones and other iOS devices
* Personal Resource Management: includes banking and bill pay methods and tracking
* Work-Readiness and Work Behavior training: includes information on soft skills, work expectations, interviewing, resume writing, and disclosure

The concentrated hybrid 12-week training program begins on the OCB campus. Participants will receive daily hands-on instruction in Orientation and Mobility (O&M), Adaptive Technology and Braille. Cooking classes take place twice per week and Daily Living Skills 1 to 3 times per week depending on the current skill level of the participant. There is no cost for participants to attend. Any consumer of the Department of Rehabilitation who is blind or visually impaired may be referred and considered for participation.

## TRAINING OPTIONS

A residential component to training is available for up to 36 participants at a given time. The residential training facility is comprised of multi-occupancy shared dormitory style rooms and bathrooms. It should be noted that OCB is not a permanent housing option but a training facility that may include a residential aspect for some participants. For those who live in the local area, they may choose to receive training services on a daily basis, travelling independently to and from the facility each day on a pre-arranged training schedule from one to five days per week. Hybrid options are available as well and interested individuals are encouraged to talk with OCB staff and DOR Counselors directly about individual training options.

Unsure about what training you may need or rusty in certain areas? OCB offers a Comprehensive Work-Related Behaviors and Skills Assessment. This assessment takes approximately two weeks to complete, depending on the needs of the individual, and can be arranged through the referring DOR Counselor. It can be completed on either a residential or day only schedule. The purpose of the assessment is to provide both the individual and the counselor with quality information that can be used to create or review an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

# II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The OCB is a rehabilitation center dedicated to independent living and work-readiness skills training for people who are blind and visually impaired. OCB is located on a three-acre campus in Albany, California, and is within easy walking distance to public transportation, shopping centers, and urban and suburban residential areas in the San Francisco Bay Area. The campus consists of three buildings encompassing a dormitory, cafeteria, gymnasium, conference center, teaching areas and administration offices.

Instructional staff, rehabilitation professionals, and additional staff members, provide a learning environment dedicated to adjustment to visual impairment and acquisition of adaptive skills in all areas of life functioning. Individual training schedules and services are developed with each participant and are designed to support his/her life and career plans.

The manner of instruction varies according to an individual’s needs and abilities. Instruction in effective and efficient use of non-visual strategies is included in all training. Where appropriate, strategies for effectively and safely utilizing low vision techniques may be taught in conjunction with non-visual techniques. Sleep shades are utilized routinely for many reasons including but not limited to the following; to increase an individual’s belief in the abilities of people who are blind to manage all aspects of independent living, to encourage an individual to develop the most efficient and effective tool kit of options available for any given task regardless of lighting conditions and external factors, and to facilitate participants’ focus upon and skilled use of other senses.

## INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

Certified O&M Instructors assist participants to learn the skills and techniques of safe and independent indoor and outdoor travel, including maintaining orientation, navigation across a variety of terrains, planning trips and use of various modes of public transportation. Instructors take advantage of the variety of transportation options and interesting destinations available in the San Francisco Bay Area, using lessons to “normalize” independent travel by participants. Field trips like cross-country skiing and ocean kayaking are offered.

Participants engage in a course of study that teaches everything from good functional cane technique through full independent travel, utilizing the mode or modes of travel that is right for the individual’s skill level. Participants gradually become more independent as they develop their skills. Utilizing the long cane, individuals are taught established and effective techniques to recognize curbs, locate and manage stairs and interpret environmental cues. From there, training includes how to use regular modes of transportation, such as paratransit, buses, trains, taxis and ride share services, shuttles and airplanes, and to efficiently and appropriately articulate one’s needs to drivers and companions. Participants learn to plan routes and trips in a variety of challenging situations, using tactile maps, web pages, interactive telephone services, and the latest GPS apps and technologies.

