California Department of Rehabilitation Logo
Employment, Independence and Equality

Department of Rehabilitation

Biennial Report

on

Programs and Activities of the Division of Specialized

Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired and

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

July 1, 2021

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# Executive Summary

The Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) presents this biennial report to the Legislature on programs and activities of the Specialized Services Division (SSD) providing services to the Blind and Visually Impaired and Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Pursuant to the requirements of Senate Bill 105, Chapter 1102, Statutes of 2002 (“SB 105”), this report provides statistics and individual success stories on competitive integrated employment placements for persons who are Blind and Visually Impaired and/or Deaf and Hard of Hearing, as well as an update on the Business Enterprises Program (BEP), the Orientation Center for the Blind (OCB), and the Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) program, which are also administered by the SSD. This report is DOR’s ninth. The first eight reports starting July 1, 2005, and each subsequent odd numbered year, are available by request.

This report highlights the unique impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the provision of DOR’s SSD services. Amidst a statewide stay-at-home order starting on March 16, 2020, as an essential service provider, DOR has remained open with a goal of serving the community safely with minimal disruption while also protecting the safety of our staff. DOR rapidly transitioned to provide direct services to individuals through virtual means, while ensuring our offices remained safely open to individuals who did not have digital access or who otherwise needed in-person services. DOR partners and vendors providing services to DOR consumers also quickly adapted and have been delivering many services remotely. Despite these challenges, both Blind and Visually Impaired and Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers being served by SSD have continued to obtain employment with higher average weekly wages compared to the average weekly wages of all DOR consumers obtaining employment.

The BEP program has opened 85 new vendor sites and there has been an increase of over $22,000 in average annual wages for vendors in the program since the passage of SB 105. The COVID-19 pandemic hit the BEP vendors particularly hard due to restrictions on restaurants and the food service industry, in addition to the loss of foot traffic caused by the large number of employees teleworking.

OCB has served 758 Blind and Visually Impaired participants since the passage of SB 105. The facility was able to reopen during the pandemic through a new and innovative hybrid approach, which has proved to be safe and effective. Being able to continue these services has allowed OCB participants to obtain the independence required to work towards competitive employment.

The OIB program has also been able to continue to serve over 4,700 individuals ages 55 or older with significant visual impairments in California annually. Over 78 percent of the OIB grant funds were spent on providing direct services such as assistive technology, daily living skills, and orientation and mobility training. Consumer assessments showed over 97 percent of OIB recipients reporting an increase in their independence as a direct result of the services received.

# Background

The SSD was established with the enactment of SB 105, which recognized the need for a more skilled and tailored approach to providing vocational rehabilitation job training, and placement services to individuals with sensory disabilities. The goals of the SSD are:

(1) To assist persons who are Blind and Visually Impaired and Deaf and Hard of Hearing to obtain competitive integrated employment.

(2) To enlarge economic opportunities for persons who are Blind and Visually Impaired and Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

(3) To enhance the independence and self-sufficiency of Blind and Visually Impaired and Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers.

With the establishment of the SSD, DOR management, counselors, and support staff were realigned to create Blind Field Services (BFS) and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS) Programs. In addition to this realignment, SSD assumed oversight of the BEP, OCB and OIB programs.

# Blind Field Services (BFS)

BFS has staff located throughout the State. These staff include Rehabilitation Counselors for the Blind (RCB) and various other employees who all have specialized knowledge and training in serving the Blind and Visually Impaired population.

Since the last biennial reporting period, BFS continues to focus on the Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), passed in 2014, which includes an increased emphasis on providing pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities age 16 to 21. These student services include job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, post-secondary education counseling, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy.

Ongoing in-service education and training is routinely provided to BFS staff and community partners to increase their expertise and remain current on trends and innovations leading to successful employment outcomes for Blind and Visually Impaired consumers. In September 2019, BFS staff met for a three-day training in Southern California, which focused on the Common Performance Measures and other requirements of the WIOA. Beginning in 2020, BFS adjusted to the pandemic by providing robust remote training for all staff. These training topics included: Social Security Benefits and the impact on BFS consumers, Improving Customer Service, writing more accurate Individualized Plans for Employment, working with the underserved Hmong community, and improving Expedited Enrollment for BFS applicants.

