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The Monthly Newsletter of the NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

October 2017 – Volume 5, No. 10

Daniel B. Frye, J.D. Pamela Gaston

Executive Director Editor

# From the Director’s Desk

October, in America, is generally used to celebrate the accomplishments of persons with disabilities. Annually, since 1964, the President of the United States has issued a proclamation acknowledging White Cane Safety Day, which has been more recently rebranded Blind Americans Equality Day. Similarly, October has also been congressionally recognized as Disability Employment Awareness Month. Both of these occasions are recognized at the state and local levels with ceremonies, educational programs, and the like, all calculated to acknowledge the mainstream or integrated role that persons with disabilities are to enjoy across our land, on the aspirational foundation of Federal, State, and Local laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), The Rehabilitation Act, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), to name a few.

Finding ourselves in this month of disability awareness, I am inclined to stop and reflect on the broad and transcendent mission of the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI). Our agency’s mission is to promote and provide services in the areas of education, employment, independence, and eye-health through informed choice and partnership with persons who are blind or vision-impaired, their families, and the community. Among the multiple elements of the job description for the Executive Director of CBVI are the responsibility for representing the agency before State and National organizations; interpreting the Commission’s philosophy, policy, and programs; and presenting a constructive view of blindness and vision-impairment and the problems, aspirations, and accomplishments of blind persons to the general public.

Given this ambassadorial function, I am pleased to report that the Commission is succeeding in operationalizing its mission every day. Quietly and effectively, we are doing good work in each of our organizational disciplines.

As is our custom, the Blindness Education Unit within CBVI will be hosting our annual Teacher’s Symposium on October 18-19 to provide practical strategies and instruction to public school teachers and school administrators who have our blind, vision-impaired, and deaf-blind consumers as students in their classrooms. Through the dedication of our Director of Blindness Education and her committed team, we have increased the number of students who are being taught Braille by almost 50% over the last two years. And, finally, because of the attentive professional advocacy of one of our Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs), the Commission worked with a young learner’s parents and local school district to guarantee that this pupil was placed in a learning environment that was consistent with his rigorous intellect and curiosity; without this TVI’s perception and persistence, this blind young man may have been placed in an educational setting that would have been less challenging for him, potentially resulting in delays in his learning. Quietly and effectively, we are doing good work.

During the last Federal fiscal year, CBVI has helped over 200 blind, vision-impaired, and deaf-blind consumers find work in competitive, integrated employment. This year, in addition to helping people find work, we have placed an emphasis on our self-employment, small business program, where we have funded start-up costs for several creative entrepreneurs. Last, consistent with the new Federal requirements under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), we have established an in-house Business Relations Unit (BRU), which has undertaken the important task of cultivating strong and direct relationships with large and small New Jersey employers, with the twin objectives of helping our consumers match their talents with interested businesses and systemically educating the business community about the inherent capacity of people who are blind, vision-impaired, and deaf-blind. Quietly and effectively, we are doing good work.

In our Independent Living (IL) and Independent Living—Older Blind (ILOB) programs, we have partnered with seven libraries across the state to provide individual and group instruction in Assistive Technology as part of our Library Equal Access Program (LEAP). On a daily basis, our Rehabilitation Teachers visit with consumers in their homes to provide individual instruction on a variety of skills that enable these people to live self-sufficiently and with increased self-confidence. Further, our Orientation and Mobility instructors meet with our consumers to teach them how to travel with grace and poise while our cadre of Eye-Health Nurses engage with our consumers to train them in strategies for managing their diabetes or other conditions that require regular and responsible attention. And as of this writing, CBVI has executed its third senior retreat, where groups of seniors have been provided with a five-day intensive instructional session, emphasizing the nonvisual alternative techniques of blindness. Anecdotally, we hear from those who have participated in these senior retreats, that they have received life-changing instruction and perspective. These individual stories are affirmed in the positive results that we receive from the satisfaction surveys that are regularly administered for CBVI by our partners at Mississippi State University’s National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low-Vision. Quietly and effectively, we are doing good work.

Project BEST (Better Eye-Health Services and Treatment) continues to provide eye screenings to thousands of children, diabetics, migrants, and other residents of New Jersey. These invaluable examinations keep residents of our state aware of their own eye-health and best practices for maintaining their vision. In instances where we notice that a person may have an issue with his/her vision, these preventative services allow CBVI to refer these people for further medical attention and introduce them, when appropriate, to Commission services. As our Field Representatives in Project BEST undertake their vital duties, a positive message about blindness or vision-loss is provided to people when a test indicates that an eye-health issue may exist for any of them. Within the last month, our professionals in Project BEST have been recognized for their professional services by requests for a positive feature story from local newspapers in Red Bank. Quietly and effectively, we are doing good work.

