

SUMMARY OF INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL; RESPONSE OF THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT; AND EXPLANATIONS FOR REJECTION OF INPUT OR RECOMMENDATIONS.

The State Rehabilitation Council contracted with the Eagleton Institute of Rutgers University to conduct a Consumer Satisfaction Survey on clients who received services under a Plan in 1996. More than 1400 surveys were mailed and a high response rate was achieved. Although the overall level of satisfaction was high with consumers, there were some areas that consumers felt that the commission needed to improve on. These areas were:

- ?? Better dissemination of information on CBVI services
- ?? Better communication between staff and consumers
- ?? Delays in receiving services
- ?? Inconsistency of services
- ?? People want jobs.

The State Rehabilitation Council made a presentation to vocational rehabilitation staff in June of 1998 and solicited from staff recommendations to address the issues listed above. Among the suggestions adopted are the establishment of an agency newsletter, Internet site, brochures, recruitment of paraprofessional staff. Some recommendations, such as video development and 800 number establishment were rejected as being too costly. The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired will continue working with the State Rehabilitation Council to continually improve the quality of services offered to consumers.

The State Rehabilitation Council has been conducting Annual Forums with the Commission since 1993 as a mechanism of gathering information to assist the Commission constantly improve the services that are offered. The lack of adequate transportation for individuals with disabilities continues to be a common theme in these forums. A forum specifically dedicated to issues of transportation was convened in the fall of 1998. Consumers, legislators, and NJ Transit officials were invited to participate to gain information on how this issue impacts upon the provision of VR services and employment. A Tri- Council Forum (including the State Rehabilitation Council of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and the State Independent Living Council) is planned during State fiscal 2000 to further address this issue.

The Annual Report, recently completed and submitted to the Governor and to the Rehabilitation Services Administration, listed the 1998 Accomplishments and the Goals and Initiatives for 1999.

The 1998 Accomplishments were as follows:

- ?? Involved in the development of the State, Strategic and Resource Plans
- ?? Development of program performance recommendations based on the consumer Satisfaction Survey

- ?? Increased involvement in CVBI review of policies and program planning
- ?? Presentation of five regional public hearings in conjunction with the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration under the United State Department of Education
- ?? Continued advocacy for the re-authorization of the Rehabilitation Act
- ?? Recommendation of strategies to increase competitive employment opportunities
- ?? Collaboration with the Statewide Independent Living Council and the SRC of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation on issues of concern to people with disabilities
- ?? Establishment of a mentoring committee which successfully implemented Phase I of a mentoring program
- ?? Provided testimony on the Unified state Plan developed by the Workforce Investment System of New Jersey
- ?? Participated in a National Rehabilitation Council meeting at the Council for State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation Spring Conference

The Goals and Initiatives for 1999 are as follows:

- ?? Co-sponsor (with DVRS) a public hearing on the Unified State Plan to receive consumer comments and recommendations
- ?? Follow up on the suggestions and recommendations of consumers from the public meetings specific to the issue of transportation
- ?? Conduct a Consumer Satisfaction Survey on the Intake Unit at the Joseph Kohn Rehabilitation Center
- ?? Solicit, evaluate, and analyze feedback on consumer involvement and informed choice
- ?? Establish a protocol for SRC review of information gathered through the exit interviews of consumers from the Joseph Kohn Rehabilitation Center
- ?? Clarify the roles, responsibilities and relationships of CBVI staff and SRC members in planning and decision making processes
- ?? Develop result-oriented goals for each SRC sub-committee
- ?? Develop an informational brochure and web page
- ?? Participate in the continues evolution of CBVI technology efforts
- ?? Participate in the on-going training of One-Stop staff
- ?? Participate in RSA monitoring of state agencies
- ?? Implement Phase II of the SRC Mentoring Program

COOPERATION AND COORDINATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND OTHER ENTITIES

(1) Cooperation with Agencies that Are Not in the Statewide Workforce Investment System and with Other Entities

Because of the size of the population it serves, the complexity of the services rendered and because of the emphasis placed upon partnerships and collaboration by its funding source, the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired finds that cooperative agreements with organizations and service providers enhance our ability to deliver quality services to persons who are blind and visually impaired.

