

Department of Rehabilitation

Biennial Report

on

Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired and

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

July 1, 2025

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# 1. Executive Summary

The California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) submits this biennial report to the Legislature, highlighting the programs and accomplishments of the Specialized Services Division (SSD), which provides services to individuals who are Blind or Visually Impaired (B/VI) and Deaf or Hard of Hearing (D/HH). In accordance with Senate Bill 105, Chapter 1102, Statutes of 2002 (SB 105), this report includes statistics and personal success stories related to competitive integrated employment outcomes, along with updates on the Business Enterprises Program (BEP), the Orientation Center for the Blind (OCB), and the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program—all administered by SSD. This marks the eleventh such report since the first was issued in 2005. Previous reports, published every two years in odd-numbered years, are available upon request.

Since the last report, the SSD and its five program areas have shown strong progress as they continue to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Blind Field Services (BFS) program is currently experiencing its highest application level in five years. BFS continues to lead the state in placing consumers into employment with the highest average weekly wages. Similarly, Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers are securing employment at higher-than-average weekly wages.

The Business Enterprises Program (BEP) trains legally blind individuals to operate food service businesses in state and federal buildings. Since the pandemic, BEP vendors have demonstrated notable success. Between Federal Fiscal Years (FFY) 2019–20 and 2023–24, BEP reported over $9.8 million in increased sales, more than $2.3 million in additional net profits for vendors, and a $53,000 rise in average annual vendor income. The current average vendor income of $112,000 exceeds pre-pandemic levels, which averaged $92,000 in FFY 2018–19. Financial growth is expected to continue as more state workers return to office settings.

The Orientation Center for the Blind (OCB), located in Albany, California, is a DOR-operated facility offering in-depth training to help blind and visually impaired jobseekers adjust to vision loss and build the skills needed for employment. Staffed by experienced instructors and rehabilitation professionals, OCB provides personalized training programs that promote independence and job readiness. During State Fiscal Years 2023–24 and 2024–25, OCB will serve approximately 15 consumers per 12-week session, with four cohorts each year. As of this report, the center has successfully completed its eighteenth consecutive training cohort.

The Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program serves approximately 4,000 Californians each year who are age 55 or older and have significant visual impairments. More than 84 percent of OIB grant funds are directed toward direct services, including assistive technology (AT) training and devices, daily living skills instruction, and orientation and mobility training. As a result of these services, over 99 percent of participants report maintaining or increasing their independence.

# 2. Background

The Specialized Services Division (SSD) was created through the enactment of SB 105, which recognized the need for a specialized approach to vocational rehabilitation (VR) services for individuals with sensory disabilities. SSD focuses on providing tailored job training and placement services to better support these communities. The division’s goals are:

(1) To assist people who are B/VI and D/HH to obtain competitive integrated employment.

(2) To enlarge economic opportunities for people who are B/VI and D/HH.

(3) To enhance the independence and self-sufficiency of B/VI and D/HH consumers.

# 3. Blind Field Services (BFS)

Blind Field Services (BFS) is dedicated to empowering B/VI Californians with the training and tools needed to achieve independence and obtain competitive integrated employment (CIE). BFS staff are located throughout the state to maximize reach and accessibility. Consumers can now apply for services both online and in person through the accessible VR Connections platform—part of the DOR ongoing efforts to meet the goals of SB 105, including making its website fully accessible to the B/VI community.

BFS currently serves over 5,000 customers. Many have successfully obtained employment, particularly in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields. Advances in accessible technology, remote collaboration tools, and assistive devices have opened more career pathways than ever before. BFS provides critical training and tools to ensure consumers can keep pace with evolving workplace technologies.

BFS has also expanded pre-employment transition services to students aged 16 to 21, as required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). These services include job exploration, work-based learning, post-secondary education guidance, workplace readiness, and self-advocacy instruction. A continued emphasis on paid work experience—shown to increase long-term employment outcomes—remains a program priority.