## DAILY LIVING SKILLS

Living Skills Instructors provide training that assists participants to learn new and modified skills that enable self-sufficiency in the activities of daily living, such as personal hygiene and grooming, clothing care, household cleaning and organization, and eating techniques for people who are blind and low vision. Instruction is “hands-on,” and is normally provided in the classroom, and in the dormitory or in the community, where skills are applied.

Personal hygiene and grooming focuses upon those daily routines that attend to one’s personal care, such as cleanliness, shaving, haircare, make-up application if applicable, and appropriate clothing choices for the work environment. Clothing management ranges from labeling and personal organization of clothes, to laundering and ironing.

## COOKING

The cooking class curriculum provides participants with information and skills pertinent to food preparation. By practicing the adaptive cooking skills in the classroom kitchens, participants can increase their safety, efficiency and confidence. This course includes recipe gathering and reading, grocery shopping, pouring, slicing, measuring, mixing, cooking on all kinds of small and large appliances, and cleaning and storing everything afterwards.

## BRAILLE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Participants learn to read, write and communicate by learning Braille in the Communication Skills course. Participants start by learning to use the Braille alphabet and numbering system to read and label such items as cabinets, elevator, keyboards, food, clothing and other personal effects. Guided by a participant’s goals and abilities, participants learn facility with a Braille Writer, and the direct handwriting method of using a slate and stylus. Some participants will learn part or all of the contracted Braille code. Many participants master Braille and either replace or supplement their remaining ability to read and write print. The Communication Skills course ensures that participants can match what they learn in Braille to the printed word, and to be able to transfer print to Braille, Braille to print, and Braille-to-Braille. Advanced participants will learn to read Braille books and to communicate with other Braille users. A slightly larger form of Braille, called Jumbo Braille, can help participants with diminished sensitivity in their fingers. Braille music and the Nemeth mathematical codes are available for interested participants.

Any use of Braille can help people to be self-sufficient. For example, by learning labeling techniques participants can distinguish between objects that feel identical by touch, such as compact disks (CDs).

OCB maintains a Braille library for participant use and to celebrate a great international system of reading and writing.

## COMPUTER ACCESS TECHNOLOGY

Participants are taught to use computers and accompanying software in new ways. They become accustomed to reading the computer screen with synthetic speech or image enlarging software. By utilizing an individualized, self-paced approach participants learn to perform all computer operations. The curriculum emphasizes access solutions to computer use, while recognizing that some individuals who have lost vision may have no previous computer or typing experience.

Instruction begins with a basic understanding of how a computer works, and how it can benefit participants in their daily lives. Basic computer use and keyboarding skills are evaluated, and, if necessary, taught first.

As appropriate, participants are taught the use of screen readers, to include speech or Braille output, screen enlargement, and mainstream applications, such as word processing and spreadsheet software. Self-study methods, such as recorded or online tutorials, supplement face-to-face instruction. Participants are guided through the access and navigation of the Internet, to include search strategies, use of email, and online banking and shopping. Participants learn how to modify adaptive software and to manage accessibility problems.

In both Computer Access Technology and Resource Management classes participants are introduced to and instructed in the use of the broad array of today’s generation of access products, such as scanners with optical character recognition software, Braille writing, display and printing equipment, closed circuit screen enlargers, audio playback equipment, accessible cell phones and personal data assistants, and optimum use of available computers, notebooks, monitors, cables and adapters.

Advanced participants can learn to navigate career development websites and software, to include activities such as self-assessment, exploration of educational requirements, job placement sites and the labor market. These activities are done in concert with the participant’s referring vocational rehabilitation counselor, the OCB Rehabilitation Counselor and appropriate skills instructors.

## PERSONAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Personal resource management is an area that is shared across the curriculum, with each instructor assisting the participant to develop the skills necessary for adult independent living. Participants are taught organizational skills and learn to manage their personal affairs, such as money handling techniques, budgeting, organizing bills and bank statements, shopping, maintaining calendars to keep appointments, reliable note taking, maintaining address books, and use of telephone and email communication with individuals and entities key to community integration.