The Commission presently has Cooperative Agreements with the following agencies that are not required partners in the Statewide Workforce Investment System:

- ?? Division of Developmental Disabilities (Transitioning)
- ?? Division of Mental Health Services (Supported Employment)
- ?? Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (Transitioning)
- ?? NJ Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
- ?? The Lexington Center
- ?? Division of Youth and Family Services
- ?? Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- ?? New Jersey Transit ADA Task Force
- ?? National Federation of the Blind (Newsline and Jobline)
- ?? Department of Health (Diabetic Services)
- ?? Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- ?? Drew University
- ?? Division of Disability Services (in progress)

The above list represents more formal cooperative agreements which are with organizations not currently under contract with the Commission for the Blind. Contracted agencies include organizations such as the Community Health Law Project, Recordings for the Blind, Puerto Rican Association for Human Development, National Society to Prevent Blindness and various other entities such as the Passaic County Board of Social Services, Cumberland County, Family Services of Morris county, the Senior Service Corps, Inc., Family Services Association, and Heightened Independence. Many of these contracted services are provided to clients who are not seeking employment, or are services closely related to blindness, rather than employment. In addition, CBVI acts as the State Licensing Agency for business people in the Randolph Sheppard Program and, as such, enters into agreements with government agencies to provide food services (primarily) to building employees and the public.

On a less formal basis, the Commission maintains membership on a variety of levels and supports the activities of a variety of organizations such as Region II, RRCEP, the Commodities and Services Council, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, National Council of State Agencies for the Blind, Association of Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Network of Organizations for the Blind, New Jersey Transit Senior Citizen and Disabled Advisory Committee, and various county college, and chamber of commerce organizations.

(2) Coordination with Education Officials

Since 1910, the Commission has assisted school districts in providing education programs that address the special needs of children with visual impairment and blindness. In 1993, this partnership was formalized with local school districts through provider service agreements. These agreements identify the specific level of services that the Commission will provide for each child in the school district. As the child reaches the age of fourteen, the Commission's education counselor refers the student to a transition counselor who will begin to determine eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services and provide the student with information concerning a variety of programs designed around the specific needs of blind or visually impaired youth who require information as well as specialized techniques for research and training in career awareness/job seeking activities, etc. Throughout this transition process, contact with the school district remains constant, as the student's participation in various programs, and need and provision for specialized training and/or adaptive equipment are addressed as part of the IEP and the transition plan. Technical consultation begun in the earlier grades with the education counselor is continued by the transition counselor. In the education community, CBVI transition counselors play an organizational role in technical consultation through their active participation in career fairs, school-to-work activities, task force memberships etc.

On the state level, the Executive Director of CBVI is an invited member to the State Agency Directors Forum which includes directors of DVRS; OSEP, OSTCI, both in the DOE; the Division of Developmental Disabilities, and the Juvenile Justice Commission. These meetings enhance the coordination of policies and programs relating to students in transition.

(3) Cooperative Agreements with Private Non-Profit Vocational Rehabilitation Service Providers

In addition to those listed above, the Commission has an agreement with the New Jersey Association of the Deaf and Blind and works closely with a variety of rehabilitation organizations in a contractual relationship. Our contracts are with the First Occupational Center of New Jersey, the Monmouth Center for Vocational Rehabilitation, St. Joseph's School for the Blind, Abilitech, and Jersey Cape Diagnostic Center. Additionally, the Commission maintains close relationships with many of the Centers for Independent Living, and Independent Living organizations such as Pathway to Independence with whom we have a contract.

(4) Evidence of Collaboration Regarding Supported Employment Services and Extended Services

The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired is presently working on an updated agreement with the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). DDD has traditionally assumed responsibility for the follow along services in the extended phase of supported employment.