In September 2024, BFS staff gathered in Sacramento for specialized training, as required by SB 105. This was the first in-person training since the pandemic, with a focus on assistive technology. Highlights included hands-on experience with emerging tools such as AI-powered smart glasses, which promote independence by converting visual information into audio, and the newly released “Monarch” Braille device, which allows for dynamic, tactile access to complex information like math formulas and graphs. The training also featured a presentation from the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC), addressing employment and technology solutions for the deafblind community.

As the table below shows, BFS Blind and Low Vision consumers have continued to obtain employment with higher average weekly wages compared to all other DOR consumers.

| **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 | 364 | 315 | 93% | $676 | $960 |
| 2023-24 | 343 | 315 | 92% | $712 | $912 |
| 2024-25\* | 112 | 106 | 95% | $781 | $941 |

\*As of November 30, 2024.

\*\*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 from DOR Dashboard.)

As detailed further in Section 8.1, BFS services have had a measurable impact on consumer success. In the coming biennium, BFS will focus on increasing applications from both adults and students aged 16 to 21. Outreach to high school districts statewide will continue to expand, along with efforts to provide more paid work experiences for both youth and adult consumers. BFS will also strengthen partnerships with the American Job Centers of California (AJCCs) and the Foundation for California Community Colleges (FCCC) to offer valuable training, resources, and work-based learning opportunities.

# 4. Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS)

The DHHS program is committed to improving access, quality, and outcomes for D/HH consumers. Through targeted strategies and expanded service offerings, DHHS has enhanced opportunities for D/HH individuals to access education, training, and competitive integrated employment.

**Key Initiatives and Services**

**Professional Development and Community Engagement**
DHHS hosts bi-monthly Community of Practice sessions and annual regional trainings to support professional development for staff and partners. These events promote best practices, foster collaboration, and strengthen the delivery of services across the state.

**STEM Summer Program for High School Students**
DHHS continues to offer an annual summer STEM program for high school students who are D/HH. This initiative equips students with foundational skills for high-demand careers and supports early engagement in the workforce.

**Expansion of Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs)**
Since the last reporting period, DHHS has added four new CRPs broadening access to specialized services such as tutoring, job coaching, supported employment, and psychological assessments. Services are available both in-person and remotely to accommodate consumer needs statewide.

**Video Remote Interpreting On-Demand (VRIOD)**
The VRIOD service ensures on-demand sign language interpreting across DOR districts, supporting virtual and in-person meetings, trainings, and events. This service enhances accessibility and ensures D/HH consumers can fully engage in DOR programs.

The following table presents data on the number of D/HH consumers placed into competitive integrated employment, along with 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 | 454 | 311 | 68.5% | $697 | $812 |
| 2023-24 | 457 | 336 | 73.5% | $739 | $819 |
| 2024-25\* | 301 | 177 | 58.8% | $797 | $903 |

\* SFY 2024-25 refers to data as of February 28, 2025.

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

**Priorities for the Next Biennium**

* **Expand Remote Access:** Increase virtual access to apprenticeship, vocational training, and employment services to remove geographic and communication barriers.
* **Enhance Counselor Training:** Provide specialized training for Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs) and DOR staff on remote service delivery, cultural competencies, and adaptive communication technologies.
* **Strengthen Collaboration:** Improve coordination between RCDs and DOR counselors to ensure seamless, effective support for D/HH consumers.

DHHS remains committed to driving innovation, improving access, and advancing employment outcomes for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Californians. Examples of individual success stories are highlighted in Section 8.2.

# 5. Business Enterprises Program (BEP)

The Business Enterprises Program (BEP) was established under the federal Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936, granting priority for vending operations on federal property. California expanded this authority in 1945 to include state-owned sites, giving legally blind individuals the opportunity to operate food service businesses in public facilities.

BEP continues to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, driven by the return of in-person activities at public institutions and increased traffic at state roadside rest areas. This upward trend is expected to continue as more state employees return to on-site work.