As the table below shows, Blind and Visually Impaired consumers have continued to obtain employment with higher average weekly wages compared to the average weekly wages of all DOR consumers obtaining employment.

| **State Fiscal Year (SFY)** | **Total B/VI**  **Competitive Placements** | **BFS Placements** | **BFS Placements % of Total** | **DOR Average Weekly Earnings\*\*** | **BFS Average Weekly Earnings** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2001-02 | 389 | N/A | N/A | $334 | N/A |
| 2002-03 | 390 | N/A | N/A | $340 | N/A |
| 2003-04 | 347 | 214 | 61.6% | $340 | $497 |
| 2004-05 | 363 | 242 | 66.7% | $344 | $513 |
| 2005-06 | 452 | 355 | 78.5% | $351 | $484 |
| 2006-07 | 445 | 363 | 81.5% | $363 | $565 |
| 2007-08 | 404 | 323 | 80.8% | $372 | $554 |
| 2008-09 | 406 | 347 | 85.5% | $374 | $619 |
| 2009-10 | 278 | 235 | 84.5% | $355 | $578 |
| 2010-11 | 368 | 309 | 83.9% | $367 | $629 |
| 2011-12 | 354 | 306 | 86.4% | $351 | $556 |
| 2012-13 | 344 | 281 | 81.7% | $388 | $585 |
| 2013-14 | 402 | 335 | 83.3% | $386 | $609 |
| 2014-15 | 387 | 316 | 82% | $390 | $622 |
| 2015-16 | 443 | 376 | 85% | $390 | $570 |
| 2016-17 | 398 | 339 | 85% | $402 | $646 |
| 2017-18 | 297 | 242 | 82% | $421 | $774 |
| 2018-19 | 360 | 321 | 89% | $457 | $726 |
| 2019-20 | 345 | 320 | 93% | $499 | $809 |
| 2020-21\* | 118 | 103 | 87% | $557 | $851 |

\*As of December 31, 2020

\*\*DOR average weekly earnings are comprised of competitive weekly earnings of all consumers served including BFS consumers

Although these statistics are important, section 8.1 of this report has powerful individual examples of the impact and meaningful benefits these services have had on BFS consumers. For the next biennium, BFS will work on a strategic plan that has recently been developed to increase applications from potential Blind and Visually Impaired consumers, which decreased significantly during the pandemic, but began to increase again in the Fall of 2020. BFS will also revisit and update traditionally productive methods including collaborating with BFS community partners and vendors. The program will continue to expand the amount of time spent to develop additional relationships with employers, the America’s Job Centers of California, their local Workforce Development Boards, and with high schools serving Blind and Visually Impaired students throughout the State.

# Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS)

The DHHS program provides technical guidance and consultation to its staff and community partners. This includes services such as the SB 105 annual statewide training and three regional trainings for all staff and community partners. Since the last biennial reporting period, the DHHS program has established specialized services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers with five additional deafness Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP), and expanded services for two current Rehabilitation Programs. The new CRPs were able to provide consumers with situational assessments, personal vocational social adjustment services, short term supports, supported employment, job coaching and employment services. Several other existing CRPs expanded their service offerings during this period. Most of the CRPs and other community partners serving the DHHS have converted to provide remote accessible services during the pandemic.

The DHHS program continues educating other DOR staff and stakeholders about Deaf culture, sensitivity, and awareness as part of an overall strategy to create inclusivity in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community and workplaces. This included presentations at the annual SB 105 training noted above. Since that last in-person training, the DHHS program leveraged unique remote training opportunities from a variety of speakers and educational resources across the country to meet the needs of DHHS and its community partners.

The table below provides data on the number of Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers being placed into competitive integrated employment and their average weekly wages compared to the average weekly wages of all DOR consumers obtaining employment.