The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired has contracted with three service providers for job coaching and extended services, (The First Occupational Center for Northern New Jersey, Monmouth Center for Vocational Rehabilitation for Central New Jersey, and Jersey Cape Diagnostic Training and Opportunity Center for Southern New Jersey.) In addition, the Commission utilizes Title VI, Part C funds on an individualized fee for service basis in order to provide consumers with a range of choices in the provision of supported employment services. At present, the Commission utilizes the same fee structure and approval process as that which is in place for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired is committed to the establishment and maintenance of Comprehensive System of Personnel Development to ensure that highly qualified individuals provided services to individuals who are blind and visually impaired. The Commission will utilize a variety of highly qualified providers including the Region II Continuing Education Program (RRCEP), the New Jersey Department of Personnel, Human Resource Institute (HRDI), New Jersey and other state universities and colleges, as well as consultants and individuals who can provide workshops, conferences and other discipline specific training for the professional VR staff.

Components of the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

In- service Training

Vocational outcomes (employment), career development, and personal empowerment are the cornerstones of the vocational rehabilitation program. Issues, such as community access, the development of personal and social relationships, social responsibility, leisure and recreation, and personal fulfillment all must be considered if the agency's vocational rehabilitation program is to continue to have a positive impact on the lives of our consumers. Staff is empowered to assist the consumers in reaching their personal goals and this is accomplished through a comprehensive, integrated sequence of goal focused training programs utilizing the Human Resource Development model.

Region II Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program (RRCEP). The Commission provides ongoing training opportunities through the RRCEP to VR staff to meet the present and emerging needs in the field. The Commission is an active member of the RRCEP Advisory Board and participates in the development of training to meet the needs of agency staff.

Tuition Reimbursement Program. The Commission encourages employees to participate in the tuition reimbursement program. The program provides a means for employees to pursue formal academic training to improve job skills and work performance and to further career development. Courses must be job related and are generally pursued on the employees' own time. The Commission will reimburse for up to six credits per semester, at the state college or university rate, whichever is higher.

New Jersey Department of Personnel The New Jersey Department of Personnel, through the Human Resource Development Institute (HRDI) offers courses, on an ongoing basis to agency staff to assist them achieve personal and organizational goals and needs. Employees are encouraged to attend courses pertinent to their job duties and responsibilities.

Department of Labor, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

(DVRS) The Commission has been working closely with DVRS to provide joint training to vocational rehabilitation staff of both agencies. Joint efforts will enable both agencies to provide the most effective and cost efficient training to staff through shared resources, i.e. vendors, distance learning mechanisms, such as satellite sites, compressed video conferencing, computers, etc.

Conference, Workshops and other Training. The Commission encourages staff to attend training, seminars, and workshops appropriate to their job duties and responsibilities within and outside the state.

Subject Matter Experts. The Commission has developed in-house subject matter experts. These are staff who can provide training to other agency staff in areas of their expertise. Areas that we have used and will continue to use subject matter experts are ADA, CPR, and Employer Relations/Grievance Process.

Distance Learning. The Commission will continue to utilize its stationary and mobile satellite equipment to provide training from across the nation to vocational rehabilitation staff. The stationary satellite is located at the Commission's Joseph Kohn Rehabilitation Center.

State Licensure

The Regulations to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, mandate that states develop and implement strategies for the hiring or retraining of personnel to meet standards or qualifications based on the highest requirements in the state for the counseling profession. New Jersey presently has established a standard, which is a 60 credit Masters Degree in Vocational Rehabilitation. This is the standard that our agency must work toward. In New Jersey, we have not had a CORE approved Rehabilitation Counseling program since 1985. The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services have been negotiating with the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) School of Health Related Professions to establish a Masters level program in Vocational Rehabilitation. It is anticipated that the program will commence in the summer of 1999 at two distinct sites.

The Commission presently has 14 counselors working with the Title I program with bachelor degrees and who will be required to obtain a Masters degree. Additionally, there are 11 vocational counselors who have Masters degrees in other fields. The opportunity will be offered to these individuals to obtain a Masters Degree in Vocational Rehabilitation in order to meet the state standard. Our agency anticipates that all of the vocational rehabilitation counseling staff will have obtained the standard by fiscal 2004.