## WORK-READINESS PREPARATION

The schedule at OCB is based on a full-time work week. Participants are assisted in integrating the independent living skills and adaptive techniques learned at OCB with the participants’ vocational planning and preparation process. This includes assessment and consideration of each participant’s functional strengths and limitations, experience, education, work habits, aptitudes, interest and personality that supports and strengthens the participant’s Individual Plan for Employment. In concert with skills learned in other OCB curricula participants practice communication and adaptive techniques and technologies that support work, training and/or education efforts.

Each weekday morning begins with an hour workshop incorporating work readiness and self-advocacy topics and training. The OCB Rehabilitation Counselor takes the lead on planning and delivering the workshops with involvement and participation from all members of the instructional staff.

The OCB Rehabilitation Counselor provides one-on-one counseling, guidance and advocacy, and functions as the participant’s liaison to the referring vocational rehabilitation counselor.

## PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT COUNSELING

All OCB staff, including teachers, counselors and administrative personnel, participate to provide a normalizing environment in which participants can safely learn the skills, attitudes and behavior with which to adjust to loss of vision. The immersion experience combines individualized structured scheduling of classes with unstructured social networking opportunities designed to build confidence and self-esteem.

The OCB Rehabilitation Counselor takes the lead in addressing participant personal adjustment issues, and facilitates referral to more in-depth psychological or psychiatric attention when needed and appropriate.

## FITNESS

OCB has a gymnasium with state-of-the-art exercise and physical conditioning equipment that is accessible to blind persons and are available for use both during and after class hours. Staff teach participants how to safely operate gym equipment, and are available to consult with participants on exercise routines they can incorporate into their lifestyles.

# III. ADMISSION PROCEDURES

The Orientation Center for the Blind offers an intense educational training option to visually impaired individuals who have an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) with the California Department of Rehabilitation. The decision to apply to OCB is arrived at by the consumer and his/her vocational rehabilitation counselor. Admission is not contingent upon race, culture, ethnicity, age, religion, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or educational achievement.

Applicants to OCB must possess sufficient social skills and tolerance to work effectively in a collaborative group training and dormitory environment. The program can be physically and mentally demanding. Some individuals may need to stabilize their physical or mental health conditions, such as mastering diabetic management techniques or seeking treatment for substance use disorders, before applying to OCB. While staff is available to help, it is ultimately a participant’s responsibility to manage their own medical care, to include taking medication as prescribed, making, and keeping appointments, picking up prescriptions and arranging for transportation. Staff can assist with familiarizing participants with transportation options.

OCB’s aim is to help identify and put the necessary supports in place to allow each participant to successfully complete the program, not to exclude individuals from participation. If you have a condition that you believe may impact your ability to participate to the fullest, please allow us to assist you by being honest and up-front throughout the process. Chances are you will not be the first person to share a particular concern, and this will give us the opportunity to work together to find appropriate solutions.

## APPLICATION

Applicants apply to OCB through their state vocational rehabilitation counselor. The application process typically begins with a visit to OCB before being referred by the counselor. This allows the individual to gain a full understanding of the program’s setting and curriculum. If an applicant is not able to visit, a telephone interview may be arranged with an OCB representative.

If an individual is then interested in pursuing OCB as a training option, they will be given a Medical Clearance Form to take to their physician. The medical clearance includes a TB test that cannot be more than 12 months old. The physician will complete the form and return it to OCB so that our Medical Consultant can review it and clear the individual for participation.

Concurrently, the individual should be working with their referring DOR counselor to complete the referral packet. This is a form that is completed by the counselor in dialogue with the individual and gives the OCB staff information about what the individual is hoping to gain from the training, past experiences with training, and other medical conditions or disabilities that should be taken into consideration when developing an individual training schedule for the participant. Please note that this information is used as a starting point for training and the program itself will be modified as the individual progresses at OCB.

