

**NEW YORK STATE
OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

**COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND
AND VISUALLY HANDICAPPED**

INFORMATION BOOKLET

For

Open Forums on the

**Proposed Update to the State Plan for Vocational
Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Services for
FY 2009**

February 6, 2008

Queens, New York

February 14, 2008

Buffalo, New York

(snow date, February 28, 2008)

February 20 2008

Albany, NY



New York State
Office of
Children and Family
Services

COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY HANDICAPPED (CBVH)

HAVE A VOICE IN CBVH'S FUTURE

Come to an open forum to share your thoughts and to hear what others are saying about services and issues that affect people who are blind.

Provide input for the 2009 State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Services and CBVH policies and talk about issues that are important to you.

Hear about the CBVH State Rehabilitation Council and share your ideas and concerns with a representative of the Council.

Consumers, family members, advocates, rehabilitation service professionals, and other interested individuals are invited to attend.

Open Forum Dates and Locations

Long Island/Queens

February 6, 2008
4:30 PM - 7:30 PM
(718) 990 - 0858

Queens Central Library
89-11 Merrick Boulevard
Jamaica, NY 11432

Buffalo

February 14, 2008
3:30 PM - 6:00 PM
(716) 858 - 7181

Buffalo and Erie County Public Library
Central Library, 1 Lafayette Square
Buffalo, NY 14203-1887

Snow date: February 28, 2008

Albany

February 20, 2008
3:30 PM - 6:00 PM
(518) 449-3386

Albany Public Library
Main Library, 161 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12210

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Suggested Topics to Address

1. How can CBVH improve outreach to let people know that services are available to assist them with employment?
2. How can CBVH work more effectively with employers and community partners to expand job opportunities?
3. What does CBVH do best? Provide suggestions for improvements and the best methods for making the improvements.

The proposed State Plan update and policy revisions are detailed in an information booklet that is available upon request, by contacting CBVH at the numbers listed below. Please let us know if you want the booklet in regular print, large print, Braille, disk, via email or on tape. Beginning Jan. 24, 2008, the information booklet will also be available at www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/cbvh.

Pre-registration is not required to speak at the forum. However, if you do plan to speak, you can pre-register for a specific time. Please limit your comments to ten minutes. To pre-register, call or E-mail CBVH (see contact information below).

If you are unable to attend one of the forums, written comments can be sent to CBVH. Mail or E-mail comments by March 3, 2008 to CBVH (see contact information below).

CBVH Contact Information

Voice: (518) 473-2346

TDD: (518) 474-7501

Voice Relay: 1-800-421-1220

E-mail: Mike.Rose@ocfs.state.ny.us

Regular Mail: New York State Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped
52 Washington Street, South Building, Room 201
Rensselaer, NY 12144-2796
Attention: Public Comments

Please share this notice: Post it in common areas; include it in your newsletter; distribute it to people and organizations that may be interested in attending.

All open forums are being held in facilities that are accessible to individuals with disabilities. If you require an interpreter or other accommodations at one of the forums, please contact CBVH by January 24, 2008, at the numbers listed above.

OVERVIEW

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services' Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (CBVH) is holding three Open Forums across the state to obtain input for the development of the Federal Fiscal Year 2009 update to the State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Services and to hear comments on a variety of issues affecting individuals who are blind. Comments received at the Open Forums will be reviewed and incorporated into the State Plan and into general activities, as appropriate.

The Federal Rehabilitation Act provides funding for states to implement vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs. The purpose of these programs is to empower individuals with disabilities to maximize employment opportunities and achieve economic self-sufficiency and independence with the goal of full inclusion and integration into society. CBVH is the agency designated in New York State to provide vocational rehabilitation and supported employment services to individuals who are legally blind. In order to receive funding under the Rehabilitation Act for vocational rehabilitation services, CBVH must submit a State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Services to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) as well as annual updates to the plan.

THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT STATE PLAN

The Update to the State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Services consists of several attachments that provide narrative information about CBVH activities in certain areas. It is expected that the final State Plan submittal will include the following attachments:

- 4.8 (b)(1) Cooperation with Agencies that Are Not in the Statewide Work Force Investment System and Other Entities
- 4.8 (b)(2) Coordination with Education Officials
- 4.10 Comprehensive System of Personnel Development
- 4.11 (a) Results of Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of the Rehabilitation Needs of Individuals with Disabilities and Need to Establish, Develop, or Improve Community Rehabilitation Programs
- 4.11 (b) Annual Estimates of Individuals to Be Served and Costs of Services
- 4.11 (c)(1) State's Goals and Priorities
- 4.11 (c)(4) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds

- 4.11 (d) State's Strategies and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities
- 4.11 (e)(2) Evaluation and Report of Progress in Achieving Identified Goals and Priorities and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities
- 6.3 Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services

SUMMARY OF ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 4.8(b)(1) Cooperation with Agencies That Are Not In The Statewide Workforce Investment System And With Other Entities

This attachment describes the variety of entities that CBVH works closely with to enhance vocational rehabilitation services and placement opportunities for CBVH consumers.

Attachment 4.8(b)(2) Coordination With Education Officials

This attachment describes the coordination between CBVH and education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to receipt of vocational rehabilitations services.

Attachment 4.10 Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

The CSPD describes CBVH's system of personnel development to enable CBVH to maintain an adequate supply of qualified professionals and paraprofessionals to provide vocational rehabilitation services.

Attachment 4.11(a) Results of Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of the Rehabilitation Needs of Individuals with Disabilities and Need to Establish, Develop, or Improve Community Rehabilitation Programs

This attachment describes methods CBVH uses to determine the vocational rehabilitation service needs of individuals who are legally blind. The current attachment includes information about the recently completed comprehensive needs assessment.

Attachment 4.11(b) Annual Estimates of Individuals to Be Served and Costs of Services

This attachment provides updated information regarding the estimate of the number of individuals expected to be served using vocational rehabilitation funds and supported employment funds during the next fiscal year and the cost of services.

Attachment 4.11(c)(1) State's Goals and Priorities

This attachment identifies several goals and priorities for the coming year.

Attachment 4.11(c)(4) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI, Part B, Funds

This attachment provides information regarding the use of supported employment funds and the supported employment services provided by CBVH.

Attachment 4.11(d) State's Strategies and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities

This attachment identifies several strategies to be employed to enable CBVH to achieve the goals and priorities in the State Plan.

Attachment 4.11(e)(2) Evaluation and Report of Progress in Achieving Identified Goals and Priorities and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities

This attachment describes the progress CBVH has made towards achieving the goals and priorities described in the FY2008 State Plan.

Attachment 6.3 Quality, Scope and Extent of Supported Employment Services

This attachment describes the scope of the supported employment services provided by CBVH, the ways services are provided and the efforts made to assure the quality of those services.

Proposed Policy Changes

RSA has long criticized CBVH for its use of VR dollars to support the vocational goal of homemaker. In addition, one of the RSA standards and indicators is negatively affected by cases closed as VR homemakers. In an effort to reduce the number of VR homemakers and continue to provide quality services to its consumers, CBVH will be serving those individuals with Older Blind funds.

PROPOSED COOPERATION WITH AGENCIES THAT ARE NOT IN THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT SYSTEM AND WITH OTHER ENTITIES

CBVH works closely with a variety of entities to enhance vocational rehabilitation services and placement opportunities for CBVH consumers. These efforts are described in this attachment.

A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) developed among the New York State Department of Labor, State Education Department/Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (SED/VESID) and the Office of Children and Family Services/Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (OCFS/CBVH) for administration, implementation and promotion of the Work Opportunities Tax Credit program and the New York State Workers with Disabilities Employment Tax Credit Program remains current.

Employment Related Collaboration Activities

CBVH is collaborating with community rehabilitation programs, schools, employers and other state vocational rehabilitation programs to improve employment outcomes. These collaborative efforts are described in this section.

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Business Network

CSAVR is actively working with business, consumers and state VR agencies to develop a national VR Business network. The vision is to create a coordinated approach to serving business customers through a national VR team that specializes in employer development, business consulting and corporate relations. The dual customer approach provides the following benefits to the customers of the national network – business, VR consumers and state VR agencies:

- Business has direct access to qualified applicants and the support services provided by the public VR system;
- VR consumers have access to national employment opportunities and career development resources; and
- VR agencies have a national system for sharing employment resources, best practices and business connections.