The Commission views participation in this program to meet the CSPD requirement as an employee benefit, which is valuable and part of a national competency movement. Financial participation will be provided by the agency to enable an employee to complete this program.

ASSESSMENT; ESTIMATES; GOALS AND PRIORITIES; STRATEGIES; AND PROGRESS REPORTS

(a)(1)(A) Rehabilitation Needs of Individuals

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired utilizes a variety of methods to ascertain the rehabilitation needs of individuals residing in the state in order to continue to improve the nature and scope of services that are provided to individuals seeking an employment outcome. These assessments are done in a variety of ways:

Forums and Public Meeting conducted with the Commission's State Rehabilitation Council, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and other entities.

Evaluations conducted with consumers exiting the Joseph Kohn Rehabilitation Center.

Continuing surveys conducted by the State Rehabilitation Council.

Review of prior year(s) closure information at the end of each fiscal year. This evaluation focuses on the number of individuals employed, the wages at closure, and satisfaction with services offered.

On February 25, 1999, a Public Meeting was held prior to the submittal of the Unified State Plan on April 1, 1999 to gather information from consumers, other professionals, and interested parties. There were a variety of issues that were brought forth and these were as follows:

- ?? Technology is and will continue to be a major issue relative to the employment of individuals with disabilities. More sophisticated technology and continuous training is needed to allow individuals compete on an even level with non-disabled persons.
- ?? Passaic County is in need of a Center in the county to meet the needs of consumers. Individuals have to travel to surrounding counties to receive the services that they require. Transportation, as it is, requires individuals to spend long hours just getting to centers in adjoining counties.
- ?? Changes in Social Security guidelines are needed so that people can continue receiving health benefits when they begin working, if benefits are not available.
- ?? Transportation for all individuals with disabilities, whether in employment or training, continues to be a major impediment. Transportation needs to be available, particularly in rural areas and during off- hours so that people can go to work. There are major problems with Access Link. It is not meeting the need of people with disabilities. The WIB's are required to develop Transportation Plans, as they relate to Work First New Jersey. These

Transportation Plans make recommendations to New Jersey Transit. DVRS and CBVI need to be aware of these as they relate to consumers.

- ?? Literacy needs must be addressed, regardless of the media, for all people. The changing job market will continue to require a higher skill level.
- ?? Consumers must make some of their own changes if they are going to be successful, not just rely on others to make changes. If something is needed, don't hesitate to ask for it.

The Executive Director of the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and the Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services attended the Public Meeting and led an Open Discussion period following the formal presentations. As estimated 60 people participated in the Public Meeting. A direct outgrowth of this Meeting was that the State Rehabilitation Councils of both agencies and the State Independent Living Council will convene to discuss the major issue of transportation and determine what they can do as a group to effect the necessary changes.

(a)(1)(B) Community Rehabilitation Program Needs

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired operates the Joseph Kohn Rehabilitation Center, a residential facility that provides comprehensive services to individuals who are blind and visually impaired residing in the state. The following services are offered: evaluation and adjustment to blindness services, vocational assessment, independent living services, counseling and guidance, and specific vocational training in areas identified by consumer and staff input. Presently, a comprehensive food service training program is underway at the facility. In October, 1998, the Norma F. Krajczar Technology Center was opened at the Joseph Kohn Rehabilitation Center to provide evaluations and training to consumers in assistive technology in order to meet the growing need for technology that exists in most occupations today. The Technology Center keeps abreast of the latest developments in technology to meet the current and ever expanding needs of consumers entering training and employment situations.

Community Rehabilitation Programs throughout the state, including the Joseph Kohn Rehabilitation Center, will need to be prepared for and utilized to assist vocational rehabilitation agencies implement the trial work situations as required in the Rehabilitation Act amendments.

The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development requires that Community Rehabilitation Programs also employ qualified rehabilitation personnel. Although, at present, the first priority is the education and training of state agency staff, sufficient opportunities must be available to assist the Community Programs meet the mandates of the Act.