Once the medical clearance has been reviewed and approved by OCB’s medical consultant and the referral form has been reviewed and necessary items clarified by OCB staff, a start date will be determined. Start dates are selected based on the availability of OCB staff, an appropriate dorm room if applicable, and the individual’s upcoming schedule. If medical procedures or family vacations are planned for the near future, it is often best to temporarily delay the start date.

# IV. SUCCEEDING AT OCB

OCB offers participants a wealth of resources and opportunities to succeed, and maintains a climate that encourages participants to acquire skills in self-sufficiency and employability, achieve life and career goals, and to gain greater self-confidence and independence in decision-making. Every effort is made to accommodate the special needs of each participant to maximize success.

During the course of the program OCB staff meet regularly to evaluate participant progress to ensure coordinated effort and timely resolution of problems. Feedback is provided to the participant to enable them to be involved in problem solving and self-determination.

Participants are expected to:

\* Maintain good attendance and punctuality

\* Actively participate in all class and meeting activities, to include

completion of homework and self-study assignments

\* Demonstrate optimum effort and seriousness of purpose toward

goals that have been agreed upon

\* Respect the rights, culture and feelings of fellow participants and

staff

\* Communicate with staff or administrators in case of

dissatisfaction with services

Participants whose behavior is noticeably disruptive, or who are frequently late or absent from class will be counseled and asked to modify their behavior. Participants who continue to engage in disruptive behavior, or who display an ongoing pattern of non-punctuality or absenteeism may be asked to leave temporarily, or may be terminated from the program.

# V. RIGHTS AND REMEDIES

If questions or issues arise in relation to your application to attend OCB or while participating in the OCB program, there are a number of different ways you may raise questions and work to resolve concerns. While most problems can be resolved informally and more quickly by talking to the OCB Administrator or your Rehabilitation Counselor, please also find attached the DOR’s Rights and Remedies form, DR 1000. You are welcome to include a family member, other representative, or advocate with you any time that you meet with DOR staff.

# VI. GETTING STARTED

If you are currently signed up for services with a DOR counselor, contact your counselor and let them know you are interested in considering OCB as a training option. Your DOR counselor may be able to arrange your travel to visit OCB for the tour. When you are ready, give us a call at the number below to schedule the tour date. Tours typically start at 10:00am and finish around 1:30pm with lunch included. However, we are happy to arrange alternative times as needed.

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Telephone: 510-559-1200

If you do not yet have a DOR counselor, contact the Blind Field Services (BFS) section at 916-558-5480 or email Blind.Services@dor.ca.gov.

Blind Field Services maintains a core group of Counselors and Managers skilled in understanding the barriers people who are blind and visually impaired face in achieving meaningful employment and independence.

Even if you aren’t sure you are ready for OCB training, please feel free to contact us and use us as a resource. We wish you the best of luck on your journey towards employment. And we believe in you!

ATTACHMENT

STATE OF CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION

**YOUR RIGHTS AND REMEDIES**

DR 1000 (Rev. 05/22)

If questions or issues arise while you are an applicant or a consumer of the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), talk with your Rehabilitation Counselor. You may also request an informal meeting with your Rehabilitation Counselor’s Team Manager.

You have the right to request an administrative review with the District Administrator. You may also seek, as set forth below, an administrative review concurrently with a formal request for mediation and/or fair hearing. However, most problems can be resolved informally and more quickly at the district level. You may bring a family member, other representative, or advocate with you any time you meet with the DOR staff.

**CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.** To seek an advocate or for information regarding vocational rehabilitation services or the appeal process, the Client Assistance Program (CAP) administered by Disability Rights California may be available to assist you. Information is available at the [Disability Rights California website](http://www.disabilityrightsca.org/) (http:www.disabilityrightsca.org), by phone at 800-776-5746 or 800-719-5798 TTY/TDD (Telecommunication Device for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing), or at the [DOR website](http://www.dor.ca.gov/) (http:www.dor.ca.gov).