As a member of the national network, CBVH has designated an Associate Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to serve as a point person in New York State. The point person is the primary contact for national employers looking to partner with state

vocational rehabilitation programs and is responsible for providing a consistent set of services that support employers in hiring and retaining individuals who are legally blind. In addition to being a resource for the referral of qualified candidates, CBVH offers the following support services to employers:

1. Assistance with Work Accommodations - CBVH has expertise in designing and providing work accommodations for individuals who are legally blind to assist in meeting performance expectations.
2. Tax Credits - CBVH qualifies job candidates for Federal and State tax credits for businesses, such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and the New York Workers with Disabilities Employment Tax Credit (WETC).
3. Employee Retention Services - CBVH provides retention assistance that assists employees who are legally blind to remain a skilled asset to businesses.

In the past year, CBVH and VESID worked with H&R Block, a partner with CSAVR's National Employment Team to provide cross-training about the VR system and employment opportunities in H&R Block. Through CSAVR CBVH learned about the federal Schedule A hiring system. Now CBVH is working with Internal Revenue Service, another partner, to help them diversify their federal workforce. CBVH is developing a partnership with a major staffing company based in New York and assisting with efforts to bring the company into the national partnership. CBVH has also benefited from information available over the partnerships communication software: ShareNet. Through discussion boards, CBVH has participated in conversations regarding home-based employment resources, working with ex-offenders, working with community partners, and the use of Placement Plans.

Regional and Bi-Regional Coordination

CBVH is working closely with VESID and state vocational rehabilitation agencies from other States in Region I, meeting periodically to share information and resources, and to plan a Bi-Regional Employment Conference. This regional partnership has assisted CBVH in obtaining important employment contacts, sample marketing materials and training tools (such as On the Job Evaluation). Closer to home, CBVH will be renewing a cooperative relationship called "Hands Across the Hudson" among state vocational rehabilitation agencies in New Jersey and New York.

National, bi-regional and regional efforts are expected to lead to the development of numerous cooperative relationships with employers and human resource organizations and to provide employment opportunities for CBVH consumers.

Working with Community Rehabilitation Partners

CBVH is interested in improving the capacity of community rehabilitation partners to successfully place consumers who are legally blind. With the enthusiastic support of community rehabilitation partners, CBVH has re-established both a Downstate and an Upstate Employment Providers Group. Composed of placement staff from private agencies for the blind and some generic agencies, as well as CBVH staff, the groups have made good use of meetings and teleconferences to share best practices, gain knowledge on specific programs or disabilities and discuss issues impacting efforts to place people in competitive settings. Between them, the two groups have discussed topics such as: tax credits for employers, services to veterans, call-center employment, possible mechanisms for sharing job leads, working with ex-offenders, determining when a person is “job ready”, better ways for CBVH and providers to work together, and working with people with mental health issues. The downstate group is planning an employer recognition event in conjunction with an employer breakfast sponsored by the Baruch College Computer Center for the Visually Impaired.

CBVH is currently re-examining existing contracts to enhance the availability of placement-related services, focusing on outcomes, accountability, quality services, and staff qualifications. The specific services under consideration are Vocational Assessment, Job-Readiness, Vocational Skills Training and Placement.

Meeting the Needs of Special Populations

For the past year, CBVH's Rural Employment Group has met by teleconference to discuss issues unique to rural areas. As a vehicle for problem solving, it has helped counselors find new approaches and share solutions that have worked. CBVH has also formed a group focusing on the needs of individuals who are legally blind who also have mental health issues. The group has shared resources and sought out expert advice on issues such as the effects on vocational pursuits of the various medications used to treat mental illness.

Chapter 515 Workgroup

An interagency group composed of representatives of CBVH, VESID, the Office of Mental Health (OMH) and the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) have been meeting regularly to assure cooperative implementation of the State Education Chapter 515 Integrated Employment law. Chapter 515 primarily focuses upon supported employment, including a memorandum of understanding which outlines the responsibilities of each agency in terms of intensive and extended services. This past year, the group focused its efforts on improving the Chapter 515 Annual Report and strengthening reporting through the existing New York

Supported Employment Reporting System. The state agencies have brought in the Empire State Chapter of the Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE) for their input on improvements. Resulting changes to the system are expected to ease the reporting burden on providers and lead to better collection of data on the statewide supported employment program.