| **State Fiscal Year (SFY)** | **Total D/HH Competitive Placements** | **DHHS**  **Placements** | **DHHS Placements % of Total** | **DOR Average Weekly Earnings\*\*** | **DHHS Average Weekly Earnings** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2001-02 | 757 | N/A | N/A | $334 | N/A |
| 2002-03 | 824 | N/A | N/A | $340 | N/A |
| 2003-04 | 872 | 760 | 87.2% | $340 | $411 |
| 2004-05 | 785 | 729 | 92.9% | $344 | $406 |
| 2005-06 | 826 | 772 | 93.5% | $351 | $417 |
| 2006-07 | 737 | 728 | 98.8% | $363 | $432 |
| 2007-08 | 740 | 695 | 93.9% | $372 | $464 |
| 2008-09 | 710 | 596 | 83.9% | $374 | $477 |
| 2009-10 | 560 | 536 | 95.7% | $355 | $553 |
| 2010-11 | 652 | 432 | 66.3% | $367 | $482 |
| 2011-12 | 614 | 454 | 73.9% | $351 | $486 |
| 2012-13 | 606 | 414 | 68.3% | $388 | $450 |
| 2013-14 | 610 | 512 | 83.9% | $386 | $469 |
| 2014-15 | 813 | 575 | 71.4% | $390 | $472 |
| 2015-16 | 855 | 589 | 68.9% | $390 | $467 |
| 2016-17 | 793 | 612 | 77.2% | $402 | $458 |
| 2017-18 | 678 | 516 | 76.1% | $421 | $495 |
| 2018-19 | 611 | 477 | 78.1% | $469 | $534 |
| 2019-20 | 551 | 419 | 76.0% | $518 | $630 |
| 2020-21\* | 174 | 136 | 78.2% | $578 | $685 |
| Source: Ad hoc Reports - Field Computer System (pre SFY 2010-11), AWARE (post SFY 2010-11)  \*As of December 31, 2020  \*\*DOR average weekly earnings are comprised of competitive weekly earnings of all VRED consumers served including DHHS consumers | | | | | | |

To see examples of some of these individual success stories, see section 8.2 of this report.

In the next biennium, DHHS will work to increase remote and virtual access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers to apprenticeships, vocational training, and employment services available within the workforce system. Focusing on program efficacy and results, DHHS will engage in systemic evaluation of program implementation and innovation efforts. The program will continue to provide training to Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCD) with their teams and DOR counselors outside of DHHS.

# Business Enterprises Program (BEP)

BEP was created through the Federal Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936, which authorized a priority for BEP to place vending facilities on federal property. California State law, enacted in 1945, expanded the federal program giving priority for BEP operated vending facilities on State property.

The BEP curriculum is evolving to be computer-based learning, with more emphasis on occupational skills to better prepare the trainees to operate a food service business. Other BEP services include developing new facilities with an emphasis on private sector establishments, overseeing the selection process for placement of vendors into these facilities, providing technical assistance to BEP vendors, purchasing and maintaining all vendor equipment, and managing funding for new and existing facilities.

To meet the challenges of COVID-19, BEP has assisted vendors to keep their businesses viable by providing nine months of Fair Minimum Return (FMR) stimulus checks from the Vendor Trust Fund, access to early withdrawals from their retirement accounts, providing information on Unemployment Insurance for business owners and through participation in the Federal Paycheck Protection Program. Additionally, Congress appropriated $20 million as part of the Federal stimulus package for all State BEP’s to offset vendor losses in 2020. California vendors’ share of these stimulus funds is $906,516. DOR worked with the California Vendors Policy Committee (CVPC) to determine how these funds will be allocated to eligible vendors.

The following table provides an overview of the BEP activities since Federal Fiscal Year 2002-03.

| **Federal Fiscal Year** | **Vendor Person Years of Employment** | **Gross Sales** | **Net Profit to Vendors** | **Average Vendor Earnings** | **Total Facilities** | **Number of**  **New Locations** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2002-03 | 138.3 | $38,141,507 | $5,052,869 | $36,536 | 185 | 17 |
| 2003-04 | 128.2 | $37,035,071 | $4,564,908 | $35,608 | 182 | 13 |
| 2004-05 | 122.6 | $41,545,828 | $5,012,233 | $40,883 | 178 | 10 |
| 2005-06 | 129.1 | $48,707,789 | $5,318,684 | $41,198 | 167 | 5 |
| 2006-07 | 131.5 | $48,823,250 | $5,897,458 | $44,848 | 156 | 1 |
| 2007-08\*\* | 122 | $37,739,686 | $6,106,816 | $50,056 | 151 | 3 |
| 2008-09\*\* | 116 | $35,754,322 | $5,911,371 | $50,960 | 149 | 4 |
| 2009-10 | 112 | $48,432,548\* | $5,667,628\* | $50,604\* | 140 | 1 |
| 2010-11 | 110 | $48,514,643 | $6,043,826 | $54,944 | 134\* | 6\* |
| 2011-12 | 104\* | $47,742,039 | $6,688,849 | $64,316 | 128\* | 7\* |
| 2012-13 | 104 | $48,452,853 | $7,333,891\* | $70,518 | 119 | 7\* |
| 2013-14 | 96 | $47,315,041 | $7,319,353 | $76,164 | 114 | 7\* |
| 2014-15 | 93 | $48,712,182 | $7,629,192 | $81,771 | 104 | 4\* |
| 2015-16 | 88 | $49,641,741 | $8,055,668 | $91,542 | 101 | 9\* |
| 2016-17 | 85 | $48,356,035 | $7,655,510 | $90,065 | 101 | 8\* |
| 2017-18 | 85 | $51,804,332 | $7,704,395 | $90,747 | 96 | 13\* |
| 2018-19 | 79 | $50,326,440 | $7,347,267 | $92,886 | 83 | 9\* |
| 2019-20 | 77 | $35,465,101 | $3,773,680 | $58,840 | 82 | 0\* |