**You have the right to take any of the following steps should issues arise:**

**REHABILITATION COUNSELOR.** Most misunderstandings and issues can be resolved by talking them over with your Rehabilitation Counselor. It is your responsibility to let your Rehabilitation Counselor know there is an issue.

**TEAM MANAGER.** If you believe that you and your Rehabilitation Counselor cannot resolve the issue, you may request an informal meeting with the Team Manager to discuss the issue.

**ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW.** You may request an administrative review by the District Administrator within one year of the action or decision. An administrative review decision will be rendered within 15 calendar days of the date of your request, unless you agree to a later date. If you disagree with an administrative review decision, you may file a request for fair hearing within 30 calendar days of the receipt of the written decision of your administrative review.

**MEDIATION.** Mediation is another option for resolving disputes with the DOR. You may file a request for confidential mediation within one year of the DOR action or decision with which you disagree. A qualified, impartial mediator can help you find solutions that are satisfactory to you and the DOR. If the DOR agrees to mediate, the mediation will be held within 25 calendar days from receipt of the request, unless you agree to a later date. A written request for mediation and/or fair hearing may be filed concurrently.

**FAIR HEARING.** If you are dissatisfied with any action or decision of the DOR relating to your application or receipt of vocational rehabilitation services, you may file a request for a fair hearing within one year of the DOR action or decision or within 30 calendars days of the receipt of written decision of your administrative review (see above). A fair hearing will be held within 60 calendar days of the receipt of your written request, unless you agree to a later date. At the hearing, you may appear in person, and may be accompanied by a representative or advocate of your choice. It may be to your benefit to first work through the administrative review process or mediation (see above) before requesting a fair hearing. If you are not satisfied with the fair hearing decision, you may file a Writ of Mandate with the California Superior Court within six months of the decision.

To request a mediation and/or fair hearing, please obtain form DR 107 Request for Mediation and/or Fair Hearing from one of the following options: contact the DOR Mediation and Fair Hearing Office by phone at 916-558-5860 or by email at DOR Appeals Info (appealsinfo@dor.ca.gov); visit the [DOR website](http://www.dor.ca.gov/) (http:www.dor.ca.gov); or contact a CAP advocate (see CAP contact information above).

**DISCRIMINATION.** If you believe that the DOR or its contractor or grantee has unlawfully discriminated against you because of one or more of the following protected categories, your race, color, religion, ancestry, physical or mental disability, national origin, medical condition, genetic information, sexual orientation, marital status, age, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, military status, or veteran status or retaliation, you have the right to pursue the following options: 1) Make an oral or written request for an administrative review to the District Administrator, who oversees the office where your case is assigned. The request should include: your name, address, and phone number; the name and title of the person against whom the complaint is being made; a description of the alleged discrimination; the protected category; and the remedy being sought. 2) File a discrimination complaint directly with DOR’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR). For more information or to obtain a discrimination complaint form, contact the DOR’s OCR directly by phone at 916-558-5850 or by email at OCR@dor.ca.gov. 3) File a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights. For more information contact the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights directly by telephone at 800-421-3481 or by email at OCR@ed.gov.

Requests for administrative review and complaints of discrimination must be made within 180 days of the date of alleged discrimination.

**DISCRIMINATION OR HARASSMENT ON THE BASIS OF SEX.** If you believe that the DOR or its contractor or grantee has discriminated against or harassed you or another individual with a disability on the basis of sex – including sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual harassment, and sexual violence, such as rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, and sexual coercion, you have the right to pursue the following options under Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 (Title IX): 1) contact the Chief of OCR and Title IX Coordinator by mail at 721 Capitol Mall, Sacramento, California 95814, by email at OCR@dor.ca.gov, or by telephone at 916-558-5850; you can also report information you have about potential harassment by leaving a voicemail for OCR and the Title IX Coordinator at 916-857-9175; 2) file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights; you may contact the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights directly by telephone at 800-421-3481 or by email at OCR@ed.gov.