



DEPARTMENT OF

REHABILITATION

Employment, Independence & Equality

**Department of Rehabilitation
Biennial Report**

on

**Programs and Activities of the Division of Specialized
Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired and
Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

July 1, 2013

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1. 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 (hereafter referred to as SB 105), this report provides statistics on competitive employment placements for persons who are blind and visually impaired and deaf and hard of hearing, as well as an update on the programs administered by the SSD. This is the DOR's fifth biennial report to the Legislature. The first four reports, dated July 1, 2005, July 1, 2007, July 1, 2009, and July 1, 2011, are available upon request.

For the fifth biennium, the total competitive employment placements continued to be consistently higher than before the SB 105 implementation, in spite of a decline in placements seen for State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2009-10 through SFY 2011-12, which is attributed to labor market influences and staff furloughs. While the average weekly earnings for consumers with blindness and visual impairments fluctuate annually, in all years, the average weekly earnings for blind and visually impaired consumers served by the Blind Field Services (BFS) District is nearly one-third higher than the total departmental caseload. The average weekly earnings have consistently remained at least \$50 higher than in SFY 2003-04 when the BFS was established. This indicates that specialized services aid in more successful transition of the blind and visually impaired consumers from dependence on social services and public benefits to independence and competitive employment.

Since SFY 2003-04, the average weekly earnings for deaf and hard of hearing consumers remained higher than the total departmental caseload. The Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf continue to account for over 60 percent of the competitive employment placements for deaf and hard of hearing consumers. This suggests that specialized services also aid in successful transition of deaf and hard of hearing consumers from dependence on social services and public benefits to independence and gainful employment.

From Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2002-03 to FFY 2011-12, the Business Enterprises Program (BEP) has experienced an increase of \$9.6 million in sales, an increase of \$1.6 million in net profit income to vendors, and an

increase of \$27,700 in average annual vendor income. While the total number of facilities has dropped by 51 since FFY 2002-03, there were a total of 58 new facilities established over the years. The financial gains reflect the benefits of closing less profitable facilities. Noticeably, the number of facilities continues to outpace vendors operating facilities.

The Orientation Center for the Blind (OCB) has served over 350 students since SFY 2002-03. Length of services for each student averages seven and a half months. The students who received OCB services have been positioned to advance their employment goals, increase their independence, and further their individual pursuit of equality.

The Title VII, Chapter 2, Older Individuals Who Are Blind (hereafter referred to as OIB) program continues to see an increase in the number of individuals aged 55 or older with severe visual impairments that received services. Most notably, almost 1,000 additional persons were served in FFY 2011-12 over the prior fiscal year.

2. Background

The DOR's mission is to work in partnership with consumers and other stakeholders to provide services and advocacy resulting in employment, independent living, and equality to individuals with disabilities. The primary program administered by the DOR is the Vocational Rehabilitation program, which provides a wide range of services designed to help individuals with disabilities prepare for and engage in meaningful employment consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.

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

- (1) To assist persons who are blind and visually impaired and deaf and hard of hearing to gain competitive employment.
- (2) To enlarge economic opportunities for persons who are blind or visually impaired and deaf or hard of hearing.
- (3) To enhance the independence and self-sufficiency of blind and visually impaired and deaf and hard of hearing persons.

Under the SSD, administrators, counselors, and support staff were realigned to create the Blind Field Services (BFS) District and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS) program. Staff within the BFS District and the DHHS program are located throughout the state and provide specialized services to their respective consumer groups. The BFS District staff report directly to the SSD Deputy Director. In contrast, the DHHS administrative program staff report to the SSD Deputy Director, while field staff (i.e., Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf) report to local supervisors, administrators and the Vocational Rehabilitation Employment Division Deputy Director.

In addition to the realignment, the SSD assumed oversight of the Business Enterprises Program, the Orientation Center for the Blind, and the Older Individuals who are Blind program.