DDPC Employment Think Tank

The New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC) has a commitment to facilitate promising practices in employment as one of its required Areas of Emphasis under the Developmental Disabilities Act. Recently, the DDPC brought together state partners in employment to solicit ideas for how the agency might be helpful in furthering employment initiatives. Participants included representatives of CBVH, VESID, OMRDD and OMH, as well as the Department of Labor, and the Self-Advocacy Association of NYS. The group provided input on future funding efforts and discussed recent Governor's initiatives in Virginia and Kansas which might be replicated in NY. Having expanded membership to include APSE, the Association for Retarded Citizens of New York, the New York State Rehabilitation Association, and the Commission on Quality of Care and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, group members are continuing to meet to explore and promote means to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities within the public sector. Initial dialogues are being planned with representatives of the Department of Civil Service, the two largest state employee unions (PEF and CSEA) and the Governor's Office of Employee Relations. The group also plans to keep abreast of other statewide initiatives to increase employment of people with disabilities in order to coordinate activities and prevent duplication of effort.

Cooperation with Industries for the Blind of New York State

CBVH continues its partnership with Industries for the Blind of New York State (IBNYS) to facilitate growth in competitive employment options. IBNYS' Strategic Plan states that its leadership will focus 50% of its time on opportunity development, including areas of employment in service and technology. While supporting new initiatives, IBNYS will also maintain its manufacturing components, looking for new products and customers. IBNYS is in the process of developing a Call Center in Albany. CBVH has encouraged IBNYS affiliates to provide needed work experience and skill training to enable individuals who are interested to move on to competitive employment in an integrated setting.

ADA Trainer Network

Four CBVH staff members, along with staff from VESID, and staff from private rehabilitation agencies and One-Stop Centers, recently were trained to be trainers for the ADA Trainer Network. The Network has been designed by the Disability Business Technical Assistance Center – Northeast (DBTAC) ADA Center at the Employment & Disability Institute at Cornell University. Partners participated in a two-day train-the-trainer session, and received all related materials needed to train in each of the nine programs that make up the ADA Trainer Network program. Each participant selected three programs in which to become fully competent as trainers. As members of the Network, trainers may be asked to provide training to a specific group or may develop their own training opportunities. The Network will enable trainers to provide information that employers and consumers need, and provide an opportunity for CBVH to connect with potential employers of CBVH consumers.

Cooperative Agreement with Recipients of Grants for Services to American Indians

In 2003, CBVH established an interagency agreement with the Seneca Nation of Indians Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program. The agreement represents both parties' commitment to mutual cooperation, coordination and collaboration to increase vocational opportunities for members of the Seneca Nation of Indians with legal blindness. It establishes shared values, outlines how services will be coordinated and how members of both organizations will participate in cross-training activities.

The collaborative relationship between the CBVH Buffalo District Office and the Seneca Nation of Indians Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program has increased awareness, acceptance and utilization of CBVH services. CBVH maintains a relationship in which referrals are handled in a timely and culturally sensitive manner. CBVH staff conducts in-service training with agencies on the Cattaraugus Reservation, and working closely with staff of the Salamanca satellite of the Section 121 program and with the Area Office for the Aging on the reservation. CBVH staff serves on the Section 121 Project's Advisory Board, which meets monthly. CBVH further supports the activities of the section 121 Tribal VR Program through the delivery of state-funded services to children and elderly individuals, allowing them to better focus resources on tribal members seeking employment.

PROPOSED COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS

Formal Interagency Agreement with the State Educational Agency

Understanding the importance of interagency planning and the need to increase the availability, access and quality of transition services, CBVH continues to work with school districts as they develop and implement transition services. The Joint Agreement on the Provision of Transition Services, signed in 1993 by CBVH, the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) and the Office of Elementary, Middle, Secondary and Continuing Education (EMS) in the State Education Department articulates the expected relationship between vocational rehabilitation and secondary education programs in New York State. The joint agreement covers the following:

1. Increasing successful transition outcomes;
2. Enhancing vocational assessments;
3. Implementing transition planning procedures; and,
4. Implementing functional referral criteria for schools to refer students to VESID and to CBVH.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Joint Agreement clarifies that school districts have the primary planning and programmatic responsibilities for the provision of transition services for their students in school. School districts are financially responsible for transition services mandated for school districts by Federal or State laws and regulations. CBVH personnel currently have a consulting role with the schools to see that adult services are involved in the planning and decision-making process regarding transition services for students with disabilities. The transition services for youth are to be aligned with labor market needs and integrated community living opportunities, and coordinated with the adult world to facilitate employment, post-secondary education, and community living outcomes. CBVH may be consulted for vocational evaluation interpretation, occupational opportunities, decision making with the Committee on Special Education, coordination with adult services, peer counseling, role modeling and job placement analysis.