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired continues to meet with ACCSES to investigate ways and methods to increase the number of blind and visually impaired consumers employed by the State Use Program.

(b) Annual Estimates of Individuals to Be Served and Costs of Services

- (1) It is estimated that 2800 individuals will be eligible for services in Program Year 2000.
- (2) Of the 2800 eligible individuals, it is estimated that all will receive services provided under Part B of Title I of the Act and/or under Part B of Title VI of the Act. The Commission for the Blind is not under an order of selection.
- (3) Service costs are estimated to be \$ 11,858,00 inclusive of amounts for Supported Employment under Title VI, part B and state match under Title I.

(c)(1) Goals and Priorities

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired has established goals and priorities for all consumers of services. The Mission statement, Philosophy, Goals and Objectives are as follows:

Mission Statement

The mission of the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired 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 visually impaired, their families and the community.

Statement of Philosophy

People who are blind and visually impaired can succeed in education, in careers, in the home and in the community. The services that our agency provides directly impacts on the ability of individuals to achieve success. The consumer must be the most important part of the process. The skills of blindness are essential to independence, education and employment and must be promoted by staff to consumers, employers, educational institutions, and the general public. We encourage involvement and support by the family of the consumer. Research and development of assistive technology is encouraged and supported to ensure that persons who are blind and visually impaired can become independent and competitive in education and employment.

ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

General Goals and Objectives

Goal 1

The Commission will provide timely, effective, high-quality services.

Objectives

- ?? Determine eligibility for services within 30 days of referral and begin service delivery within 30 days of eligibility determination.
- ?? Analyze and streamline the Intake process.
- ?? Undertake consumer satisfaction surveys, follow-up interviews, and act on consumer recommendations.
- ?? Provide resource information as needed.
- ?? Maintain a highly trained and competent staff.

Goal 2

The Commission will increase competitive employment.

Objectives

- Network with employers to establish an informed public as to the abilities of persons who are blind and visually impaired in the work place.
- Develop access to computerized job banks.
- Upgrade formal and informal training for Commission staff to be relevant to current market trends. Work cooperatively with the Workforce System in New Jersey to ensure access to labor market information.
- Provide, in partnership with employers and in keeping with the provisions of ADA, technical and adaptive assistance at the work place.

Goal 3

The Commission will work towards excellence in the education of students who are blind and visually impaired.

Objectives

- Work toward age-appropriate concept development, early literacy experiences and grade-level achievements for students who are blind and visually impaired.
- Provide education services and adaptive equipment that will promote integration and enable students who are blind and visually impaired to function independently on an equal basis with their peers.
- Promote positive attitudes among school staff regarding the abilities of students who are blind and visually impaired and the skills of blindness.

- Keep parents informed on a regular basis of the scheduling and content of lessons and the student's progress.
- Develop partnerships for the purpose of sharing information among parents, Commission staff, classroom teachers and advocacy groups regarding trends, changes, new ideas and different approaches in the education of children who are blind and visually impaired.

Goal 4

The Commission will work to decrease the incidence of blindness or significant vision loss through eye health programs.

Objectives

- To increase public awareness of eye safety and the causes and treatment of vision loss by publicizing the Commission's prevention services and conducting education and detection programs.
- Provide blindness prevention services such as eye disease detection screenings and medical intervention.
- Target high-risk populations for prevention and eye health services.

Goal 5

The Commission will actively promote equality and full inclusion into society.

Objectives

- Work to promote abilities and dispel misconceptions about blindness and visual impairments.
- Work to promote positive attitudes through a variety of community-based activities.
- Advocate for the rights of the population served.
- Build a collaborative network of consumers, blindness organizations, other disability groups, service providers and interested individuals to facilitate consumer empowerment.
- Encourage consumers to advocate for themselves through blindness organizations, government, community, in school and on the job.

Goal 6

The Commission will work in partnership with consumers.

Objectives

- Work with the individual to choose a direction which will enable him or her to achieve desired goals.
- Develop an individual blueprint for achievement that will early define expectations and responsibilities.

