California Department of Rehabilitation Logo
Employment, Independence and Equality

Department of Rehabilitation

Biennial Report

on

Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired and

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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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 is DOR’s tenth report. The first nine reports starting July 1, 2005, and each subsequent odd numbered year, are available by request.

Since the last biennial report, the SSD and its five sections have made excellent progress emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic. Current BFS applications and successful job placements are exceeding pre-pandemic numbers, and since SB 105’s inception, BFS had one of its best years in 2022. BFS continues to have the highest average consumer wages compared to all other DOR districts. Similarly, Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers continue to obtain employment with higher average weekly wages compared to the average weekly wages of all other DOR consumers obtaining employment.

The BEP provides DOR consumers who are legally blind with training and opportunities to become independent food service vendors in federal and state government buildings. Its vendors have been extremely productive post the Covid-19 pandemic, and there has been much planning, restructuring, and exploring of new business opportunities to accommodate the post-pandemic consumer market to provide profitable business opportunities to the BEP vendors.

The OCB is a DOR owned and operated training facility in Albany, California that assists job-seekers from across California who are visually impaired and blind to adjust to their vision loss and acquire the skills and tools necessary to pursue competitive integrated employment. A specialized staff of qualified teachers, trainers and rehabilitation professionals provide comprehensive training and experiences tailored to assist each participant to reach their full potential for independence. During State Fiscal Years (SFY) 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, OCB will have served an average of 16 consumers per 12-week in-person training session, serving four cohorts annually and completing its tenth consecutive cohort. Being able to continue these services has allowed OCB participants to obtain the independence required to work towards competitive integrated employment (CIE).

The OIB program has continued to serve over 4,475 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 99 percent of OIB recipients reporting maintaining or increasing their independence as a direct result of the OIB services received.

# Background

The Specialized Services Division (SSD) was established with the enactment of SB 105, which recognized the need for a more skilled and tailored approach to providing vocational rehabilitation (VR) 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)

The primary objective of Blind Field Services (BFS) is to provide blind and Visually Impaired Californians with the necessary training and tools to enable them to become independent and obtain competitive integrated employment (CIE). BFS assist blind and visually impaired consumers in their pursuit of a career with high wages, benefits, and job satisfaction that encourages them to keep working and not rely on government entitlement programs and other benefits that can result in navigating a less fulfilling and productive life.

BFS has staff located throughout the State to reach as many blind and visually impaired consumers as possible. Since the last biennial report in 2021, any blind or visually impaired individual can now apply for BFS services online instead of having to come into a DOR office to apply. The online application process is accessible with screen-reader and screen enlargement software. Likewise, DOR’s public-facing website and available resources are now accessible with assistive technology. With these improvements, BFS and DOR completed one of the main goals of the SB 105 legislation, which was to make DOR’s website and resources accessible to the blind and visually impaired community.

Although Covid-19 and the subsequent California government shutdown in March of 2020 initially caused a significant decrease in BFS applications, applications have steadily begun to increase over the proceeding years and have surpassed pre-pandemic levels. Additionally, despite the initial impact the pandemic had on the state’s unemployment rate, a significant number of BFS consumers were able to obtain employment working from home that paid well, as compared to the general VR caseload, during the pandemic. These remote and virtual opportunities played an important role in mitigating the commuting and public transportation issues many blind and visually impaired individuals face and navigate daily and has historically been one of the biggest impediments to employment. As a result, employers were more open to hiring BFS consumers in these jobs compared to the period prior to the pandemic.

One reason BFS has the highest average wages as compared to all other DOR consumers is that in recent years, BFS consumers have been able to obtain and retain more jobs in the Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) fields than ever before. This is due in large part to the improvement in assistive technology and efforts to make training materials and other resources accessible.

BFS has also continued to increase the number of services to students, 16 to 21 years old, as required by the Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). These services include job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, post-secondary education counseling, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy. Over the past two fiscal years, DOR has provided 3,586 hours of work experience to students who are blind or visually impaired. BFS recognizes that having a work history significantly increases the likelihood of consumers obtaining and retaining CIE. Having work experience can also reduce the number of consumers leaving the workplace.