3. Blind Field Services (BFS)

The BFS is a statewide District that provides specialized and comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with vision loss. The goal of the BFS is to increase employment outcomes and enhance the independence and self-sufficiency for Californians who are blind and visually impaired by utilizing a service delivery team approach through nine units of Rehabilitation Counselors for the Blind and paraprofessional staff managed by supervisors and a District Administrator, all of whom who have specialized knowledge and training in serving this population.

Since the last biennial reporting period, the BFS has provided ongoing in-service education, at least annually, to all BFS staff and their community partners to increase their expertise and remain current on trends and innovations leading to successful employment outcomes for blind and visually impaired consumers. Training topics included assistive technology and accessibility, medical and psychological aspects in serving individuals with vision loss, benefits counseling, effective employment outcomes for individuals with vision loss, and legal aspects in vocational rehabilitation practices. In 2011, the BFS also received sponsorship through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding to attend the 2011 California State University, Northridge Assistive Technology (AT) Conference, which is considered to be the largest and most comprehensive training in the nation on AT for individuals with disabilities. In addition to in-person trainings, the BFS regularly conducts teleconference trainings to conserve travel funds. The provision of the in-service education for the BFS staff has served to ensure that the average weekly earnings for blind and visually impaired consumers continue to be higher than the average weekly earnings for all consumers served by the Department.

The following table provides data on the total number of competitive employment placements of blind and visually impaired consumers compared to those served by the BFS, as well as the average weekly earnings for the total DOR caseload and BFS consumers.

State Fiscal Year (SFY)	Total 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*	164	134	81.7%	\$384	\$570

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

* As of December 31, 2012

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

N/A - BFS District implemented July 1, 2003

While statistics can be useful in measuring performance, they do not reflect the personal impact and meaningful benefit on each individual. Consumer success stories on the BFS can be found in section 8.1.

For the next biennium, the BFS will implement its 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, being developed in collaboration with various stakeholders. Planned activities are anticipated to include refining casework management to better

prepare consumers towards job readiness outcomes, developing relationships with local employers, doubling the number of partnerships with no cost employment programs and community partners, and providing ongoing training and leadership opportunities to BFS staff. The BFS will also work in collaboration with the Vocational Rehabilitation Employment Division to transition to a new service delivery model that will result in more comprehensive and timely services to consumers.

4. Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS)

Although the DHHS program has been aligned within the SSD, the Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (RCDs) and their supervisors do not report directly to the Deputy Director of the SSD. Rather, they report to administrators over the districts in which they serve. While most of the RCDs receive supervision from generalist supervisors, administrators have placed their RCDs under specialty supervisors to focus expertise and promote consistency of service-delivery in three districts. The DHHS program provides technical guidance and consultation to these administrators and supervisors who manage the RCDs as well as support services, such as the annual SB 105 training for the RCDs and DOR staff.

For the past two years, the DHHS program focused on providing each RCD with a videophone in order to be telephonically accessible to deaf and hard of hearing consumers who rely on American Sign Language (ASL) as their primary mode of communication. Another key accessibility effort includes the development of an orientation video in ASL about DOR services, it is nearing completion and will be placed on the DOR public website for viewing by consumers, community partners, and other interested stakeholders.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding allowed the DHHS program to augment training services through projects such as the Deaf Awareness Sensitivity Training in February 2011 to generalist supervisors and administrators and to support registration to the American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association Training Conference in April 2011 for the RCDs and other DOR staff. In addition to ARRA funded training opportunities, the DHHS program most recently completed the annual SB 105 training in October 2011, for which community rehabilitation programs and partners were also invited to attend. This invitation was a first, and the DHHS program expects to maintain this new tradition to allow for increased collaboration between RCDs and partners leading to improved services for this population.

The following table provides data on the total number of competitive employment placements of deaf and hard of hearing consumers compared to those served by the DHHS program, as well as the average weekly earnings for the total DOR caseload and DHHS consumers.