To better prepare vendors for success, the BEP training curriculum has been modernized with computer-based learning and a stronger focus on occupational skills. Core BEP services include:

* Developing and launching new vending facilities
* Training and certifying new vendors
* Coordinating the vendor selection and placement process
* Providing ongoing technical support
* Managing vendor equipment and maintenance
* Overseeing facility funding and operations

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

| **Federal Fiscal Year** | **Average Number of BEP Vendors**  | **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 | 82\* | 5\* |
| 2021-22 | 63 | $35,805,159 | $3,177,352 | $50,434 | 81\* | 0 |
| 2022-23 | 59 | $43,761,898 | $5,994,942 | $102,128 | 75 | 1 |
| 2023-24 | 54 | $45,270,323 | $6,112,397 | $112,775 | 72 | 2 |

Source: RSA 15 Reports

\*Values adjusted to reflect final published RSA 15 Reports

\*\*Data does not include Department of Defense

While performance data is important, it does not fully capture the personal impact of the Business Enterprises Program. Section 8.3 of this report highlights individual success stories that reflect the real-world benefits experienced by BEP vendors.

Looking ahead, BEP remains committed to becoming the food service provider of choice across California. The program will continue to modernize vending facilities to align with industry trends and consumer expectations. Ongoing education and support will focus on marketing, operations, health and safety compliance, customer satisfaction, and employee retention to ensure long-term success for vendors.

# 6. Orientation Center for the Blind (OCB)

The Orientation Center for the Blind (OCB) is a residential training facility in Albany, California, operated by the Department of Rehabilitation. OCB serves blind and visually impaired consumers through a 12-week in-person program designed to build independence and work-readiness. Up to four cohorts are served annually, with individualized instruction in orientation and mobility, daily living skills, assistive technology, and other essential areas.

In July 2023, OCB began offering non-residential services to consumers in the Greater Bay Area, expanding access to training. The program also includes work readiness assessments, online workshops, and a two-week mobility training bootcamp.

OCB partners with organizations such as Hearts for Sight and the Foundation for California Community Colleges to provide wellness support and paid work experience. It also serves as a training site for orientation and mobility graduate interns from San Francisco State University.

In July 2023, OCB hosted the SB 105 training and open house event, marking the 20-year SB 105 anniversary. The event brought together DOR staff, community partners, and guest speakers from major blind advocacy organizations for collaboration and professional development.

Consumer success stories can be found in section 8.4.

# 7. Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB)

During this biennium, the OIB program successfully implemented a competitive grant process, ensuring services are available statewide to Californians aged 55 and older who are B/VI. The program continues to serve approximately 4,000 individuals annually, with 84% of funds dedicated to direct services such as assistive technology, daily living skills, and orientation and mobility training.

All 58 counties are covered under the current grant cycle, which uses an updated funding formula to better support rural and underserved areas. Extending the grant cycle from three to five years has provided more stable funding for service providers.

OIB staff continue to offer in-person reviews and technical assistance to grantees, helping strengthen both virtual and in-person service delivery. Grantees report success with strategies such as virtual support groups, online training, and local outreach.

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 |
| 2022-23 | $3,370,978 | 4,654 |
| 2023-24 | $3,407,194 | 3,979 |

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

The above narrative and statistics show trends, but the true impacts of this program can better be seen by reading the examples of success stories in section 8.5 of this report.

For the next biennium, the OIB program will continue providing technical assistance and in-person program reviews to ensure proper documentation of consumer services, expenditure of funds, and data collection methods for accurate reporting.

# 8. Consumer Success Stories

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

## 8.1 BFS Success Stories

**Ms. A.’s Journey to Employment and Independence**

Ms. A., a 28-year-old woman with a lifelong visual impairment, relocated to Sacramento in 2019 and connected with DOR for support. After a low-vision assessment, she received assistive technology, training, and support to pursue her goal of becoming a counselor. She enrolled in a psychology program at a local university and received additional training from the Sacramento Society for the Blind, including orientation and mobility.