In accordance with SB 105, all BFS Rehabilitation Counselors for the Blind (RCBs) and team managers continue to receive mandatory ongoing, specialized training to increase their expertise and remain current on information important when working with Blind and Visually Impaired consumers. During the pandemic, BFS was able to accomplish some limited in-person training. BFS initiated a Blind Immersion Program at OCB for BFS counselors and staff. For one week, five BFS staff attended immersion training at OCB in Albany, California. Participants stayed in the OCB dormitories and were encouraged to use sleep shades to simulate the experience of being newly blind when participating in various training, such as assistive technology assessments, orientation and mobility, and daily living skills. BFS is in the process of sending additional staff who would benefit from immersion training. Most other BFS training during the pandemic was done remotely, including training on procuring assistive technology goods and services, current trends in assistive technology hardware and software for blind and visually impaired consumers, supported employment for blind and visually impaired individuals, person centered individualized plan for employment, and labor market research.

Due to the pandemic, BFS had been unable to have its traditional, in person, annual SB 105 conference. In July of 2023, BFS is excited to not only hold this in-person conference for the first time since the pandemic but also celebrate the 20th year anniversary of the enactment of SB 105 at OCB in Albany, California. The SB 105 celebration includes an open house to the public that will feature speakers reviewing the history and importance of SB 105, assistive technology displays, tours of the OCB campus, and other exciting events.

As the table below shows, blind and visually impaired consumers have continued to obtain employment with higher average weekly wages as compared to all other DOR consumers who have obtained work.

| **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 |
| 2021-22 | 380 | 355 | 93% | $626 | $864 |
| 2022-23\* | 154 | 154 | 100% |  |  |

\*As of January 31, 2023

\*\*DOR average weekly earnings are comprised of competitive weekly earnings of all DOR consumers served including BFS consumers (Data from Hourly and Median Wages at Employment by BFFR)

In addition to the table above, section 8.1 of this report highlights the impact and meaningful benefits employment services have had on BFS consumers. For the next biennium, BFS will continue efforts to increase applications from potential blind and visually impaired consumers throughout the state. BFS will continue our emphasis and focus on increasing applications of students ages 16 to 21, as required by WIOA. There will also be more attention focused on increasing the number and quality of relationships with businesses and participation with the America’s Job Centers of California (AJCC), a mandatory partner of DOR.

# Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS)

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS) program provides technical guidance and consultation to its staff and community partners. This includes services such as the bi-monthly Community of Practice sessions with guest speakers, two regional trainings for all staff and community partners, and one annual summer program for high school students regarding STEM training to prepare for future employment. Since the last biennial reporting period, the DHHS program has established specialized services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers with four additional deafness Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP). The new CRPs provide Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) consumers with tutoring services, psychology assessments, short term supports, supported employment, job coaching, and employment services. The CRPs and other community partners continue to provide remote accessible services as well as in-person services to D/HH consumers.

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 workplaces and the community. This included 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. DHHS also administers the Video Remote Interpreting On-Demand (VRIOD) services for cross-district sign language interpreting support and presentations for the Community of Practice sessions.

The table below provides data on the number of D/HH consumers being placed into competitive integrated employment and their average weekly wages compared to the average weekly wages of all other 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 | 396 | 285 | 72.0% | $582 | $649 |
| 2021-22 | 531 | 394 | 74.2% | $626 | $699 |
| 2022-23\* | 249 | 175 | 70.3% | $685 | $772 |

Source: Ad hoc Reports - Field Computer System (pre SFY 2010-11), AWARE (post SFY 2010-11)

\*As of January 31, 2023

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

Examples of some of these individual success stories can be found in section 8.2 of this report.

In the next biennium, DHHS will work to increase remote and virtual access for D/HH 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 separate from the DHHS unit.

# Business Enterprises Program (BEP)

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) was created in conjunction with the Federal Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936, which authorized a priority for BEP to place vending facilities on federal property. In 1945, California law enacted and expanded the federal program giving priority for BEP operated vending facilities on State property.