State Fiscal Year (SFY)	Total 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*	242	174	71.9%	\$384	\$421

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

* As of December 31, 2012

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

N/A - DHHS program implemented July 1, 2003

In the July 1, 2011 report, it was noted that the DOR recognized the number of DHHS placements had been inadvertently inflated. Recent implementation of the new case management system has allowed DOR to refine and report actual competitive placements.

While statistics can be useful in measuring performance, they do not reflect the personal impact and meaningful benefit on each individual. Consumer

success stories, on deaf and hard of hearing services, can be found in section 8.2

The next biennium will mark a transformation to a new service delivery model in which RCDs and paraprofessional staff will work in a team to provide direct, comprehensive consumer services. The DHHS program will provide training to staff and partners in support of the new service delivery model and educate the deaf and hard of hearing communities on the benefits of this transition.

5. Business Enterprises Program (BEP)

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

The BEP provides training and support to enhance self-employment for visually impaired Californians. Twelve trainees have completed the BEP course since 2010. The curriculum is evolving to be computer based learning with more emphasis on occupational skills training 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 vendors; purchasing and maintaining all vendor equipment; and managing the funding for new and existing facilities.

The BEP vendors operate facilities including cafeterias, snack bars, convenience type stores, coffee carts, vending machine routes, and Department of Defense contracts on federal, state, county, and city property. Currently, there are 134 BEP facilities operated by 114 vendors throughout the State. Since July 2010, the BEP has opened four new facilities.

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

Federal Fiscal Year	Vendor Person Years of Employment	Gross Sales	Net Profit to Vendors	Average Vendor Earnings	Total Facilities	Number of New Locations
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	\$48,629,881	\$6,372,221	\$56,895	140	1
2010-11	110	\$48,514,643	\$6,043,826	\$54,944	136	3
2011-12	114	\$47,742,039	\$6,688,849	\$64,316	134	1

Source: 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 on each individual. Consumer success stories on the BEP services can be found in section 8.3.

The BEP's focus for the next biennium is to become the preferred food service choice throughout the state. To accomplish this vision, the BEP has procured a software program, currently in development, to more effectively maintain and track program data, and will explore additional functionality such as a web portal for blind and visually impaired vendors to view and pay fees required to operate their facilities. In addition, the BEP will remodel facilities to meet the needs of today's more sophisticated customers, and train the BEP staff on current trends in food service marketing and management to provide effective technical assistance to the vendors.

6. Orientation Center for the Blind (OCB)

The OCB is a DOR owned and operated residential training facility that assists adults who are visually impaired and blind adjust to their vision loss. Credentialed teachers and qualified rehabilitation professionals provide a full curriculum of classes and experiences individually tailored to assist each student to reach their full potential for independence and to develop pre-vocational skills. Length of training is individualized to meet students' needs, and students' enrollment averages seven and a half months. The residential facility is available to support up to 36 students at any given time.

In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2010-11, \$7.3 million American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) funds were expended for the renovation of the OCB facility to implement energy efficiencies, comply with current building and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) code requirements, replace antiquated equipment and furnishings, purchase state-of-the-art assistive technology, and, most important, retrofit training areas to enhance pre-vocational and independent living services. The retrofitted training areas included the construction of an office training area for student computer training with state-of-the-art adaptive technology equipment for use by OCB students. Additionally, four dormitory rooms were converted to four studio apartments to enable the students to practice independent living skills learned prior to exiting the OCB program. These renovation examples assist OCB graduates to transition directly from the Center to independent living, training, and education and work opportunities.

In January 2012, the OCB also implemented an internship program where students assist in the operations of the facility. The assignments are in food services, groundskeeping, janitorial services, housekeeping, and administrative sections of the campus. These assignments give the students work experience to develop interpersonal work relationships, learn time management skills, and build confidence and self esteem while they are engaged in their adjustment training.

During this biennial period, the OCB also underwent an organizational restructure in response to staff changes resulting from retirements or individuals leaving for other opportunities. Most notably, the OCB hired a permanent Administrator in July 2012, and added a new Assistant Administrator position which was filled in December 2012. These two

administrative positions will serve to implement innovations to advance the OCB program and services.