- Review service plans annually as developed between case managers and consumers.
- Conduct routine compliance reviews to ensure the delivery of consumer services.
- Seek consumer input through committees, forums, public hearings, etc.

Goal 7

The Commission will encourage positive attitudes toward blindness and visual impairments by consumers and their families.

Objectives

- Develop a mentoring program.
- Implement a program of socialization and interpersonal skills appropriate to various age groups.

Goal 8

The Commission will expand service delivery to historically underserved populations.

Objectives

- Analyze targeted populations to determine appropriate service needs.
- Expand outreach activities.
- Increase services to these populations.
- Conduct annual reviews.
- Review and revise Commission literature and communications.

Goal 9

The Commission will promote the development and use of assistive technology.

Objective

- Maintain up-to-date information on assistive technology.
- Develop a training program for Commission staff.

The Sterling Group The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, in order to benchmark our activities, demonstrate continuous improvement and develop a Comprehensive Strategic Plan for the next millenium, has employed the Sterling Group to evaluate all areas of our agency and make recommendations on how we can improve the quality of services that we offer.

(c)(2)(B) Explanation to support the Decision Not to Establish an Order of Selection

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired is able to provide Vocational Rehabilitation Services to all eligible individuals who are blind and visually Impaired within the state who apply for services. Our agency has not delayed, through waiting lists or any other means, eligibility determinations, assessments, the development of the IPE, and the provision of services under the IPE. The Commission's budget for fiscal 1999 is approximately \$22 million dollars. Our agency anticipates that we will be able to provide the full range of vocational services to all eligible individuals in fiscal 2000. In addition to adequate resources, the Commission is able to utilize agency-based programs and personnel and contract services to assist in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

The Joseph Kohn Rehabilitation Center (JKRC) The Commission operates a comprehensive, residential rehabilitation center, located centrally in the state. The JKRC is able to provide Adjustment to Blindness counseling and training, diagnostic and pre-vocational evaluations. A consumer is able to receive services in the following instructional areas: vocational assessment, career counseling, communications, home and personal management, orientation and mobility, low vision services, and evaluation and training in assistive technology. The Center is able to provide training for Randolph- Sheppard operators and Job Seeking Skills training.

Adaptive Living Skill and Prevention Services The Commission, in addition to providing vocational rehabilitation services, is able to offer services to consumers that will enhance their ability to be employed. These direct services, offered on a regional basis, are eye health nursing, social casework, orientation and mobility, and rehabilitation teaching. These services can be offered before, during, and after the rehabilitation process in order to ensure ongoing support and meet consumer needs.

Contracted Services Contracted services assists the vocational rehabilitation program by providing direct services to consumers. Utilizing this method, the Commission is able to provide services in Assistive Technology, Supported Employment, Legal services, and services to the older blind.

Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, by utilizing the above in-house modalities are able to provide services to all eligible blind and visually impaired consumers residing in the state.

(3) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired remain committed to increasing the quality, scope and extent of Supported Employment Services to eligible consumers who are blind and visually impaired. There are presently sixty-five (65) providers throughout the state who provide supported employment services on a fee for service basis. In addition to utilizing the Title VI, Part B funds on the individual fee for service basis, the Commission for the Blind and Visually

Impaired contracts with three (3) providers for intensive job coaching and extended services. These three providers are the First Occupational Center (Northern New Jersey), Monmouth Center Vocational Rehabilitation (Central New Jersey), and Jersey Cape Diagnostic Training and Opportunity Center (Southern New Jersey). The total amount expended for the three contracts is \$168,000.

Change in Fee for Service Rate. Effective April 1, 1999, the baseline hourly fee for service rate was raised from \$37.00 to \$42.00 by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. This represents the first increase to reflect rising costs since the fee for service mechanism was introduced in 1991.

Interagency Agreement with D.D.D. The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired plans to update its Interagency Agreement with the Division of Developmental Disabilities (D.D.D.). With the continued emphasis of moving individuals from institutional setting to group homes, The Commission plans to work with DDD on a strategy to refer individuals who are blind and visually impaired and developmentally disabled to the Commission for the intensive phase of supported employment job coaching. Upon completion of the intensive phase, these individuals will be referred back to DDD for the long- term extended services.