Consultation and Technical Assistance

CBVH staff is encouraged to consult with school personnel to assist in recommending assessment practices and interpreting results in relation to employment. CBVH counselors assist the school by identifying resources in the community that are familiar with blindness and that offer comprehensive assessments. As a participant in the school's transition process, CBVH staff is encouraged to contribute knowledge of rehabilitation services and outcomes, and to discuss post-school plans with the youth, family and school personnel.

Proposed Attachment 4.8(b)(2), Page 1 of 4 Pages for 2009 State Plan Update

Procedures for Outreach

A standardized process has been implemented for school district referrals. VESID and CBVH collaborate with school districts and other State agencies to facilitate a coordinated approach to the provision of transition services and to eliminate the duplication of assessment, services and reporting. The agreement specifically states that every student with a disability will receive comprehensive, coordinated educational services to prepare for employment, post-secondary education or community living when they leave school.

Plans, policies and procedures for coordination with education officials and roles and responsibilities of each agency:

The CBVH transition policy states that as a participant in the school's transition planning process, CBVH staff should contribute knowledge of rehabilitation services and outcomes, identify the need for involvement by other state agencies, adult service programs, independent living centers, and community based services whose resources can assist students who are legally blind, their families, and education personnel during the transition process. It also states that CBVH is responsible only for services written into the IEP by the Committee on Special Education with the direct knowledge and agreement of the CBVH counselor. Financial responsibility for services, other than those which are mandated for school districts by Federal or State law or regulation, may be shared by other agencies, including CBVH.

Cooperative efforts between the schools and CBVH take place on a daily basis at the district office level. CBVH Children's Consultants provide schools with technical support, help parents learn to advocate effectively for their child, and purchase services to supplement those that school districts are required to provide. As the student nears transition age, the Children's Consultants' familiarity with particular students allows for a more effective transition to the vocational rehabilitation program. In cooperation with the school and community agencies, CBVH vocational rehabilitation counselors encourage and help individuals to live independently and develop meaningful employment plans. During school years, CBVH counselors can provide vocational guidance and counseling, resource information, and the preparation of post high school service plans. In addition, CBVH counselors may be able to provide job related occupational tools, purchase low vision aids, assist in obtaining employment and facilitate summer employment. CBVH currently employs eight vocational rehabilitation counselors who work exclusively with transition age youth. The transition counselors have provided educational guidance to CBVH vocational rehabilitation counselors and encouraged student and parent involvement in the transition process.

Brochures describing CBVH services have been widely distributed. The brochures are available in regular print, large print and Braille (upon request) and electronically.

Provide for the development and approval of an individualized plan for employment before school exit, also (3 b): transition planning by personnel that facilitates the development and completion of their IEP:

The 1993 agreement states that transition services and the agencies responsible for the provision of such services should be indicated on the Individual Education Plan (IEP) for all students with disabilities, ages 15 years or older. The CBVH Transition Policy recommends that the student's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) be developed, to the extent possible, during the annual review of the transition component of the IEP. At that time, information required on the IPE should be consistent with the content of the IEP, including vocational goals, educational and rehabilitation objectives, projected dates and responsibilities for participation in the transition process. CBVH policy requires that an IPE be completed for each eligible student by the time the student graduates from high school. CBVH transition counselors have received training on this policy requirement and on the requirements of developing an IPE and coordinating the IPE with the IEP. All CBVH transition counselors have been actively developing employment plans for youth.

CBVH remains involved with the activities of the Transition Coordination Sites in New York State that were established through a five-year State Systems Change project funded through Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Coordination Sites assist local communities with implementing transition planning and services. The objectives of site activities are to:

1. Coordinate existing resources within the geographical area of each site in order to provide information, training and technical assistance to school districts, families, students and community agencies in their implementation of transition planning; and
2. Assist at the local and community levels in expanding services to enhance transition of students with disabilities from school to postsecondary educational opportunities, adult vocational rehabilitation services, and employment.

Activities include leadership for local planning groups to sustain cross-systems planning, resource information and referral, and individual technical assistance and problem solving. Coordination sites also assist families, community organizations, agencies and schools to develop models of practice that demonstrate good transition collaboration. Staff from CBVH district offices request assistance from the Transition Coordination Sites on a regular basis.

The NYS Transition Partnership Serving Deafblind Youth and their Families

The NYS Transition Partnership (NYSTP) Serving Deafblind Youth and their Families is a state-wide team that assists with transition services for individuals who are deafblind.