During SFY 2010-11 and SFY 2011-12, the OCB served 51 and 52 students, respectively. Through the first half of SFY 2012-2013, 44 DOR consumers have been served, and it is anticipated that the total number served for the year will exceed the prior year. While statistics can be useful in measuring performance, they do not reflect the personal impact and meaningful benefit on each individual. Consumer testimonials on the OCB services can be found in section 8.4.

For the next biennium, the OCB administrators and staff will continue to conduct a major curriculum review to include more training opportunities that support the students' transition to work, school and home settings upon graduating from the OCB program.

7. Independent Living Skills for Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB)

Title VII, Chapter 2 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, authorizes and funds independent living services to private non-profit entities, that provide services to individuals age 55 or older whose severe visual impairment makes competitive employment difficult to attain, but for whom independent living goals are feasible.

For this biennial period, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds were made available to 13 OIB service providers, from January 2010 through September 11, 2011, resulting in increased capacity building and almost 1,000 additional persons served in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2011-12. This one-time funding was also provided for training grants, to increase the expertise of service professionals in the field of vision loss for older persons, including service providers for individuals who are deaf-blind.

Additionally, communication with OIB service providers increased as evidenced by holding a two-day OIB summit, and numerous teleconference calls wherein reporting requirements, compliance issues, best practices and future planning were among the topics. Onsite monitoring resumed to evaluate services and provide individualized consultation. The technical assistance provided regarding reporting requirements and capacity building that occurred with ARRA funding led to the increased number of those served.

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

Federal Fiscal Year	Federal Award	Number Served
1999-00	\$1,004,368	680
2000-01	\$1,713,782	2,162
2001-02	\$2,290,501	2,332
2002-03	\$2,604,141	2,874
2003-04	\$3,086,561	3,326

Federal Fiscal Year	Federal Award	Number Served
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

Source: RSA-7-OB Reports

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

In the next biennium, the OIB program is looking to refine the methodology used to allocate funds and having services available statewide to the extent possible. Under consideration is a formula-based model coalescing geography and population of individuals age 55 and older for each catchment area. This funding model will allow for equitable, consistent and flexible distribution of OIB funding throughout the state. The new funding model also includes incentives to build capacity in catchment areas previously unserved or underserved. The DOR has actively engaged currently-funded agencies, the Blind Advisory Committee and other interested stakeholders to provide input on the funding model. The DOR anticipates releasing a Request for Application early in 2014 with grant awards, effective October 2014 to September 2017, based on the new funding model.

Finally, the success of the services offered through the various programs has benefited immensely from participation of the Blind Advisory Committee and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Committee. These committees were established in SB 105 to advise the DOR Director on means to increase competitive employment, enlarge economic opportunities, enhance independence and self-sufficiency, and otherwise improve services for persons who are blind and visually impaired and deaf and hard of hearing.

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

Albert is a legally blind, Hispanic male who was closed successfully February 2012. A plan was written for Albert to receive training as a Taxpayer Service Representative from the World Services for the Blind (WSB) in Arkansas. He was chosen to work in the Oakland, California office of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) upon completion of the training program. However, he did not qualify because of three failing grades, but the WSB was so impressed with his customer service skills that they recommended him to enroll in the Service Center Collection Representative (SCCR) training. He was doing well in his training when suddenly he became very ill and had to be rushed to the hospital for an emergency operation to remove a part of his intestines that had become blocked. Consequently, he had to return home to recuperate from this ordeal and have additional surgeries to correct the problem. A year later, he returned to the WSB to complete his SCCR training and was accepted to the IRS Office in Ogden, Utah. In addition to paying for the training, the DOR also covered the cost of moving Albert's household to a rental house that was found close to work. Albert and his family are very happy in their new home. Albert is receiving bilingual pay along with his monthly salary of GS-% level of approximately \$34,000.00/year.