While in school, Ms. A. interned at the County Department of Education and later secured a full-time position with the Urban League. After relocating to Alabama, she used her education and experience to obtain a salaried role as a Residential Manager at a training center for the blind. She credits DOR for helping her achieve financial independence and long-term career success.

**Ms. J.’s Path to a New Career**

At age 62, Ms. J. lost her job due to vision loss from glaucoma. Determined to stay in the workforce, she turned to BFS for support. After earning a nutritionist certification, she struggled to find work and, with her counselor’s help, shifted her focus to human resources.

With BFS assistance, Ms. J. earned a bachelor’s degree from CSU Fullerton and soon secured full-time employment with an insurance company, where she helps seniors navigate Medicare. BFS supported her with tuition, assistive technology, and job placement services—empowering her to achieve both independence and a successful career transition.

## 8.2 DHHS Success Stories

**Mr. B.’s Journey to a Career in Tax Auditing**

Mr. B., a prelingually deaf individual fluent in four languages, relocated from New York to California and secured a full-time Tax Auditor position with the Franchise Tax Board in January 2024, earning $88,920 annually.

With support from DOR starting in late 2023—including LEAP certification, interpreting services, and transportation assistance, he applied to 60 jobs, landed 15 interviews, and successfully achieved his career goal. Mr. B.’s story reflects determination, preparation, and the power of DOR services in helping individuals with disabilities succeed.

**Mrs. G.’s Path to Becoming an ASL Teacher**

Mrs. G., a Deaf individual, partnered with DOR to pursue her goal of becoming an ASL teacher. She began at Mira Costa College, later transferring to CSU Northridge, where she earned a B.A. in Deaf Studies in 2017. She then continued at CSU Long Beach to obtain her ASL teaching credential.

After completing student teaching at El Camino High School, she was hired as a full-time ASL teacher there, where she continues to work while awaiting her permanent credential. Mrs. G.’s journey highlights how DOR’s support helped her achieve both professional and community impact through education and advocacy.

## 8.3 BEP Success Stories

**Mr. C. and His Path to Gainful Employment**

Mr. C., a legally blind computer science graduate, joined BEP in March 2010. After completing a 20-day evaluation, he was awarded a BEP facility at the Port of Entry in San Ysidro in 2011. Although his first venture was a learning experience, it shaped his future success.

He later managed vending services at California State Prison, Sacramento, and expanded his operations across California. However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced closures. Undeterred, he reapplied for a BEP location and was awarded the Metropolitan State Hospital vending facility, restoring both his confidence and financial stability.

**Mr. H.’s Path to Business Ownership and Community Impact**

Mr. H. joined the Business Enterprises Program (BEP) in 1992, bringing with him a background in hotel and restaurant management and culinary training. After losing his vision, he discovered BEP through his DOR counselor and saw it as a path to regain independence and pursue self-employment. With his industry experience, he was granted permission to skip the standard evaluation and passed the final exam to become a licensed BEP vendor.

His first assignments included managing dry stands in San Francisco, later expanding into a full-service coffee cart and vending operation. His most notable role was at San Quentin Prison, where he adapted to the challenging environment and found the work highly rewarding.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. H. faced major disruptions but received support through DOR to navigate financial challenges. He emphasizes the importance of adaptability and credits BEP with helping him achieve financial independence, professional fulfillment, and lasting friendships within the blind community.

## 8.4 OCB Success Stories

**Mrs. Z.’s Journey to Independence and Employment**

In her late 50s, Mrs. Z. enrolled in the OCB 20-week immersion training program for the Winter 2024 session. Eager to regain independence and re-enter the workforce, she approached the program with determination and enthusiasm. After being away from the workforce for 27 years, she was determined to return. She stated, “I wanted to reclaim my self-reliance and enlarge my shrinking world.”