To be sure, this brief survey of Commission services neglects to mention numerous programs and activities that are undertaken by our staff each day. As a matter of professional course and routine commitment, members of our staff come to work with the aim of promoting our organizational mission through the performance of their individual duties. Our staff members perform their responsibilities without fanfare or fuss, but their collective efforts make a substantial difference in the lives of thousands of blind, vision-impaired, and deaf-blind consumers every year, a difference that helps to facilitate the American promise of inclusion, opportunity, and full integration in society. During this October, as we focus on national disability observances, at CBVI quietly and effectively, we are doing good work.

*Daniel B. Frye*

Executive Director

**Learning Lunch Reminder:**

As previously noted, during each of these monthly sessions, I will meet with five CBVI staff and a member of our Executive Management Team to receive feedback or suggestions on what the Commission might do that is new and exciting. Please indicate your interest in being part of such an up and coming forum by sending an email with the subject line “Learning Lunch” to my assistant, Melissa Brown, at [Melissa.Brown2@dhs.state.nj.us](mailto:Melissa.Brown2@dhs.state.nj.us)

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# Program Administration – John C. Walsh, Chief

**Self-Employment as a Viable Employment Goal**

CBVI operates a small business program that is designed to provide vocational rehabilitation services to those consumers whose goal on their Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is to establish a solely owned business. The program is administered within the Business Enterprises New Jersey (BENJ) unit, with Napoleon (Deacon) Truesdale as the lead liaison with consumers and counselors. Deacon is able to provide technical assistance to consumers to steer them to community resources to develop their small business concept into a viable business plan. He provides information on Small Business Development Centers connected with institutions of higher education in the consumer’s community and also contract information for the Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE). CBVI has found these community partners to be excellent resources for consumers to learn the intricacies of developing a small business.

Consumers may also seek start-up funds for their small business from the agency, as regulated by NJAC 10:95-12.3. The funding formula follows a cost-sharing model, specifying the amounts the consumer must contribute to the start-up costs of their business, based on the size of the requested grant from CBVI, e.g. for a consumer requesting a startup grant over $15,501, they must secure 40% of the total start-up costs for the business from funds secured from other sources, including their own expenditures with personal funds for items dedicated to the business, SBA backed loans, or other financing.

Before a counselor refers a consumer to be considered for the small business program, the counselor should review the following eligibility criteria for entry to this program:

1. The consumer must indicate a commitment to own and operate his or her own business;

2. The business goal must be appropriate to the consumer‘s physical/mental condition according to the counselor, based upon documented medical conditions pertaining to the requirement of the business;

3. The consumer must demonstrate an ability to acquire basic business management skills such as maintaining inventory and financial records;

4. The consumer shall have at least two years of experience in the type of business or have related experience in the business that he or she wishes to operate; and

5. The consumer shall develop a comprehensive business plan which shall allow the Commission and other funding sources (such as, banks and the Small Business Administration) an opportunity to evaluate its chances for success.

Deacon will provide consultation to the referred consumer on the requirements of the program, and when the consumer completes the early draft of a business plan, he will give them feedback on how to improve it. Consumers are encouraged to work with SBA-sponsored programs in their community, to learn current practices for writing a robust business plan. Once a final draft is submitted by the consumer to Deacon, I convene the Self-Employment Review Committee, composed of members of the executive staff and chaired by me, to perform a comprehensive review. An evaluation instrument is used by committee members to evaluate the plan for compliance with NJAC 10:95-12.3, and for its viability for success as a business concept. The consumer is informed of the Committee’s decision. In a favorable decision, which means that the business plan was approved for funding, the consumer would have to register his/her business with NJ START to make them a state vendor, and the grant is issued directly to the business. Consumers must maintain records of all expenditures from grant funds, and expend all funds within the first year of the business’s operation.

In a changing economy that often creates niche business opportunities for entrepreneurially minded individuals, we want to make sure that our consumers can also avail themselves of these self-employment opportunities that are facilitated through the vocational rehabilitation process.