Over the past two decades, the BEP has experienced a steady decline in vendor net profits and the number of available opportunities for profitable new facilities. State and federal hiring freezes, lay-offs, furloughs, and an increase in telework opportunities have steadily dwindled the customer base for the BEP vendors since their primary customers are state and/or federal employees. Higher cost of goods and increased employee wages have resulted in higher operating costs and a decrease in profits to vendors. Additionally, increased security requirements in public buildings, a fluctuating economy, and an increase in competitive integrated employment opportunities for individuals who are blind and visually impaired, have all contributed to a decrease in new vendor interest. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic further limited the BEP vendors’ opportunities for business success, and many closed their doors, retired, or gave up their locations.

At the end of this biennium, BEP’s recovery from the effects of the pandemic has been slow. A major reason is the implementation of telework options afforded to state workers. Despite this change, there have been some positive developments. BEP vendors have resumed food service to in-person visiting at state prisons and courthouses. Other state buildings have returned to 40 to 60 percent capacity allowing vendors to reopen and retain the location until foot traffic returns to a more profitable level. Recently, the courts ruled that BEP has priority to operate attendant food services at Department of Defense (DOD) dining facilities. This is expected to provide stable and profitable business opportunities for BEP vendors at several California DOD installations.

The current BEP curriculum for new vendors has been redesigned to incorporate computer-based learning, with emphasis on occupational skills to better prepare the trainees to operate a food service business. Other BEP services include developing new facilities, 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.

BEP provided a maximum of $21,262 to 51 vendors to offset losses and to help keep their businesses viable during the challenges of COVID-19 as part of the California vendors’ $906,516 share of stimulus funds appropriated by Congress.

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\* |
| 2020-21 | 68 | $27,050,007 | $2,741,616 | $46.833 | 61 | 1 |
| 2021-22 | 63 | $35,805,159 | $3,177,352 | $50,434 | 60 | 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. Section 8.3 presents a glance of vendor success stories while receiving BEP services.

BEP's focus for the next biennium is to become the preferred food service choice throughout the state of California 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)

The Orientation Center for the Blind (OCB) is a DOR owned and operated residential training facility that assists visually impaired and blind consumers 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. The training is tailored to meet consumers’ individualized needs, and the average length of training is 12 weeks. Depending on individual needs and circumstances of the consumer, it may be assessed and determined to be appropriate and advantageous to receive additional training on the residential campus or in the consumer’s local area in which they reside. The additional training would assist in strengthening and gaining skills and techniques leading to independence and future employment. The residential facility is available to support up to 20 consumers at any given time.

From July 2021 to present, OCB offered non-residential services for those living in the Greater San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to residential training services, local consumers were able to attend training at the OCB one to five days per week depending on their availability and individual training needs. This allowed consumers with minor children at home, medical limitations such as dialysis, part-time employment, community college classes, and other scheduling restrictions to participate in training at OCB without having to forego their other demands entirely.

OCB services also include a two-week comprehensive work-related behaviors and skills assessment. This service is designed to evaluate the consumer’s baseline skills in areas related to blindness, including orientation and mobility (O&M) (white cane use, mental mapping, use of travel related technology tools, and travel training to include fixed route systems), Braille proficiency, foundational skills (money handling to include card and cash identification and management, labelling, color identification, telling time, keeping appointment calendars, etc.), and assistive technology applications including smartphones, and daily living skills. A third-party comprehensive career interest inventory and aptitude assessment is also offered as part of the assessment program. The information gathered is designed to be used by the consumer and their BFS counselor to develop an appropriate vocational rehabilitation plan that leads to a successful employment outcome. Since the last SB 105 report, the following program components were added to enhance the training experience: Zoom workshops with emphasis on boundaries in the workplace, safety while out in the community, and a seminar focused on sexual health and education. Both the workshops and the seminar all include topics of healthy relationships, consent, and healthy boundaries. Additionally, a second program component added was an O&M two-week, 40 hour-bootcamp, in which DOR consumers reside in the dormitory and receive mobility training.