Source: RSA 15 Reports

\*Values adjusted to reflect final published RSA 15 Reports

\*\*Data does not include Department of Defense

While statistics can be useful in measuring performance, they do not reflect the personal impact and meaningful benefit for BEP vendors. Consumer success stories on the BEP services can be found in section 8.3.

BEP's focus for the next biennium is to become the preferred food service choice throughout the State. To increase the customer base for BEP vendors, BEP will continue to modernize vending facilities to meet or exceed the trends seen in today’s food service industry. BEP will continue to focus on providing continued education and consultation to staff and BEP vendors in the areas of marketing, operations management, new health and food safety requirements, customer satisfaction and employee retention.

# Orientation Center for the Blind (OCB)

OCB is a DOR-owned and operated residential training facility located in Albany, California. OCB assists consumers who are Blind and Visually Impaired to adjust to vision loss; prepare for success in post-secondary education and vocational training; and obtain, retain, and advance in competitive integrated employment. Credentialed teachers and qualified rehabilitation professionals provide a full curriculum of courses and experiences to assist each consumer to develop work-readiness skills and reach their full potential for independence.

In response to COVID-19 concerns, OCB participants returned to their homes in March 2020. The OCB Team immediately made modifications to the delivery of direct services to 21 consumers by providing remote training via computer applications.

Following the implementation of a detailed COVID-19 Prevention Worksite Plan, OCB participants returned to campus in September 2020. The OCB Team made modifications to the delivery of direct services to a cohort of 14 consumers by providing a combination of in-person and remote training. The dormitory capacity was reduced to under 50 percent to allow for single dorm room occupancy and social distancing. Additionally, the program implemented a 12-week intensive immersion training schedule to serve four cohorts annually.

During State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2019-2020, OCB served 50 consumers. While statistics can be useful in measuring performance, they do not reflect the meaningful benefits of OCB services. Individual consumer stories can be found in section 8.4.

For the next biennium, OCB will focus on building relationships with community partners who have expertise in other disabilities or in serving underserved populations. Recent collaborations that have proven mutually beneficial include: working with California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), to build CDCR capacity to serve individuals with vision loss; partnering with the Contra Costa Unified School District continuation school programs to provide a worksite for transition students with disabilities; and serving as an intern location to San Francisco State University and Career Counseling Graduate Program where graduate students obtain experience as interns by providing college and career counseling to OCB consumers.

# Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB)

This biennium has been particularly challenging for the OIB program due to COVID-19 impacting the ability of grantees to adequately serve OIB consumers in the traditional in-person format. Despite the pandemic, the OIB program has been able to adjust and continue to serve over 4,700 individuals with the large majority of funds being used on direct consumer services such as assistive technology, daily living skills, and orientation and mobility training.

The OIB program has also been able to expand services to consumers in 56 of the 58 State counties in the current grant cycle. The current formula for distribution of OIB funds has allowed new OIB participants in less densely populated areas to take advantage of the program compared to the prior formula that had been used. The current five-year grant cycle compared to the prior three-year cycle has proved to be beneficial in many ways such as including a longer and more stable funding source.

OIB has continued supporting grantees with technical assistance and personalized plans to strengthen their ability to safely and successfully deliver virtual and in-person services. DOR applied and was approved for Technical Assistance from the Federal OIB Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC) in Grant Year 2020. As part of the technical assistance contract the OIB-TAC worked collaboratively with DOR to provide a series of trainings to the OIB grantees in California. The trainings were well-attended as they were provided virtually (due to the COVID-19 pandemic), allowing significantly more people to attend. There were over 100 unique participants collectively and the attendees reported learning valuable strategies for improving their programs to better connect with and serve OIB consumers.