# Vocational Rehabilitation and Transitional Services – Amanda Gerson, Coordinator

**National Disability Employment Awareness Month – “Inclusion Drives Innovation”**

Each year, the month of October brings the celebration of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), an initiative within the Federal Government to celebrate the skills, abilities and of workers with disabilities and educate the general public on the value of an inclusive workforce. Initially established in 1945, after the return of service members with disabilities from World War II, President Harry S. Truman approved a Congressional resolution declaring the first week in October as “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week” to increase awareness of individuals with disabilities in the workplace. It was later amended to remove the word “physically” to acknowledge individuals with all types of disabilities in 1962, and then further expanded and modified to National Disability Employment Awareness Month in 1988 under President George H.W. Bush. In 2001, Congress established the Office of Disability Employment Policy (OPED) within the US Department of Labor. Previously only existing as an advisory council under prior administrations, the creation of ODEP established a permanent entity focused on disability and federal labor policy.

As part of the NDEAM celebration, the Commission’s Business Relations Unit is keeping busy with a range of activities, including a number of Disability Mentoring Days and other disability awareness and outreach events with our business partners, such as Prudential, Port Authority, and ShopRite. Disability Mentoring Day is a national effort spearheaded by the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), and implemented nationwide “to promote career development for students and job-seekers with disabilities through hands-on career exploration and ongoing mentoring relationships.”

From their web site: “The AAPD is a convener, connector, and catalyst for change, increasing the political and economic power of people with disabilities. As a national cross-disability rights organization, AAPD advocates for full civil rights for the 50+ million Americans with disabilities by promoting equal opportunity, economic power, independent living, and political participation.”

Their programs and initiatives not only include employment-oriented programs, such as Disability Mentoring Days, a summer internship program, and the Disability Equality Index, but also focus on full community inclusion, education, transportation, health, housing, technology, and veteran’s issues. Their website ([www.aapd.com](http://www.aapd.com)) provides a wealth of information and resources, including research, law and policy, services, and programs pertaining to the inclusion of people with disabilities.

# Educational Services – Christine Hinton, Deputy Director of Blindness Education

**Visiting the Kentucky Correctional Industries Prison Braille Services Program**

Earlier this month I attended the American Printing House for the Blind’s (APH) Annual Meeting for Ex- Officio Trustees on which I serve as CBVI’s representative and an APH Trustee. This was my first opportunity to attend the Prison Braille Forum which is usually held a couple of days before the opening of the annual meeting. This forum brings together correctional institutions and agencies of states that have Prison Braille Programs and representatives of agencies who are interested in learning more about the program. Part of this year’s forum included a tour of the Kentucky Correctional Industries Braille Services Program.

The Kentucky Correctional Industries Braille Services Program is located in the Kentucky Correctional Institution for Women (KCIW) outside of Louisville, Kentucky. This facility houses inmates who are serving anything from community service to life sentences. The Braille Services Program was established in 2000 as an effort to provide braille for students who are blind and to provide the participants (inmates) with the opportunity to develop good work ethics as well as employability skills such as willingness to learn, reliability, self-motivation, effective communication and team work in addition to the skills required for all areas of braille transcription. Training and Braille Transcription certification for participants include Literary Braille, Nemeth Braille (Math), Music Braille and Proofreading. Currently there are over 30 correctional facilities in the United States that have a braille program.

National Prison Braille Programs not only provide students throughout the country with braille textbooks, but the program also helps address the need for more transcribers, especially for the subjects of math and science.

My visit to the KCIW Braille Services Program not only re-confirmed the importance of braille production services for the provision of quality textbooks that enable classroom inclusion and access to information for the success of our students but also, enlightened me to the program’s potential for addressing recidivism.

# Independent Living & Clinical Services – Elizabeth DeShields, Coordinator

**Independent Living Assistive Technology Services**

According to Cathy Bodine, Executive Director of [Assistive Technology Partners](http://ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/medicalschool/programs/atp/Pages/AssistiveTechnologyPartners.aspx) (ATP), “The demand for devices to help people with disabilities and the elderly is increasing exponentially as the population ages. This growth is fueled by an aging population, as one in five people are expected to be 65 or older by 2035”

As a result of the increasing demand for assistive technology services, Eddie Montanez has joined the Independent Living (IL) team as the Assistive Technology (AT) Specialist.  Statewide, Eddie services those consumers in IL in need of additional or enhanced assistive technology instruction. These services may include but are not limited to: MAC or personal computer trainings including various software programs; mobile phones; Braille Notes and voice controlled smart home devices.