Suzanne is a high energy, super motivated lady who was a Human Resources (H.R.) executive in the private sector, but her sight deteriorated to the point that it interfered with her ability to do her job. She was referred to the BFS to assess her needs. Assistive technology equipment and training were provided and she was able to go back to work. When her case was closed in May 2012, she was working as a H.R. employee earning \$30/hr for a company in Universal City. She is now employed with an affiliated company as an H.R. executive. She also works as a private contractor at an hourly rate of \$49.50 per hour.

Mark came to DOR in 2009 at the age of 29. Mark was born in Turkey, and has been completely blind since age 3. At the time of intake, he had a Master's degree in Special Education. He was asking for assistance to find

employment. Assistive technology and job placement assistance were arranged. While in his job search, he was teaching Turkish to immigrants from Turkey. He also worked for two months at a summer camp teaching art to blind people of various ages. Some of his art work was commissioned by an Art Gallery, with ceramics being his forte. He established an online business to become a Turkish language instructor, translator and interpreter. He credits his BFS counselor for all her assistance in helping him accomplish his goals. He currently works 30 hours a week earning \$16.00 an hour, but this will change as he grows his business.

Mary became a consumer in 1999 at the age of 45 due to her vision loss. With many DOR supports, including assistive technology and vocational training, she completed her Master's degree and gained the poise and self confidence to become self employed as a successful, accomplished writer/journalist. She currently earns over \$19.00 an hour. She has written her autobiography, and is in the process of writing and publishing other various writings. She contracts to do various writing assignments for magazines and newspapers. Her long-term goal is to publish more of her own work, including short stories.

Louisa became a consumer during her senior year in high school in 1998, and was determined eligible for services based upon having low vision. She had already shown herself to be a highly motivated individual who had held part-time jobs babysitting, as a photographer's assistant, and as a telephone customer service representative for Good Guys. Her original goal was to become an elementary school teacher, and upon her graduation from high school, she obtained an Associates of Arts Degree from Chabot College. She then entered California State University (CSU), Stanislaus, and decided to pursue a career as a Marriage and Family Counselor. Upon obtaining her Bachelors of Arts in Psychology, she was accepted into the Masters of Counseling Program at the University of San Francisco. After much hard work, she subsequently graduated, having obtained solid grades throughout. During and immediately after completing her graduate studies, Louisa had acquired a considerable amount of practical experience as a mental health counselor through her many volunteer/internship hours, and landed a part-time counseling position. She passed the California Marriage and Family Therapist Examination, and is now a fully licensed therapist with her own practice. She also works part-time leading support groups for individuals with anger and domestic violence issues at a mental health clinic.

8.2. DHHS Success Stories

Siavosh immigrated from Iran to the United States as a child. He was born profoundly deaf and struggled with learning English and American Sign Language (ASL), and adapting to the cultural changes. However, he did manage to graduate from high school. After high school, Siavosh still struggled with English and came to DOR to receive vocational services. He attended several training programs to assist him in improving his English to the point he was ready to attend college. Through DOR's support, he obtained a Bachelors of Science degree in Civil Engineering. During his last year in school, he obtained a student assistant position with Cal Trans. Upon completion, Siavosh was hired full time as an engineer with the California Department of Water Resources.

David, a deaf male, approached DOR to obtain help in advancing his career. After careful assessment and discussion with his counselor, the pair agreed on a goal for him to become a software engineer. This is a highly competitive position and requires a great deal of knowledge and soft skills to complete successfully. With DOR's support, David went to school, completed his degree and then began searching for work. It was not long until Microsoft noticed his talents and gave him an interview. He was hired and moved to the main headquarters in Redmond, Washington where he now works full time with the great benefits that Microsoft offers and at a wage of \$47.50 per hour.