The NYSTP works closely with young adults and their families in order to provide: information and training to professionals, paraprofessionals and families; technical assistance to schools and transition teams; ongoing assistance, information and referral; family support; and networking among parents across the state. The State team (composed of representatives of consumers, parents, CBVH, VESID, the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), the State Education Department (SED), and the NYS Technical Assistance Project continues to address systemic barriers confronting successful transition from school to adult life. It also provides support in the form of technical assistance and periodic statewide training on topics integral to the transition of deafblind youth. The team has completed a draft Transition Guidebook on Deafblindness to help school district personnel and parents understand the conditions that contribute to deafblindness and the implications for daily living, education and transition to adult services. The Guidebook is currently under review by DBlink before it goes to publication.

When a student is identified as needing transition services, regional teams can be convened to successfully develop outcome-based transition plans for individual students, effectively incorporating transition planning into the students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), leading to an effective transition to VR services and adult outcomes.

Collaborative partnerships

CBVH is a partner in a demonstration called Project WORKS. Funded by the Social Security Administration, this youth initiative is designed to support the successful transition of youth with disabilities from school to post-secondary education and employment and maximize their economic self-sufficiency. The project focuses on developing services and service-delivery systems that will improve educational and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. It is designed to increase coordination among public agencies and private organizations that have resources, funding and a mandate to provide transition services. New York State is one of six states participating in this project.

CBVH is also involved in the "Partnerships for Youth" projects funded through the New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC). The five projects bring together school based programs with the One Stop service centers, employers, vocational rehabilitation and community based service providers to create a seamless transition process. Both rehabilitation agencies (CBVH and VESID) have traditionally played a major role in facilitating work experience, mentoring, work-study and competitive employment. The work readiness and "soft skills" training provided by systems partners have been essential to facilitating successful work transition. The projects have demonstrated the necessity and importance of coordinated intervention services before the student leaves the educational system.

PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

This attachment describes the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), CBVH, system of personnel development to obtain an adequate supply of qualified professionals and paraprofessionals to provide vocational rehabilitation services to legally blind New Yorkers. As requested by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), this plan will focus on the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC), Senior VRC, Orientation and Mobility Specialist (O&M), and Vision Rehabilitation Therapist/ Rehabilitation Teacher (RT) positions. The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) plan was developed by a workgroup composed of representatives from CBVH and the New York State Education Department (SED) - Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) and is updated annually. It has been reviewed and commented on by the CBVH State Rehabilitation Council.

A. DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

1. Number of Personnel Employed

- a. As a result of an agreement with VESID, CBVH hired four new counselors to work exclusively with transition age youth. It is expected that these counselors will increase the effectiveness of vocation rehabilitation services by providing specialized transition services. As of August 1, 2007, CBVH employed a total of 54 individuals in field-based VRC and Senior VRC items. One VRC item remains vacant and is expected to be filled this year.

Approximately 4,000 legally blind individuals are "active" on VRCs' caseloads at any given time. The average caseload is 75 consumers per VRC upstate, and 97 consumers per VRC downstate

CBVH employs six O&M instructors and two RTs in field positions. One rehabilitation teacher retired and, because of the continuing shortage of qualified rehabilitation teachers, CBVH has been unable to fill the vacancy. CBVH intends to fill this position with an individual who is certifiable as a rehabilitation teacher. Otherwise, this number has remained constant in recent years.

- b. Projected Needs: It is projected for the period of September 1, 2007 to August 31, 2008 that five VRCs and Senior VRCs will retire or leave for other reasons. One orientation and mobility instructor is expected to retire during the next year.
- c. Projections: Of the 54 Senior VRC and VRCs in field positions, 48 are Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC) or CRC eligible and six are not

CRC eligible. Two individuals completed the requirements for a Masters degree majoring in vocational rehabilitation counseling and are now eligible for certified rehabilitation status. Of the six who are not CRC eligible:

1. Two intend to retire;
2. One dropped coursework and is being advised to continue with coursework;
3. One dropped classes for academic reasons and is being counseled to continue;
4. One is enrolled in coursework leading to CRC eligibility at Hunter College. She is expected to complete the program and be eligible for certification in 2008;
5. and one is currently exploring credentialing options.

CBVH estimates that all state unit personnel will meet the CSPD standard by the end of 2015.