The following table shows the history since FFY 1999-00 in grant funds awarded and the number of individuals who received OIB services.

| **Federal Fiscal Year** | **Federal Award** | **Number Served** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1999-00 | $1,004,368 | 680 |
| 2000-01 | $1,713,782 | 2,162 |
| 2001-02 | $2,290,501 | 2,332 |
| 2002-03 | $2,604,141 | 2,874 |
| 2003-04 | $3,086,561 | 3,326 |
| 2004-05 | $3,367,434 | 3,701 |
| 2005-06 | $3,260,338 | 4,113 |
| 2006-07 | $3,258,596 | 4,349 |
| 2007-08 | $3,168,533 | 4,715 |
| 2008-09 | $3,381,947 | 5,272 |
| 2009-10 | $3,386,393 | 5,509 |
| 2010-11 | $3,379,345 | 5,874 |
| 2011-12 | $3,397,041 | 7,268\* |
| 2012-13 | $3,212,792\*\* | 6,228 |
| 2013-14 | $3,350,574\*\* | 6,553 |
| 2014-15 | $3,297,919\*\* | 7,178 |
| 2015-16 | $3,297,919\*\* | 6,737 |
| 2016-17 | $3,352,651 | 5,849 |
| 2017-18 | $3,380,180 | 5,246 |
| 2018-19 | $3,354,064 | 5,696 |
| 2019-20 | $3,324,910 | 4,757 |

Source: RSA-7-OB Reports

\*Increase due to one-time American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding

\*\*Values adjusted to reflect final published 7-OB reports

While statistics can be useful in measuring performance, they do not reflect the personal impact and meaningful benefit for each individual. Consumer success stories on OIB services can be found in section 8.5.

For the next biennium, the OIB program will monitor and provide technical assistance to the grantees with updated reporting and invoicing processes. OIB will conduct program reviews to ensure proper expenditure of funds, documentation of consumer services, and data collection methods for accurate reporting. Development and competing of the Request for Applications (RFA) for the next grant cycle will begin in early 2022.

# Consumer Success Stories

All names have been altered to protect the privacy of the consumers and recipients of SSD services.

## BFS Success Stories

Ms. C. came to BFS six years ago for assistance after becoming blind from a brain tumor which had to be removed. She was no longer able to work in her prior job. However, despite her loss of sight, she was very motivated to learn new skills to become independent again and hopefully go back to work. She received extensive independent living skills training in all areas including orientation and mobility with a white cane, Braille, and using a computer with “JAWS” screen reader software. While involved in this training, she also attended college and received her Associate of Arts degree. She did extremely well in both and was then sent to a specialized training center that focused on Customer Service skills. All of this hard work paid off when she received full-time work as a customer service representative at a psychiatric center in San Diego. She says she has the best job ever and can work from home. Her boss is impressed with her job performance.

Ms. J. applied to BFS in 2015, only a few months after being diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP), which is a progressive eye condition that can lead to Blindness. She was also diagnosed with anxiety and depression related to her RP diagnosis. As an 18-year-old, she had been looking forward to attending college but was not sure she could do so with her RP. Although her mother took medical leave to take care of her, Ms. J. understood that she would need to become independent again to pursue her goals. She received a number of assessments, assistive technology and training to allow her to improve the efficiency of her remaining vision. She then felt that she could go to college and did so at California State University, Los Angeles where she obtained her bachelor’s degree. After graduation, she secured full-time employment as a Marketing and Advertising Manager at a medical company. BFS assisted with the technology, computer equipment, tuition, and job placement to help Ms. J. reach her goals.

Mr. N. contacted BFS in October 2018 to retain his employment as a marketing manager with a very large worldwide retailer. He was concerned about revealing his visual impairment to his employer, how he would perform his essential job duties, and nervous about maintaining his independence in his home and community. BFS assisted Mr. N. with assistive Technology including JAWS screen reader and specialized scanning software to meet his computer needs. BFS then contracted with an assistive technology firm who installed and configured this software on his system at his employer’s office. BFS then hired another scripting specialist to allow JAWS to work with the employer’s proprietary software. Mr. N. is now able to access his employer’s databases. Mr. N. was extremely happy to be able to retain his job with a salary of over $90,000 per year that he had worked so hard to achieve over many years.

Mr. K. came to BFS a few years ago as he was losing his vision and had been laid off as Director of Food and Nutrition for a large well-known worldwide food distributor. He was married, had an infant, and had just purchased a home. He had no idea what he would be able to do to sustain himself and his family with his increasing loss of vision. He loved his prior job. With the assistance of BFS, Mr. K. was able to obtain a job as Director of Food Operations at a hospital in the Central Valley. A number of assessments and recommendations for assistive technology were completed and equipment was purchased to assist Mr. K. with his job duties. Mr. K.’s new job allowed him to continue in the field he enjoys and met his salary needs to remain in his new home and to provide for his family.