During her time at OCB, Mrs. Z. excelled, rapidly gaining confidence in technical computer skills, independent travel, Braille literacy, and essential daily living tasks. She credited the immersive training environment for pushing her to become self-reliant and emphasized how interacting with her peers and blind professionals broadened her outlook on employment opportunities.

Following her completion of the OCB program, Mrs. Z. continued her journey by earning a certificate in assistive technology from California State University, Northridge. She is now applying her skills at the San Diego Futures Foundation, where she is completing an internship as an assistive technology instructor. Under the guidance of a master instructor, she is actively involved in teaching and assisting individuals in developing their technology skills. Her goal is to become a full-time assistive technology instructor upon completing her internship.

Throughout this journey, Mrs. Z. has received unwavering support from her family, who celebrate her newfound confidence and independence. Her story is a testament to the power of persistence, adaptive training, and the impact of immersive learning experiences in helping individuals reclaim their independence and professional aspirations.

**Mr. P.’s Road to Recovery, Independence, and Employment**

In 2016, Mr. P. was a promising senior at New Mexico State University, pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in Advanced Theoretical Mathematical Engineering. A confident, intelligent, and ambitious student, he was on the verge of graduation when a life-altering accident resulted in vision loss, physical impairments, and neurological injuries affecting his speech. Forced to withdraw from college, he returned to California to begin a rigorous rehabilitation process.

In 2017, Mr. P. and his family sought support from BFS. His counselor developed a vocational plan to help him complete his degree at a local four-year college. While finishing his studies, Mr. P. secured paid employment as a math tutor for foster students, reinforcing his passion for education and mentorship.

Mr. P. wanted to increase his independent living skills. With the support of his counselor, he enrolled in the OCB in September 2022. The immersive training experience fueled his desire to live independently and secure full-time employment. The OCB team provided comprehensive support to prepare him for the workforce.

Mr. P.’s secured a position as a Special Education Student Assistant in a local high school district. Initially, the school district was hesitant to hire him, but Mr. P. proved his abilities. He has now been successfully employed for over a year, demonstrating his resilience and commitment to making a difference in the lives of students.

## 8.5 OIB Success Stories

**Empowering a Senior Consumer with Ruby 7**

A 73-year-old woman sought support from Lighthouse following significant vision changes. Recognizing her need for assistive technology, Lighthouse’s Accessible Technology (AT) Specialists introduced her to the Ruby 7, a handheld video magnifier designed to enhance independence in daily activities.

Through funding provided by the OIB program, Lighthouse was able to purchase the device and provide comprehensive training on its use. The Ruby 7 has empowered the consumer to perform essential tasks with greater ease, including grocery shopping, reading mail, and participating in volunteer activities. Additionally, inspired by her experience, she will be volunteering with Lighthouse to mentor and train other clients navigating vision loss, further contributing to the community.

**Wayfinder’s Integration of Ray-Ban Meta Smart Glasses**

Wayfinder has begun equipping some clients with Ray-Ban Meta smart glasses, a cutting-edge assistive technology that features Meta AI, a conversational assistant. These smart glasses provide users with the ability to describe images and objects, recognize people, read printed text aloud and more.

One OIB client shared how these glasses significantly enhanced their travel experience. Using the WhatsApp integration, the client connected with a family member who was able to view their surroundings through the glasses’ camera in real time. This allowed the family members to help to provide essential guidance during their trip.

These success stories demonstrate the profound impact of the SSD in fostering greater autonomy, connectivity, and quality of life for individuals experiencing vision and/or hearing loss.

# Appendix A: List of Acronyms

The following list reflects acronyms commonly used in this report:

AI Artificial Intelligence

AT Accessible Technology

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

HKNC Helen Keller National Center

OCB Orientation Center for the Blind

OIB Older Individuals who are Blind Program

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

QRP Qualified Rehabilitation Professional

VRED Vocational Rehabilitation Employment Division

WIOA Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act