All six O&M instructors earned Master's degrees and are eligible for certification from the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP). Of the two RTs, one has a Master's degree and one earned a Bachelor's degree. Both are eligible for certification from ACVREP.

Several personnel transactions occurred during the period September 1, 2006 and August 31, 2007. The result of these transactions for the year as they affected each district office is as follows:

Buffalo

The Senior VR Counselor was promoted to District Manager
A Senior VR Counselor was hired
No vacancies as of 8/31/07

Syracuse

The Senior Counselor retired
VRC was promoted to Sr. VR Counselor
No vacancies as of 8/31/07

Albany

One vacant Rehabilitation Teacher as of 8/31/07

White Plains

One vacant VR Counselor position as of 8/31/07

New York City

District Manager appointed

2 VR Counselors hired

No vacancies as of 8/31/07

Hempstead

Sr. VR Counselor retired

Sr. VR Counselor hired

VR Counselor hired

No vacancies as of 8/31/07

CBVH estimates that by the year 2012, 33 current VRCs and Senior VRCs will be age 55 or older and eligible to retire. Many of those within retirement age, however, will not have enough time in service to retire at age 55 and will retire at a later time. In using age 57 as a likely retirement age, we assume that some employees who are older than 57 will remain employed by CBVH, but other VRCs, under age 57, may be promoted or leave for other reasons. Using this analysis of potential retirees and staff leaving for other reasons, we estimate that 30 VRCs and Senior VRCs will leave CBVH in the next five years. Of the three expected to remain, CBVH estimates only one VRC will not be CRC eligible without updating credentials. Using the same formula, it is estimated that six of the eight O&M instructors and RTs will retire or leave for other reasons. All vacancies in the O&M and RT disciplines are expected to be replaced. This plan outlines strategies to update staff credentials so that they meet the highest academic standard for their profession. The in-service training unit of CBVH coordinates and evaluates all training programs attended by staff. All in-service training records are maintained electronically in a Microsoft Access program. A training file is maintained for each staff member containing: name, title, phone number, date hired, district office, college major, highest degree earned, a note section to track courses needed (if necessary), Certification or Certification eligible, and in-service training programs attended. CBVH can thus easily access data regarding staff credentials and CRC eligibility or status.

CBVH's current staffing allows for CBVH to effectively provide services to all individuals who apply for and are determined eligible for VR services.

B. DATA ON PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

1. There are six institutions of higher education in New York State (NYS) accredited by the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) that prepare vocational rehabilitation professionals. CBVH maintains contact with all of these institutions of higher education, assists in recruitment for the colleges and uses their students as a source for CBVH staff positions. Last year, the colleges reported the following enrollment information:

State University of New York at Albany

18 Students enrolled
9 Graduates last year
2 Disabled
1 Non-white

Hofstra University

32 Students enrolled
10 Graduates last year
5 Disabled
21 Non-white

Hunter College of the City University of New York (CUNY)

90 Students enrolled
20 Graduates last year
10 Disabled
39 Non-white

St. John's University

14 Students enrolled
5 Graduate last year
1 Disabled
3 Non-white

State University of New York at Buffalo

15 Students enrolled
7 Graduates last year
1 Disabled
2 Non-white

Syracuse University

13 Students enrolled
4 Graduates last year
4 Disabled
1 Non-white

The New York University Rehabilitation Counselor program ceased operation last year. CBVH continues to work with the six remaining institutions of higher education to develop a process for the recruitment of students from diverse populations, and to establish a curriculum based on best practices, research, and development trends.

2. Hunter College of CUNY is the only university preparation program in New York State graduating O&M instructors and RTs. Graduates from this program are eligible for certification by the ACVREP.

Dual Orientation and Mobility/Rehabilitation Teacher

30 Students enrolled
4 Graduates last year
3 Disabled
9 Non-white

3. The Lighthouse in Manhattan also trains RTs using distance learning technology and on-site visits to prepare RTs. This innovative program has been co-sponsored by CBVH to prepare RTs in order to relieve the critical shortage of RTs in that area. All graduates of the program are certified by ACVREP.

15 Students enrolled
15 Graduates last year
7 Disabled
6 Non-white

4. The Lighthouse also conducts a training program for Vision Rehabilitation Assistants (VRA) who assist O&M instructors and RTs. Although CBVH does not employ any VRAs at this time, individuals included in this pool of instructors may progress to professional status and become eligible for employment by CBVH.