As we pivot further from the Covid-19 pandemic, the OCB training program continues to deliver direct in-person training in which participants receive a twelve-week intensive immersion training schedule serving four cohorts annually. The dorm capacity continues to be reduced to under 50 percent to allow for single occupancy and promote social distancing. OCB continues to take appropriate health and safety measures in alignment with California Department of Public Health guidelines to help mitigate the spread of Covid-19.

OCB also continues its Family Integration Program (FIP) as a program enhancement. The goal of FIP is to support participants with their transition back to their homes and communities after training at OCB. Often, families encounter various challenges and may find it difficult to support their loved one’s independence during this transitional period. For example, providing appropriate assistance for participants often creates unique challenges for family/guardians who may not understand how and when to provide support, and what type of support to provide. FIP gives family/guardians the opportunity to discuss their loved one’s progress with OCB’s onsite rehabilitation counselor and teachers. Family/guardians will view a pre-recorded video of their loved one independently performing tasks learned in classes. The videos can help provide some context as well as give rise to an exchange of observations, ideas, and feedback. Most of all, the collaboration and integration of family/guardians will assist in the smooth transition home so that participants’ skills of independence will continue to be encouraged.

During SFYs 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, OCB will have served an average of 16 consumers per 12-week training Session. A segment of consumers served by OCB staff includes DOR’s partnership with the Foundation for California Community Colleges, in which OCB is a worksite for DOR consumers to gain paid work experience. The paid work experiences offered are in the groundskeeping, custodial, and food service areas. The DOR consumer identifies their area of interest and schedules an interview with OCB staff. Upon the completion of the interview, a tentative start date is discussed. The DOR consumer communicates and works in concert with their BFS counselor to finalize the process. OCB supervises their work experience and gives feedback on work performance and interviewing skills. The paid work experience allows the consumer to learn good work habits, gain valuable work experience, and build their resume.

OCB continues to build relationships with community partners who have expertise with other disabilities or underserved groups. Specific partnership areas identified by OCB include agencies working with individuals with disabilities who are homeless, formerly incarcerated, or have acute psychiatric illness. Through these partnership efforts, OCB can serve individuals with multiple disabilities and/or additional societal barriers as well as assist other agencies to better serve the Blind/Visually Impaired (B/VI) population who may seek their services.

OCB continues to work with San Francisco State University where graduate students in Orientation and Mobility obtain experience as interns by providing supervised instruction to OCB consumers. OCB launched the one-week mini-immersion experience wherein four Qualified Rehabilitation Professionals (QRPs) and one Office Technician (OT) participated in May and June of 2022. Sleep shades were issued to the DOR staff and the staff members were given a class schedule and participated in hands on training experience which entailed: residing in the dormitory, eating in the cafeteria, taking part in all training classes, and attending small group meetings.

# Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB)

This biennium continues to be challenging for the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program due to ongoing pandemic impacts on grantees ability to fully serve OIB consumers in the more traditional in-person format. Despite the ongoing pandemic impacts, the OIB program has continued to serve over 4,475 individuals annually with 78 percent of funds being used on direct consumer services, such as assistive technology, daily living skills, and orientation and mobility training.

The OIB program continues providing services to consumers in 56 of the 58 State counties in this grant cycle. The current formula for distribution of OIB funds allows OIB participants in less densely populated areas to take advantage of the program compared to the prior formula that had been used. The current six-year grant cycle compared to the prior three-year cycle has proved to be beneficial in many ways such as a longer and more stable funding source for the non-profit service providers.

OIB staff has continued supporting grantees with technical assistance and personalized plans to strengthen their ability to deliver virtual and in-person services safely and successfully. The grantees report learning valuable strategies, such as virtual support groups, online curriculum for teaching independent living skills, and outreach to local groups using virtual methods, which helps service providers improve their ability to connect with and serve OIB consumers.

The Request for Applications (RFA) process was conducted, establishing the service providers for the next three to five years, starting October 1, 2023. OIB staff is working with grantees to establish all grant parameters and the implementation of updated grant requirements in service provision and reporting.