(d) State's Strategies and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired plans to continue to dedicate funding that was set aside in the previous Strategic Plan (October 1, 1997- September 30, 2000). The activities that were focused on at that time were as follows:

- ?? Operation of and initiatives of the State Rehabilitation Council
- ?? Personnel Development to ensure that vocational services are provided by highly qualified rehabilitation personnel
- ?? Initiation of the VR loaner program through an existing state program to ensure that equipment is available for consumers when they are commencing a training or employment situation.
- ?? Expansion of the National Industries for the Blind/ Veterans Administration employment initiatives

New initiative to be undertaken in fiscal 2000 and beyond are:

- ?? Mentoring program focusing on transition students, newly blinded individuals, and new Randolph-Sheppard operators.
- ?? Continued enhancement of transition programs. This will include redefining the populations presently served in the transition programs, utilizing other community programs, such as the Job Corp, and ensuring that programs are sequential, developmental and non-duplicative.

- ?? Development of employment program with National Industries for the Blind, with the focus on non-traditional occupations (i.e. homebound employment) for individuals who are blind and visually impaired.
- ?? Expansion through community based organizations into non- traditional occupations for CBVI consumers, such as construction and automotive trades and food service.

The Commission for the Blind acknowledges the need to assure effective communication with its potential consumers. To a great extent, that communication will be enhanced through the development of a newsletter, a WEB page, standardized brochures, etc., however to the extent that potential consumers may not be able to read print, additional interventions are needed to assure that potential consumers are made aware of the agency's program offerings and to standardize our communication with our current consumers.

Since effective planning of vocational rehabilitation begins at the initial point of contact, the Commission has established a centralized intake unit, consisting of experienced counselors who will work with potential clients until eligibility is established. Monitoring of this function is ongoing, with a formalized evaluation of effort underway through our next consumer satisfaction survey which is targeted at individuals who have been processed through this centralized unit.

Historically, the Commission for the Blind has successfully penetrated the minority population in proportion to the representation of minorities in the general population. We have, however, initiated outreach in selected populations, such as the Latino population in areas outside of vocational rehabilitation with the expectation that our success in vision restoration programs would generate referrals to vocational rehabilitation as well. Additionally, CBVI has a series of contractual relationships with organizations serving older blind, many of which are in geographic areas heavily populated by minorities.

The primary barrier relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with visual disabilities in the state VR program relates to the issues of travel and print access. CBVI has designed its services to be delivered to individuals within their home environment, rather than base services in an office setting. Because the nature of the disability affects the individual's mobility, our population consistently emphasizes the need for access to transportation. This need and the anticipated response to this need is identified above. With respect to Workforce Development and service delivery through the One-Stops, an initial effort is being made to provide access by utilizing lap-top computers with the ability to dial into systems appropriate to meet constituent needs.

With respect to print access, the Commission has initiated and promotes actively, the development of technology resources through its research and development committee, the ongoing expansion of its contracts for technology services

(including training), the purchase of adaptive equipment where appropriate, and the development of low tech alternatives to job seeking etc.

On a state level, the Workforce Development system has been responsive to equitable access by supporting the provision of specifically adapted technology through the local WIB's. This need is ongoing as reader service, technology, alternative media for vocational assessments, career testing and other print material is developed for customers of the One-Stops.

(e) Evaluation and Reports of Progress

Many of the initiative highlighted in the Strategic Plan for the period October 1, 1997 through September 30, 2000 are still being pursued. Activities of the State Rehabilitation Council continues to receive financial support, the food service program has commenced at the Joseph Kohn Rehabilitation Center and the agreement with the Library for the Blind and Print Handicapped for a VR loaner program is nearly completed.