Mr. D. became a BFS consumer as a high school senior as he had been dealing with serious vision loss since he was a child. He was a very good student and particularly loved computers and the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math fields in general. He was accepted to University of California, Merced in 2016. He knew he wanted to major in Computer Science. He was determined and found on-campus housing on his own and took public transportation to college. Mr. D. continued with his excellent grades and graduated from college with a 3.8 GPA. His BFS counselor guided him to seek opportunities for work experience and was assisted in obtaining a computer internship with the FBI in the spring of 2019. Shortly after that internship, Mr. D. was offered a position in the fall of 2019 as an Assistant Software Engineer with a very large international Bank earning a salary in excess of $90,000 per year.

Mr. H. is a 20-year-old young man who is very satisfied with the dishwasher job BFS helped him obtain at a very large social media company. This is his first paid job where he earns $20 per hour. He is very happy to be able to contribute to his household’s income, which helps them all survive in the expensive Bay Area. He is very committed to his job taking two buses and BART to get to work and then an Uber home at 10:30 p.m. He is grateful with the BFS services he received for his job and the ability to be independent and a productive member of society.

Mr. I. is a self-employed small business man running a very successful green technology fertilizer company in the Bay Area. Because he was losing his vision, he was not sure he would be able to continue running his company which he very much wanted to do. He could not email and do other important computer work and could not travel on his own. He was relying on assistants or other employees to help with his work. BFS provided Mr. I. with assistive technology assessments, technology devices, and training. Mr. I. also received Orientation and Mobility Training with a white cane enabling him to continue traveling on his own without assistance. He is happy to be able to keep his business, remain independent, and continue to provide work to other employees.

Mr. E. came to BFS in 2019 with increasing loss of vision and without a job. He was looking for help finding work and to address his vision loss. He had an impressive resume and had a Bachelor’s of Art degree. Although he was experiencing vision loss, he continued to be motivated to work. He anxiously attended orientation and mobility training with a white cane and excelled in assistive technology training. He was an eager learner and did well learning alternative techniques and had a great attitude. In June of 2020, he accepted a position with the city of San Francisco as a Training Officer earning over $100,000 annually.

Mr. S. is a 32-year-old man who came to BFS to retain his job as a mechanic at a large international commercial airline. He had lost most of his vision due to an accident. He was unsure whether he would be able to work as a mechanic again. BFS provided him orientation and mobility training with a cane to allow him to be able to get back and forth to work independently. He also received low vision aids and other assistive technology. BFS hired a specialist to script his computer so the accessible software programs worked with the employer’s existing software program. Once those tools were in place, the airline company retained him as a mechanic. He was grateful to be able to continue in the field he loves.

## DHHS Success Stories

Ms. N. is a deaf consumer whose only language fluency was in American Sign Language (ASL) prior to requesting services at DOR. Her parents are Spanish speakers, and they were unable to communicate well with their daughter in any language. Through the intake and assessment process, the RCD helped her to create an employment goal of Teacher Assistant for the deaf and hard of hearing, which required her to obtain an associate degree. Working to resolve barriers to achieving this goal, the RCD provided her with ongoing support and services including tutoring in Math and English, ASL interpreting, a laptop computer, transportation, and books. Ms. N. was counseled by her RCD to obtain volunteer experience in her field, while attending college, and network with local schools who might be able to offer her future employment. Ms. N. successfully graduated from her college program. Shortly after graduation, she was able to secure employment as a Teacher Assistant for deaf and hard of hearing children.

When Ms. R., unexpectedly lost her hearing overnight, she came to DOR requesting assistance with an audiological evaluation, hearing aids, employment services, and assistive listening devices. Her RCD was able to provide the requested services. Ms. R. secured full-time employment with a local medical center as a Certified Registered Nurse. Her wage at the time of hire was over $50 per hour.

Mr. K., a consumer with a moderate hearing loss, was a high school student when he first applied to DOR for pre-employment transition services. He was determined to become a lawyer and later participated in vocational training to complete an undergraduate degree and law school. DOR provided services including tuition, books and supplies, transportation, and other equipment. He obtained employment as a Judicial Law Clerk in Washington, DC and is now earning over $40 per hour.