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

| **Federal Fiscal Year**  **(FFY)** | **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 |
| 2020-21 | $3,334,694 | 4,492 |
| 2021-22 | $3,317,252 | 4,883 |

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

Examples of some of these individual success stories can be found in section 8.5 of this report.

For the next biennium, the OIB program will focus on re-starting in-person reviews to ensure proper documentation of consumer services, expenditure of funds, and data collection methods for accurate reporting.

# Consumer Success Stories

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

## BFS Success Stories

Mr. G. is 33 years old and applied for BFS services in early 2021. His disabilities included legal blindness due to Corneal Dystrophy, Bilateral Moderate Hearing Loss and mental health issues related in part to the stress from the lack of stable work and housing. He told his counselor that he really hoped to become an Accountant. However, he explained to his counselor in his own words: "My job journey has been challenging at times, particularly due to my mental health struggles. I did find that the stigma around disability is difficult to deal with. I still remember being humiliated by a classmate as a child who said, "If I were you, I would jump off a building”. I have been searching for the meaning of my life and hope to prove that my life is worth living when I pass.” The BFS counselor assisted Mr. G. with services that included counseling and guidance, various vocational assessments, low vision and assistive technology devices, hearing aids, tax and accounting training, funds for CPA professional exam, clothing, job placement assistance, and transportation for these services and interviews. These services, combined with Mr. G.’s hard work, paid off. He obtained a job as a full-time Accountant at a private accounting and auditing firm near his home. His annual starting salary was $41,600 with health and other benefits. Mr. G. is very happy with his new job, the experience he is getting and is looking forward to the possibility of upward mobility in the firm. He is grateful for BFS support and allowing him to finally have meaningful, gainful employment and stability in his life.

Ms. N. is a first-generation daughter of parents who immigrated from the Middle East to California. Soon after she was born, it was determined by medical staff that she was legally blind due to an irreversible congenital eye condition. Her parents did not accept this and constantly told her to act like she could see, even though she told them she could not. She and her mother suffered from long term domestic violence and verbal abuse by the father. Her father told her she was damaged and nothing more than a mistake. This led to a lot of emotional trauma and mental health issues for which she would need treatment. When her father began to arrange a marriage for her when she was 16 years old, he told her not to let the suitors know that she was blind because having a broken child was disgraceful. He told her it was her duty to marry, make her husband happy, raise her children and stay at home. She did not agree and wanted to decide her own life. While in high school, she was referred to BFS when she was 17 years old. As high school graduation came closer, the domestic violence continued to escalate, and she began fearing for her life. When she turned 18 years old, she fled to a shelter for domestic violence survivors. Her parents disowned her and have not spoken to her to this day. She instead began relying on herself and adopting others into her life including her long-term relationship with BFS and DOR. BFS assisted her through college and a master’s degree in social work, with books and supplies, independent living skills training and devices, assistive technology and training needed to use a computer and read printed materials, Orientation and Mobility with a white cane and then a guide dog, interview clothing, counseling and guidance and job placement services. She obtained a job as a Case Manager for Veteran Services in Los Angeles where she assists homeless veterans. She works full-time and earns $56,000 a year with benefits. She is extremely satisfied with her job and the services from BFS who she now calls her family.

Mr. R. is 50 years old and came to BFS in 2020, due to his continuing loss of vision resulting from Retinitis Pigmentosa. This progressive eye condition was interfering with him being able to do his job as a Nuclear Engineer. He was extremely worried that he might have to retire from this very large well-known business where he had a very successful and rewarding career for 17 years. He applied for BFS services to hopefully retain his job. He met with his BFS counselor who assisted him with a visual assessment, assistive technology assessments, assistive technology devices and software, a computer for this technology, assistive technology training, and transportation for these services. With these devices and training, Mr. R. was able to retain his job where he earns $128,000 a year with benefits. He is relieved to know that he can now continue to support himself and his family until he decides when he would like to retire.