Charlie was very motivated to work, however, despite many interviews, he was never hired for a position. He is a shy and reserved deaf man who continues to say he is blessed because he has his family. He lives at home with his elderly parents and cooks and runs errands for them. He tried attending school and decided it was not for him. Instead, he diligently attended every job preparation workshop and job fair and followed up with applications and interviews, but still was not hired. With the support of his Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf (RCD), Charlie was connected with a local Employment Coordinator. Immediately, a lead was given regarding a local meat packing employer who was conducting interviews the following day. The RCD rushed to send an email to Charlie, even though it was late in the day and the interviews were at 9:00 am the next morning. The DOR provided an ASL interpreter for the interview, and Charlie showed up wearing the interview clothes previously purchased by his RCD. He did well in his interview and was offered a position on the spot. He hurried to

show his RCD the offer of employment letter. He was crying because he was so happy to have a job and contribute to his family. He did not want to stay to debrief the interview, but instead ran home to tell his mother about the job. During his initial employment, DOR assisted with job training and retention to help him settle into the job and participate in the company's orientation process. Out of all the consumers who were offered positions that day, he was the only one who passed 90 days employment and was closed successfully. He remains happily on the job as a meat packer and has received raises since he began.

Keith is a person who is late deafened. He had recently started working as a bartender and was at risk of not passing his probationary period due to his hearing loss. A bar is not the most acoustically friendly environment, and a bartender is expected to carry on conversations with patrons. One patron had asked for some ice water to which Keith replied, "Why do you need a fly swatter?" He was in desperate need of hearing aids, specifically programmed for his work environment. Additionally, this client had a back injury which made standing for his entire shift difficult. He came to DOR asking for assistance. With Keith's permission, the RCD wrote a letter explaining that hearing aids were forthcoming, and the employer extended Keith's probationary period. The hearing aids, along with special orthopedic shoes, were purchased, and Keith was able to pass his probation. Keith did such a good job that he was promoted to a supervisory position even before his probation was completed.

8.3. BEP Success Stories

Sam graduated from the BEP Training Program in 2004. He opened his first location as an independent business owner in 2005. Sam put the knowledge he gained in his BEP training to good use as he managed his business and continuously looked for opportunities to expand. In 2006, he convinced the decision makers in the Internal Revenue Service Building in Fresno to allow him to put vending machines in their building. Sam was allowed to install two vending machines on a trial basis. He was informed in no uncertain terms that if the population of the building was not satisfied with his service, he would be out. Because of the skills Sam learned in his BEP training, coupled with his strong work ethic and commitment to excellence, he now services 106 vending machines in his location, as well as a snack bar in the Fresno City Hall. Sam's success is a stellar example of the opportunities available in the BEP for those who are willing to commit

to learning their craft, utilizing sound business practices, and working diligently toward achieving their goals.

Cathy had a difficult start on her journey to success in the BEP. Cathy is blind and found the challenge of mastering the massive amount of material that she needed to learn in the BEP training class too daunting. In spite of her best efforts, she was unable to successfully complete the training. Cathy's vocabulary, however, did not include the word "fail." She picked herself up, dusted herself off, and tried again. When one is gifted with the determination that Cathy brings to a challenge, there is only one direction to travel - up! Cathy aced her next attempt at the BEP training to operate two snack bars in Southern California. But when the population of one of her buildings started to shrink due to cutbacks, retirements, and furloughs, Cathy put her skills and determination to use in a savvy marketing plan and created a broader selection of delectable items to offer to her customers. This independent businesswoman knows how to succeed in a challenging environment and will always find a way to overcome obstacles. Cathy is also a conscientious and dedicated BEP Trainer who is committed to helping others succeed. Recently Cathy remarked, "I think I've found my calling; it's training other BEP Vendors."

Alicia's life changed dramatically in 2000 when she was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa. Prior to that, she worked with her husband in the family business and attended culinary school, earning an Associate of Science Degree in Foodservice and Nutrition. She worked in various capacities in Hawaii's food service and hotel industry, including as a personal chef to private businesses, a line and buffet cook, and head of the nutrition program for her son's pre-school. She also competed in various culinary competitions. In 2011, Alicia returned to her home state of California to assist her aging parents. A chance meeting with a childhood friend who works with the BEP was a catalyst in Alicia's life taking a new direction. At her friend's encouragement, Alicia contacted the DOR to learn more about the opportunities available in the BEP. She graduated from the BEP training program in 2012 and recently was awarded her first location. Alicia is now a proud independent business owner. With her drive, commitment to excellence, and the skills learned in her BEP training, Alicia is charting a new course in her life in ways that she could not even imagine after receiving the diagnosis of eventual blindness in 2000.