The criteria that the Commission utilized to determine if the objectives were met are the number of individuals achieving an employment outcome and the results of Consumer Satisfaction Surveys. Although the number of consumers achieving an employment outcome remained the same, the number of people in competitive employment rose from 203 to 224, and the number of homemakers and individuals in sheltered employment decreased. The Consumer Satisfaction Survey indicated that more than 75% of consumers felt that they benefited from CBVI services, had their rights explained to them, were given the opportunity to make their own choices about a vocational goal, and would recommend CBVI to a friend. The Commission will continue to conduct surveys as a mechanism to improve services. Some areas, such as counselors' timeliness of response and delays in service have been noted and the Commission will continue to monitor progress in those areas.

MEDIATION AND IMPARTIAL DUE PROCESS HEARING PROCEDURES

The Rehabilitation Act mandates that mediation procedures are established and implemented that allow parties to resolve disputes through a process that shall be available whenever requested. The process must meet the following criteria:

- ?? The process is voluntary on the part of both parties.
- ?? Is not used to deny or delay the right of the individual to a hearing.
- ?? The mediation is conducted by a qualified and impartial mediator who is trained in effective mediation techniques.

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired has contacted the State of New Jersey Office of the Public Defender and our agency will utilize the Office of Dispute Settlement in Trenton for purposes of mediation. The standards of practice, suggested time frames, and the cost estimates are as follows:

Standards of Practice. The Model standards of Conduct for Mediators, endorsed by The Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution, The American Arbitration Association and the American Bar Association will be utilized.

Time Frames. The mediation session will be scheduled within 20 days of the request for mediation. The 20-day time frame would include the initial conference call with the parties, and the exchange of information pertinent to the mediation session.

Cost Estimate. Mediation and consulting services would be provided at the cost of \$75.00 per hour.

Any agreement from the mediation session(s) will be set forth in writing in a written mediation agreement. The process shall be confidential and may not be used as evidence in any subsequent due process hearing or civil proceeding.

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired is presently rewriting Chapter 95, our agency Vocational Rehabilitation Rule, to reflect the changes brought about by The Workforce Act and the Rehabilitation Act. The mediation procedures will be included under the Due Process section of the code, after they are reviewed by the Office of Dispute Settlement, the Rehabilitation Services Administration and the State Rehabilitation Council of the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Services Subject to Financial Needs Test

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired uses an economic needs test in determining a consumer's financial participation in the cost of certain vocational rehabilitation services, other than evaluation of eligibility, diagnostic evaluation, counseling and guidance, referral services, and job placement. The services for which there is an economic needs test are as follows:

- ?? College Tuition
- ??Maintenance
- ??Adaptive equipment
- ??Low vision follow-up visits
- ??Accessory or optical low vision aids
- ??Projection or electronic low vision aids
- ??Medical devices and equipment
- ??Restoration services
- ??Personal attendant services
- ??Technological aids
- ??Vocational training (except work adjustment training)
- ??Training equipment
- ??Transportation
- ??Placement equipment

QUALITY, SCOPE AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

The New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired remains committed to increasing the quality, scope and extent of Supported Employment Services to eligible consumers who are blind and visually impaired.

Although there exists a sufficient number of service providers who deliver supported employment in the state on a fee for service basis, there is reluctance on the part of many providers to work with individuals with significant disabilities who are blind and visually impaired. The commission presently contracts with three (3) providers for intensive job coaching and extended services- The First Occupational Center (Northern New Jersey), Monmouth Center Vocational Rehabilitation (Central New Jersey), and Jersey Cape Diagnostic, Training and Opportunity Center (Southern New Jersey). The Commission is prepared to expand these contract based on successful supported employment outcomes or develop new providers to meet the needs of consumers who require these types of services.

The Region II Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program (RRCEP) for Community Rehabilitation Programs and the University Affiliated Program, due to a continuing turnover in staff, offer a variety of training programs in basic and advanced job coaching to meet the continuing need of providers.

The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired is presently redeveloping our agency's Interagency Agreement with the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) for Supported Employment Services. Under the new agreement, individuals are eligible and appropriate for supported employment services, and who are DDD eligible, would be provided intensive job coaching services by the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The on going extended services would be provided by the Division of Developmental Disabilities.