Ms. T. is a survivor of many years of domestic violence which caused her loss of vision, neurological and mental health impairments. When trying to escape this situation, she initially ended up homeless. She then found stable housing in a safe house for survivors of domestic violence. Despite these traumatic events, she was still driven to move forward and hopefully work as a Mental Health Counselor assisting others that were going through the same kind of situation. She met with her BFS Counselor who agreed with her vocational goal. This plan required her to start in the Community College and to then obtain her bachelor’s degree in psychology. Ms. T. obtained her degree and began interviewing for work in her area of interest. She was thrilled to be offered a job as a Mental Health Specialist with a County District Attorney’s Office working with victims of violent crimes including domestic violence. She enjoys her work very much and appreciates what BFS has done for her. She is working 40 hours a week and earning $63,000 a year with benefits. BFS services she received include Counseling and Guidance, college textbooks and supplies, Academic Tutoring, a Low Vision Evaluation, an Assistive Technology Assessment, a Vocational Evaluation, Low Vision aids, a laptop computer system, a smartphone, Adaptive Technology hardware and software, Assistive Technology training, interview and work clothing and public transportation.

Mr. G. applied for BFS services after being referred by his high school when he was 17 years old in 2012. His visual impairment was caused by Congenital Cataracts and Nystagmus in both eyes. Mr. G. told his BFS Counselor that he really wanted to attend college and was interested in science, math, and other related fields. He had been an excellent high school student with great success in these areas. The BFS Counselor knew he was dealing with an unusually bright young man and wanted to support him in his area of interest. He had already been accepted at the University of California, Irvine where he wanted to attend. His Counselor agreed to support that college plan and to write a temporary vocational goal of becoming a Pharmacy Aid while he obtained his bachelor’s degree in a closely related science field. After obtaining his bachelor’s degree, he met with his BFS Counselor and requested to pursue graduate school to obtain a Doctor of Pharmacy degree. While in graduate school, Mr. G. did his residency in Data Analytics. After graduating, he was hired at the University of California, Davis Health as a Pharmacist. He is working full time at $158,000 a year with excellent benefits.

Mr. C. is 47 years old and legally blind due to Retinitis Pigmentosa. He also has an Intellectual Disability and is a consumer of the Regional Center. He graduated with a Certificate of Completion from high school when he was 22 years old while he was attending the California School for the Blind (CSB) in Freemont, California. He had received Independent Living Skills training including Orientation and Mobility training with a white cane. After leaving CSB, Mr. C. obtained a few volunteer and sub-minimum wage jobs at a variety of locations and group work centers. After years of these types of jobs, Mr. C. called his BFS counselor to pursue work that would pay him at least minimum wage. The Counselor suggested a well-known sandwich shop close to Mr. C.’s home. The counselor worked with the employer to let Mr. C. try and work doing just one part of the advertised job to start. The owner agreed and Mr. C. was hired as a dishwasher. He continued that job for five years before calling his BFS counselor again saying that he liked his job a lot but was interested in advancement. With his experience in the sandwich shop plus a few other volunteer jobs in food service work, the counselor suggested trying to become a Food Technician with a State agency. Mr. C. agreed and a plan was written to accomplish that goal. With DOR support, Mr. C. renewed his Food Service License and obtained an interview as a Food Technician at the California School for the Deaf which is next door to the School for the Blind. He was offered a job as a Food Technician four hours a day/20 hours a week at $16.50 an hour, benefits, a pension and 401K plans. He also continued to work at the sandwich shop on Saturdays for three hours at $15 an hour. He loves to work and is happy with his current employment.

## DHHS Success Stories

Mr. P. is hard of hearing and worked with DOR to achieve his goal of being a Clinical Laboratory Scientist (CLS). He graduated from Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC) with two AS degrees in Biology and Natural Sciences. He also managed to secure a part-time job with Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital as a Pathology Laboratory Assistant. He augmented his skills at the hospital by completing a Phlebotomy Certificate program. He finished his bachelor’s degree at Sonoma State University and completed online classes at Berkeley Extension to meet the core prerequisites for the CLS program that he will attend at San Francisco State University. Upon receiving his CLS license, his employer plans to convert his position from a Laboratory Assistant to a Clinical Laboratory Scientist which will increase his wages to twice what he is currently making with greater incentives and benefits. DOR provided a variety of resources for him to succeed, which included private tutoring for the most challenging classes, sign language interpreters, required immunization and tests, state exam fees, books, supplies, uniforms, and hearing aids.