Mr. M., who is deaf-blind, came to DOR for vocational training to pursue a career working in the kitchen. DOR provided services including a vocational assessment at the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) in New York as this is the only facility in the Country that could adequately assess this need for a deaf-blind consumer and provide the training for this independent living skills training to prepare for work. Afterwards, he returned home to work side-by-side with the HKNC’s job Placement Specialist located in

Los Angeles. DOR then provided an Employment Training and Placement Specialist along with short-term supports through Support Services Providers (SSP) so that Mr. M.’s communication needs were met on the job. SSPs are trained to work with persons who are deaf-blind. A local interpreting agency was responsible for coordinating the SSPs and ASL interpreters. The teamwork of these agencies and Mr. M.’s positive attitude and motivation were contributing factors to his ability to become employed. Mr. M. is now employed at a national restaurant chain as a Food Preparation Specialist.

Ms. E. has moderate-to-severe hearing loss. She was referred to DOR during her last semester of college to see if she was eligible for college support to complete her doctorate in audiology. She applied to and was accepted at five top colleges. Her RCD provided her with partial tuition, college textbooks, transportation, licenses, a laptop computer, and moving expenses. Ms. E. was able to obtain an externship after she competitively applied for 20+ clinics and hospitals all over the United States. Upon completing her externship, she was hired full-time as a licensed audiologist. Ms. E. earns over $70,000 annually.

Ms. R., is a profoundly deaf young woman with a speech impediment and an immigrant who was referred to DOR for vocational services from a local high school. Due to language barriers, she was not able to complete her high school diploma. Instead of receiving a certificate of completion, Ms. R. worked with her RCD to enroll in employment readiness training with a local community resource partner. She was able to develop basic language, communication, and work-readiness skills as well as skills to assist her with obtaining and securing permanent employment. She received employment services, transportation, audiological evaluation, hearing aids, and interpreting services as well as assistive technology devices. Upon completing the training provided by the CRP, Ms. R. obtained full-time employment as a Food Preparation staff member for her local school district.

## BEP Success Stories

Mr. K. completed the BEP training program in January 1973. He was awarded his first vending facility in 1974 and successfully operated many other vending sites throughout his career. In 1978, he received a Certificate of Achievement for his outstanding food service in a State hospital cafeteria, where he increased monthly sales from $6,000 to $10,000. In 1980, he found the most challenging project yet, when he was awarded a cafeteria in Orange County. With the assistance of the BEP resources, accessible technology, and his own capabilities, he created a system to overcome the demands of food service and achieved his financial goals. Mr. K.’s greatest business achievement was to increase the cafeteria monthly sales from $26,000 to $65,000 after two years of operation, with the peak of monthly sales of $95,000 during his later years in the program. He was one of the first vendors that utilized screen readers equipped computers to operate a business in the California BEP. In June 2020, Mr. K. retired from BEP paying tribute to all BEP staff that contributed to a successful career during his 47 years in food service with BEP. Mr. K. loved what he did and worked on ways to improve his business model until his last day.

Mr. C. has a Business Management degree and has always had a passion for the food service and hospitality industry. He began as a bus boy and eventually worked his way up to manager positions at restaurants in Hollywood, California. In 2005, Mr. C. began losing his eyesight and consequently left his job in the restaurant industry. For several years, he worked various jobs until learning of the BEP in 2018. For him, the BEP was a vehicle to get back into the restaurant industry. After completing the training in 2019, Mr. C. was awarded a Military contract in Northern California in January 2020. His heart has always been in the food industry and his participation in BEP has helped him restore his confidence by bringing his dream back to life of working in the hospitality industry and securing his financial stability.

## OCB Success Stories

Following the completion of the OCB training program in December 2020, Mr. J. who is legally blind, has some left-side paralysis, and a traumatic brain injury, all due to a gunshot wound, attained full-time employment in January 2021 as a custodian for a well-known shipping warehouse. In intensive care for 3 months, and then in rehabilitation for 3 and a half more months, Mr. J. defied the doctors and their prognosis and learned to walk again. He then sought DOR services and accessed OCB to gain the skills necessary for him to live independently. Mr. J. completed the OCB training program and requested to work as a custodian intern. While in training, the OCB team acquired adaptive tools and made modifications to existing equipment which enabled Mr. J. to learn and perform all custodial duties as an on-site intern. Simultaneously, Mr. J. completed a certificated janitorial program through a community college.