Once a consumer is in an Independent Living/Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB) status 18 with an open assistive technology goal/objective, the IL/AT referral process can begin.  The IL/AT referral is first sent to the IL Supervisor who will review the referral which must include detailed reasoning for the referral request and then it is forwarded to the IL Coordinator.  The referral is then assigned to the IL/AT Specialist. After completing an IL/AT assessment with the consumer, Eddie makes recommendations for devices and training as needed. Progress notes, documenting instruction are entered into the consumer’s electronic case file (ECF).   The entire IL/AT referral procedure can be found in the Independent Living Manual in FACTS.

CBVI has taken steps to address the needs of our growing senior population including their desire to stay connected to the world. As the IL Assistive Technology Specialist, Eddie Montanez helps those in the ILOB program by sharing his knowledge of assistive technology and conducting presentations at our Assistive Support Programs for Independence Renewal and Education (ASPIRE) network and helps with organizing the assistive technology training portion of our Senior Hands-On Retreat Experience (SHORE).

# Joseph Kohn Training Center – Del Basha, Manager

CBVI consumers who begin the training program at the Joseph Kohn Training Center (JKTC) enroll to learn a variety of blindness skills that will empower them. From day one, each consumer is provided customized instruction each day for a period of several weeks or months. They are able to develop and refine skills in the various JKTC classes: Braille and Communications; Activities of Daily Living (ADL); Careers, Technology; Fitness; Keyboarding; Orientation and Mobility; Nutrition; and Finance, the newest course added to the JKTC curriculum. The instructor, Amo Musharraf, who initially came to JKTC to teach physical fitness in the updated JKTC gym, continues to teach fitness but now also teaches Finance. He brings a unique skillset to JKTC and students have let us know that they appreciate the valuable topics being addressed in the Finance class. Amo has experience as a professional in the marketing industry, is affiliated with athletic and competitive sports programs for individuals who are blind, and serves as a mentor for the Employment, Development, Guidance, and Engagement (EDGE) program.

We are confident that all of the JKTC classes effectively promote independence for blind and vision impaired individuals, and we look forward to the opportunity to help change lives for CBVI consumers. Graduates of the JKTC program have gone on to college, successfully pursued career goals, and have contributed to society in a number of other ways.   
  
“Success comes from seeing yourself as a truly integrated, contributing member of society, somebody who benefits from society, and a person who contributes back to society." - Dr. Fredric Schroeder.

# Business Enterprises of New Jersey – Deacon Truesdale, Manager

CBVI and the Business Enterprises of New Jersey program (BENJ) was well represented by location managers at the recent Business Leadership and Superior Training  (BLAST) held in Nashville, TN. This national conference for the Randolph-Sheppard program was hosted by Nick Gacos, who is not only the chairman of the NJ Blind Business Managers’ Committee but is also the President of the National Association of Blind Merchants (NABM). Dan Frye, CBVI’s Executive Director, who is also the President-Elect of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB), provided welcoming remarks during the conference’s opening ceremony. Much to Dan’s surprise, he was recognized for his years of work, dedication, and support of the national Randolph-Sheppard program, when the National Association of Blind Merchants honored him during its Leadership Breakfast with its highest award given to somebody who has significantly influenced and contributed to this national entrepreneurial program, the Gold Star Award.

BLAST is held every year and provides relevant information about current vending trends and events in Randolph Sheppard. Highlights of this year’s conference included workshops on loss prevention, effective hiring, rest area commercialization and healthy vending machine mandates.

# Staff Development – Kenya Whitehurst-Percell

The primary purpose of staff development is to facilitate opportunities for staff to refine and gain skills and knowledge they can apply to their jobs. I recently read an article on how to be an engaged and active learner entitled, *“Carpe Training! (Seize the Training!)”* that provided the basis for a few valuable tips that I believe could be helpful for all:

* Choose to learn. Before attending, know why you are going.  Ask yourself are you open to learning?  Is this an elective training or mandatory event? While mandatory trainings may seem to be scheduled at the most inopportune times, make the best of it. Decide how best to use the information being provided.
* If it’s an elective program, engage your supervisor or manager. Share your training objectives so she or he will know why you want to attend, what you will be learning and how it will impact upon your work performance.
* Plan ahead. Organize your work in the days before the training, especially if it’s more than one day. Leave an out of the office message on your voicemail as well as your email. If you are constantly taking phone calls or checking and answering emails during the training, you are probably not actively learning.
* Stay focused on the class and participate. I’ll be the first to say, it isn’t easy standing in front of a group of people that have mentally checked out.
* After the training, provide feedback. Take a few minutes and complete evaluations or surveys (if provided). Besides numerical ratings give specific suggestions or feedback. This information is critical for the facilitators or content developers and enables them to modify and improve their presentations.
* Apply the learning. After the training, review the materials and find ways to incorporate the information you have received. If possible share the information and materials with your colleagues, supervisors and or manager. Peer- to-peer learning is both efficient and cost effective.