8.4. OCB Success Stories

Claire describes herself as a 71-year-old woman, somewhat settled in her ways, and not easily adaptable to abrupt change. Although legally blind her whole life, her vision further deteriorated three years ago. She was increasingly afraid to walk outside and depended on others for rides and cooking and cleaning. She recognized that going to the OCB was the answer to developing new tools and techniques to live productively as a blind person within her community. When speaking to community groups about her experiences, she tells them about her fear of change and how the fear abated due to the dedication of the OCB teachers. One fear was wearing a blindfold while using a cane. With the support of her teachers, her confidence in walking slowly grew. By graduation, she was able to walk for many blocks confidently using her cane and wearing her blindfold. Other classes--cooking, needle arts, computer skills, independent living skills, seminars, and trips--provided challenges and gave her options and skills to incorporate within her existing lifestyle. Claire has now been at home for one year. Claire says she holds her head high when using her cane! She has resumed the directorship of a nonprofit group, and is using her computer skills as a very active member of the Commission on Aging. In retrospect, Claire indicated she is so very grateful that she had the opportunity to attend OCB, realizing that with the right combination of a student's motivation and willingness to learn, the OCB has and will continue to be a true force in opening new doors for the blind.

Blind since birth, Karen was born in China and came to live in the United States where she learned Braille and mobility in school. After high school, Karen went to the OCB to learn technology and daily living skills and to prepare for living at college and on her own. Karen expresses her appreciation for the training received in preparation for receiving a guide dog. Being at the OCB made her less shy and more outgoing, and helped her to build self-confidence. Today Karen is attending the University of California at Davis and utilizes the technology training received at the OCB to perform school work. Karen practices the skills learned in cooking classes and in the transition apartment program she participated in while at the OCB.

In 2009, at age 24, for the second time, Sandra had a brain tumor which resulted in her losing almost all of her sight. She felt very depressed thinking she would not be able to do anything as a blind person. Sandra

discovered DOR services and the OCB program. At the OCB, Sandra learned to use the computer with adaptive technology, cook, perform daily living tasks and mobility. She described the program as a wonderful opportunity to interact with others who were blind, as well as being fortunate to have blind teachers and staff as role models. Sandra did not think, as a blind person, she would be able to cook; she was amazed to learn she could cook using her sense of touch. She graduated from the program and is now living in an apartment where she is cooking, cleaning her apartment, and paying bills. The OCB has helped to change Sandra's outlook on life and she is now searching for employment.

Debra was working for the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) when she lost her vision due to diabetic retinopathy. She came to the OCB, which gave her the opportunity to meet other people with vision loss. This provided her support to know that she was not the only one learning how to adjust to vision loss. The OCB teachers taught her independent living skills, and orientation and mobility where she learned how to use public transportation. Now she can travel wherever she needs to go, and feels nothing can stop her as she masters basic skills like crossing the street and using her hearing to get around. Through OCB services, Debra learned adaptive computer skills and overcame her fear of technology. She uses adaptive technology such as a closed circuit television (CCTV) magnification system and Job Access With Speech (JAWS) computer screen reader program, which helps her to do her work processing accident reports for DMV. Debra realizes that even though she has lost her vision, she can still do many things.