Mr. E. is Deaf with a Cochlear implant and came to DOR to request university support while attending community college part-time. He was also working full-time as a Teaching Assistant for a local school. He attended California State University, Sacramento for a BA in ASL/Deaf Studies. After completing two years, he decided to pursue a Deaf/Hard of Hearing teaching credential at California State University, Fresno. He completed a semester-long internship at a local high school in Sacramento. Upon graduation from university, he secured a position teaching Deaf and Hard of Hearing pre-school students for a local County Office of Education at $4,500/a month. DOR provided counseling and guidance, college fees/tuition, books, supplies, Assistive technology, application/examination fees, study materials and transportation assistance.

Ms. S. applied for DOR services with a vocational interest as a lawyer. She specifically wanted to focus on advocating for people and fighting for their rights. She has moderate to severe bilateral hearing loss and was an above average student taking AP classes. Through the assistance of DOR, she has excelled, graduating with a BA in only three (3) years. She was not eligible for FAFSA due to her parents’ income, but she qualified for scholarships and DOR offset the tuition with the UC rate, as well as assisted with books and supplies. Her dream of becoming a Lawyer is coming true as she was recently accepted to Syracuse University Law School with a $120,000 merit scholarship for 3 years.

Mr. S. is a gentleman who is Deaf, homeless, and has a felony record. During his case with DOR, Mr. S. was part of the Second Chance Program at Goodwill Industries. Second Chance helped him develop his resume and provided him with an opportunity to practice for interviews. Upon completion of the weeklong program, Mr. S. graduated with a certificate and was placed at a local dry cleaners’ facility in Ventura, CA. He continues to show up to work despite stressors in his life. He was provided employment services, hearing aids, transportation allowance, clothing assistance, advocacy and ASL interpreting services.

Mr. K. is a deaf young man who communicates mostly via American Sign Language. Before coming to California’s Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), he had obtained a bachelor’s degree in Sociology from Gallaudet University. He has a dream of becoming a social scientist, doing market research. With the support of DOR, he was able to obtain a master’s degree in social science from University of California, Los Angeles. Immediately after completing the graduate program, DOR was able to assist him with obtaining and securing employment as a data analyst for a corporation. He also received audiological evaluation, hearing aids, and interpreting services as well as assistive technology devices.

Ms. E. was born deaf and only discovered her diagnosis of Usher Syndrome five years ago, a rare genetic disease that causes deafness, blindness and balance problems. As a single mother to a 15-year-old daughter, she faced numerous obstacles and believed that she would never be able to work independently due to her Deaf Blindness. However, after learning about resources such as the Helen Keller National Center through the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), Ms. E. realized that she had a bright future ahead of her. She began working with professional trainers in the areas of Independent Living Skills and Orientation & Mobility to help build her skills, confidence and prepare her for competitive integrated employment. While working as a caregiver at Better Living Homecare Service and as a stock clerk at Whole Foods, she had to face and overcome her fear of accidentally bumping into someone or falling. Ms. E. had to battle with feeling uncomfortable and overwhelmed around crowds. Despite facing these challenges, Ms. E. was placed at Marshalls, where she enjoys working and is no longer afraid of being around people. The employer recognizes and appreciates her ability to learn fast and her excellent work ethic. Overall, Ms. E. overcame barriers and persevered through challenges to achieve success in the workplace.

## BEP Success Stories

Mr. C. is legally blind and came to the BEP training program in March 2010 with a bachelor’s degree in computer science. As part of meeting the entrance requirements, he successfully completed a 20-day evaluation with a BEP vendor in southern California. After completing his training in 2011, Mr. C. was awarded the BEP facility at the Port of Entry in San Ysidro. While reflecting on his first business venture, he admits it wasn’t his greatest achievement, but was a great learning experience. Mr. C. moved on to Sacramento where he serviced the California State Prison, Sacramento. Here he was able to apply what he learned from his mistakes and was eventually able to expand his operation to various state buildings in downtown Sacramento, multiple rest stops, and various courthouses throughout California. Due to the Pandemic, he was forced to close his locations. Recently Mr. C. reapplied for a vendor location with the BEP and was awarded the Metropolitan State Hospital vending facility. His return to BEP has helped him restore his confidence and become financially stable to support his family once again.