For more information on this article visit: <http://hrweb.mit.edu/learning-development/engaged-participant>.

For training suggestions and inquiries please don’ hesitate to contact me at: 973-648-2820 or [kenya.whitehurst-percell@dhs.state.nj.us](mailto:kenya.whitehurst-percell@dhs.state.nj.us).

# Regional Updates

# Southern Region – Jack Thompson, Manager

**Submitted by Susan Hickman, Eye Health Nurse:** Every September the Gloucester County Department of Health and Senior Services holds a picnic for area seniors. This year’s theme was “American Bandstand” and approximately 1200 seniors gathered for an afternoon of food, dance, entertainment, and the opportunity for a leisurely stroll through the park visiting vendor and informational resource displays.

I arrived early, along with my colleague, Carmen Toth. We set up CBVI’s table with our agency literature and a neatly arranged display of the tools and devices we use on a regular basis to assist consumers. We estimate that about 150 people visited our table seeking information on CBVI services and programs. Of special note was the number of people who had never heard of our agency, many of whom took more than one brochure because they “knew someone” who would benefit from CBVI services. While there we also were visited by people who are currently receiving services or had been provided services in the past. It was very rewarding to talk with them and to hear how CBVI services are making a difference in their lives and how much they valued their independence.

# Northern Region – John Reiff, Manager

The Northern Service Region (NSR) welcomes Home Instructor Patricia Hipkins-Carr to the Newark Service Center’s (NSC) IL team. Patricia comes to us from JKTC and is a welcome addition. We are grateful to Del Basha and John Walsh for releasing her.

The Freehold Service Center (FSC) welcomes NSR Home Instructor Rebecca Espenscheid back from an extended leave. She gave birth to twins Talia Elizabeth and Carter Michael on July 26th.

The FSC also welcomes back Southern Service Region (SSR) Home Instructor Ally Cohen who gave birth to Noah Julian Cohen on February 17th.

One day in the coming months the FSC will hopefully be welcoming back SSR Home Instructor Amy McIntyre who gave birth to Juliana Eve McIntyre on October 5th.

Finally, the NSR is preparing to say goodbye to Home Instructor Julio Perez, who is definitely not pregnant, but he will be retiring at the end of October. We all wish him well and will celebrate this milestone with him in the NSR 5th floor conference room at 2:00 p.m. on October 26th.

# New or Noteworthy

The Affordable Housing Alliance ([www.housingall.org](http://www.housingall.org)) is the administrator for the Payment Assistance for Gas and Electric (PAGE) program. The PAGE program, funded by the Board of Public Utilities (BPU), is an annual assistance program and is designed to help low to moderate income households across the state of New Jersey who are experiencing economic hardship and struggling to pay their electric and natural gas bills.

The PAGE energy assistance program benefits homeowners and renters who are NJ residents; have not have received a Universal Service Fund (USF) grant in the past 6 months or Low Income Heating and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) grant within the last heating season, facing a crisis situation that includes a documented notice of overdue payment for gas and/or electric service, and have a past history of making regular payments towards their utility bills.

The Affordable Housing Alliance has partnered with community-based agencies in the different counties to assist residents in the completion of the application process.

Click here for a [list of agencies](http://www.njpoweron.org/page-application.html).

[**comments**](http://www.nj.com/monmouth/index.ssf/2016/06/nj_girl_to_compete_in_national_braille_competition.html#comments)

# The Last Words

“One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world.” – Malala Yousafzai

**Please send items or suggestions for the next issue of the *Commission Edition* by or before 11 a.m., Tuesday, December 4, 2017:**

[**Pamela.Gaston@dhs.state.nj.us**](mailto:Pamela.Gaston@dhs.state.nj.us) **and** [**Melissa.Brown2@dhs.state.nj.us**](mailto:Melissa.Brown2@dhs.state.nj.us)