8.5. OIB Success Stories

Peter was age 60 at the time he received services. He immigrated from Ethiopia in 2004 and resettled as a refugee. He lost his vision totally from glaucoma and attended the San Diego Center for the Blind to adjust to his loss of vision and new life in the United States. After fully participating in all aspects of vision rehabilitation, including assistive technology, Peter studied and was successful in obtaining his U.S. citizenship. Following that success, he attended community college and earned his AA degree, but he did not stop there. He is currently enrolled at San Diego State University and plans to pursue a Master's program in Rehabilitation Counseling. During his studies, Peter has returned to the Center as a student intern and

is putting into practice his desire to help others who have found themselves in similar situations as a new immigrant with vision loss.

John is a recently retired engineer who is deaf and has been losing vision due to macular degeneration over the past two years. He found out about the LightHouse for the Blind through an outreach visit to the Deaf Counseling, Advocacy Referral Agency where the LightHouse had an information booth. In denial about his low vision, John was finding communication in American Sign Language (ASL) increasingly difficult to understand, and print even more difficult to read. Connecting with the LightHouse Deaf-Blind Specialist was beneficial. Acknowledging he was unable to communicate in the way he had been doing all his life was profound, and the change to learning close-up and some tactile signing even more scary – what would his friends think? Starting with small steps, he completed a low vision evaluation and recognized how handheld magnification and lighting would be helpful. He practiced each day using close-up and tactile ASL skills, feeling less anxious and more confident to the point where he found himself teaching some of the hard of hearing participants some emergency signs and print on palm. John agreed to speak to other groups of older adults who are deaf to let them know that losing vision is scary, but reaching out for help is better than sitting at home being afraid.

Sharon was home bound due to her blindness caused by severe type-one diabetes. She was active her whole life and raised her family. She loves everything that has to do with the performing arts. She is an artist and loves to paint and visit art museums. Now at the age of 55, she has completely lost all of her remaining vision, and had been struggling with doing everyday chores and activities. For example, she would limit her family menu to items such as pre-cut carrots from the bag or microwave dinners because she no longer could cook for herself and her family. Her family decided to move closer to downtown Placerville, so that she could have better access to the local shops and grocery stores. However, without mobility skills, she was still unable to walk safely and independently. Through Society for the Blind, Sharon quickly learned how to use her support cane and her long white cane to move about safely and acquired other independent living skills. Upon completing her program, she felt more equipped to take care of her disabled son and inspires her family and friends to overcome any barriers in their lives.

Louis, a consumer from the Center for the Partially Sighted (CPS), a vigorous 81 year old man who is partially sighted due to histoplasmosis. He had great plans for his retirement years. One of his most important priorities was to continue to manage his properties, which involved substantial computer work and bookkeeping. However, he was completely stymied by his low vision which interfered with his livelihood and his quality of life. He presented to the CPS doctors with two primary goals – reading the computer screen and reading small print. He was saddened that these very important tasks seemed beyond him. The CPS low vision optometrist evaluated his vision. A simple illuminated hand magnifier helped Dan read small print, and he immediately brightened at the prospect of being able to read again. The optometrist also introduced Dan to a head-borne magnifier to use with his computer. Happily, with this low vision device, he has access to the print on his computer screen. Finally, the optometrist refracted Louis to see if she could improve on his general vision. She wanted him to be able to travel about the community as safely as possible and avoid the risk of falls. Louis remarked that he had no idea that glasses could make such a difference – he hadn't seen as well in quite some time. Louis remains partially sighted, but is equipped to handle his work responsibilities and enjoy his retirement.

Ellen is an 83 year old woman who lost her vision due to advanced stages of glaucoma. She spent her career days as a nurse and has always been a caring person. Determined not to let a loss of vision get in her way, Ellen attended the San Diego Center for the Blind and availed herself of all the classes. While at the Center, she mentored and looked after those new individuals who came in a little nervous and uncertain if this was the right course of action for them. She was a great role model. Following graduation from her program, she was determined not to let her life slip into inactivity. She found an opportunity to volunteer at a continuation school for juvenile ex-offenders. She became a tutor and surrogate grandmother. To bridge the generation gap, she started coming up with rap songs and is currently known around the school as the "Rapping Grandma." Ellen is a success story of someone who has moved past her loss of vision and is giving back to the community.