## OCB Success Stories

Mr. H. is a mature 25-year-old who came to OCB with eagerness and readiness to gain new skills while building upon his existing skill set. Mr. H. increased his confidence and self-reliance leading towards his achievement of obtaining gainful employment as an Accessibility Specialist for Google. While participating in the OCB training program, Mr. H. stated he really wanted to focus on his O&M, Cooking and Daily Living Skills; however, he found gaining new skills and knowledge in Adaptive Technology class proved invaluable in his Google employment. He became more efficient on the computer by learning more JAWS shortcut keystroke commands allowing him to increase his proficiency in software applications such as Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Outlook. Upon completion of the OCB program, Mr. H. followed a job lead with Google and was hired as a full-time employee working with a team on the hardware side of technology and its interaction and accessibility with software programs**.** Mr. H. stated his mobility training at OCB paid off in his ability to negotiate and move throughout the Google campus independently and with confidence. Mr. H. continues applying techniques and strategies he learned at OCB and integrates blindness skills into his work environment as well as everyday real-life.

Mr. M. who is legally blind with an eye disorder that effects his corneas came to OCB as part of the DOR Students with Disabilities paid work experience. Mr. M. interviewed for the food service position in the cafeteria and began his paid work experience in August of 2022. The paid work experience was his first paid job. His willingness to work alongside OCB staff and learn how to become a lead staff person serving breakfast Monday through Friday was evident from his first day on the job. Mr. M. took charge and used his Braille skills to label and make his work environment more organized and accessible for himself and other visually impaired staff. After completing his paid work experience in October 2022, he applied for a vacant Food Service Technician position at OCB. He interviewed well, competed for the position, and was hired onto the OCB team in December 2022. He works 25 hours per week in the cafeteria serving breakfast, sanitizing the food service area, and keeping track of inventory. Mr. M. stated getting a job has given him a foundation and he can start looking to the future and setting new goals for himself. His ultimate goal is to become a car stereo audio installer. Mr. M. described that having a job makes him feel more independent and confident and has allowed him to move out on his own where he lives with roommates.

## OIB Success Stories

Mrs. C. called seeking information on the food pantry program, how to obtain a personal protective equipment (PPE) supply kit, and requesting assistance in obtaining a talking high blood pressure monitor. Mrs. C. has vision loss, cancer, and high blood pressure (BP). The doctor recommended taking her blood pressure 2-3 times daily. Mrs. C. did not have access to a talking blood pressure monitor and requested financial assistance, since she is on a limited income and her insurance was unable to cover the talking BP monitor. With OIB assistance, Mrs. C. received the talking BP monitor and our OIB Coordinator contacted her via telephone and conducted a training on how to use the monitor. At the completion of her plan, she was very satisfied with the services she received, which greatly increase her independence and ability to manage her health.

A consumer’s ophthalmologist referred them to an OIB organization for services due to vision loss. The consumer stated they were devastated as they thought it was the end of their independence. The consumer was amazed at the services provided: assistive technology, local and distance traveling with confidence through O&M, braille instruction, and hands-on lessons in cooking safely. While all these services were being provided the consumer was also learning how to face the losses their new disability presented. The consumer reported that the counseling and therapy staff are full of empathy and helped them understand the emotional and psychological roller coaster they were experiencing and taught them coping skills that are specific to their situation.

Ms. E., a sixty-eight-year-old woman who is legally blind due to diabetic retinopathy, contacted an OIB organization to inquire about the services they provide. She was delighted to learn about their in-home approach. After an over the phone assessment was completed, she was provided in home training and was given various adaptive aids that would assist her with performing everyday tasks independently. She was most grateful for the long white cane and basic Orientation and Mobility training she received. Ms. E. is now more independent and able to independently walk around her property the techniques she learned from OIB.

# 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