Working full-time since the age of 18 and a Type 1 diabetic since childhood, Ms. R. lost her vision suddenly at the age of 29. At that time, Ms. R. was a supervisor for a call center, but due to blindness she was forced to resign her position and move back home with her parents. With strong family support and her DOR counselor, Ms. R. faced the challenges of the OCB program with an extremely positive attitude and high energy and enthusiasm which enabled her to acquire proficiencies in all areas. Once she obtained aptitude while using the computer with a screen reader, Ms. R. explained, “I thought I would try to return to the call center, but now that I have computer skills, I want more. I want to go to college”. Working closely with her OCB computer teacher, Ms. R. signed up for a college course while still in training at OCB. Immediately following the completion of OCB’s program, Ms. R. moved into her own apartment and began attending community college, where she is working towards a bachelor’s degree in Social Work. Ms. R. has maintained a 4.0 GPA for the past three semesters, and she will be transferring to a four-year university in the Spring of 2022.

Ms. O. started losing her central vision at the age of sixteen. She was having difficulty accessing written materials in class. She began her training at OCB in 2019, at the age of 18. Ms. O. said that being with others who shared similar experiences gave her a sense of belonging and the opportunity to form meaningful friendships. In the fall of 2020, she started at San Francisco City College. Her declared major is in Asian American Studies and she looks forward to unleashing the possibilities this path can unfold. Ms. O. concluded that she has learned “coping with vision loss is a process, and it takes time to adapt to your circumstances”. A quiet, well-balanced young woman, Ms. O. embodies a unique journey, yet a similar one to other success stories.

## OIB Success Stories

Ms. X. has been totally blind from birth. Her family is very protective of her, impeding her ability to become independent. Being monolingual Spanish further isolated her from much day-to-day contact outside of her immediate household. She began attending an OIB program’s Spanish Support Group but remained quiet and reserved. Her attendance at several retreats and participation in the program enabled her to become more comfortable with the people around her and in communicating with English speakers. Today, she is a volunteer mentor to Spanish-speaking clients.

After vision loss, Ms. B. feared having to move into an assisted living facility. She had family members take prepared foods to her on a rotating basis and she was unable to leave home. Things changed for her when she received services from an OIB program. She learned of the paratransit service that could bring her to town and she learned to prepare her own meals, go shopping, and participate in recreational activities that she enjoyed before vision loss.

Mr. K., a 99-year-old consumer, arrived at an OIB program wanting to learn how to use an iPad to compose and edit his writings. At his late stage in life, he gradually reached the point where he was able to edit his own text. He also learned to use a music-streaming application and enjoys selecting his desired songs.

Mr. S.’s daughter contacted an OIB program because of her father’s increased sight loss. At 92-years-old, he still wanted to maintain his independence and stay in his own home. His vision loss made it difficult for him to pay his bills and prepare meals. Program staff determined that a video magnifier would help Mr. S. and provided him one on a long-term loan through VIPS AT lending library. After training on the video magnifier in his home, Mr. S. was able to read bills and other important information. Mr. S. can now pay his own bills, maintain his finances, and access important documents. Mr. S. also participated in Independent Living Skills training in his home, learning how to safely use knives with a cut resistant glove, how to use low vision measuring tools, and new cooking techniques to prepare his own meals. Mr. S. now feels comfortable preparing his own meals again. He reports that he is thrilled to be able to continue taking care of himself and remain independent in his own home.

Ms. D. was depressed during the pandemic because she was no longer receiving books on tape from The Braille Institute. Under our OIB program, Ms. D. was introduced to the Library of Congress Braille and Audio Reading Download mobile application. She participated in remote training to receive assistance on how to use BARD mobile, including searching for and downloading books. After a few attempts, Ms. D. was able to successfully download books on her iPhone. She cried tears of happiness because she is now able to use her phone to listen to audio books.

# Appendix A: List of Acronyms

The following list reflects acronyms commonly used in this report:

ASL American Sign Language

BEP Blind Enterprises Program

BFS Blind Field Services

CRP Community Rehabilitation Program

CVPC California Vendors Policy Committee

DHHS Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services

DOR Department of Rehabilitation

FFY Federal Fiscal Year

FMR Fair Minimum Return

OCB Orientation Center for the Blind

OIB Older Individuals who are Blind Program

OIB-TAC Older Individuals who are Blind Program Technical Assistance Center

RCD Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf

RCB Rehabilitation Counselor for the Blind

RFA Request for Applications

RSA Rehabilitation Services Administration

SB 105 Senate Bill 105, Chapter 1102, Statutes of 2002

SFY State Fiscal Year

SSD Specialized Services Division

SSP Support Service Providers

VRED Vocational Rehabilitation Employment Division

WIOA Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act