17 Students enrolled
15 Graduates
12 Disabled
12 Non-white

C. Plan for Recruitment, Preparation, and Retention of Qualified Personnel.

The following steps describe the ongoing activities that will enable CBVH to continue the long-term CSPD plan and develop resources needed to recruit, prepare and retain qualified personnel in New York State:

- a. Maintain relationships established with the Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program (RRCEP), the VR counseling pre-service preparation programs in NYS, pre-service O&M and RT programs, and long distance learning pre-service programs from other states.
- b. Continue to track the number of students who graduate from pre-service programs statewide and the percentage of diverse populations (e.g. severely disabled, Latino) within those programs.
- c. Continue to develop relationships with distance learning programs to locate curriculum that meet the learning styles and needs of CBVH staff. These include video conferencing, videotapes, and/or computer technology.

- d. Increase opportunities for staff in-service training.
- e. Maintain a training database for all CBVH staff that includes the following information:
 - 1. CRC status
 - 2. Educational history
 - 3. Proficiency areas (sign language, foreign language)
 - 4. Training priority requests
 - 5. Graduate course work
- f. Continue to recruit qualified VRCs, O&Ms, and RTs including those from diverse backgrounds or who have needed language skills.
- g. Continue to partner with VESID with regard to the CSPD and the long term training of employees.

D. PERSONNEL STANDARDS

Highest Standard For VRCs

The New York State Department of Civil Service lists the personnel standard for vocational rehabilitation counselor as follows:

A current Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) certificate; OR
A master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, including a supervised internship, from a Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) accredited program; OR
A master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or Counseling and notice of eligibility to sit for the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) certificate examination.

2. Plans to Retrain or Hire Staff Who Do Not Meet The Highest Requirements

Staff Hired Prior to Implementation Date

Nine staff was hired prior to the implementation date of this CSPD. Their progress is updated in section A.1.c. of this report. An individual plan to achieve CRC academic eligibility is developed for each staff person who requires this credential.

Staff Hired Subsequent to the Implementation Date

New York State Civil Service VRC personnel standards were approved and reflect this CSPD. All VRCs in VRC titles will be required to commit to academic eligibility for CRC.

E. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

1. The CBVH in-service training program provides funds for attendance at workshops, conferences, formal course work, agency developed training sessions, RCEP developed or sponsored training and conferences. Training has been offered in counseling, rehabilitation, medical aspects of disability, job placement, rehabilitation technology, cultural diversity, informed choice, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, and other topics related to vocational rehabilitation. CBVH contracts with seven Adaptive Technology Centers in the state. Upon request, the centers provide training to CBVH staff on new access technology for individuals with disabilities.

2. Training areas for staff development are determined by the following:

- a. Annual needs assessment conducted by the Training Unit,
- b. RSA priorities, and
- c. CBVH administration priorities.

3. CBVH maintains a library, which contains current information and research in the rehabilitation field. This information is available to all staff.

F. PERSONNEL TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS.

CBVH continues to obtain the services of individuals able to communicate in the native language of individuals who have limited English speaking ability or require American Sign Language. CBVH staff with the required qualifications may be used for this purpose, or sub-contractors with specialty skills may be used.

G. PERFORMANCE EVALUATION SYSTEM

VRCs and their supervisors establish performance standards that become the basis for the counselor's annual evaluation. These performance standards will include the measures needed by those who must upgrade their qualifications to meet nationally recognized standards.

H. COORDINATION OF CSPD WITH THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT (IDEA)

VESID administers both the vocational rehabilitation program for individuals with disabilities other than legal blindness as well as special education programs for school-age children. The CSPD functions for both areas are carried out within VESID's Office of Program Development and Support Services (PDSS), in collaboration with other VESID organizational units. The CBVH CSPD was developed by a workgroup, which included representatives of both VESID and CBVH.

PROPOSED STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

CBVH and the SRC Needs Assessment Committee jointly agreed to have a formal needs assessment conducted by Essential Management Services (EMS). The needs assessment included an examination of the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services; the needs of minority individuals with disabilities and the needs of un-served or underserved individuals. By assessing these needs, the comprehensive needs assessment also examined the need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs. When developing the focus groups that were utilized to obtain information for the needs assessment, EMS and CBVH worked to be as inclusive as possible to identify a cross-section of individuals who are legally blind, not necessarily individuals who are served by CBVH. Individuals who participated in services through one-stop centers and other components of the Workforce Investment System were likely included in the focus groups even though there was not a specific focus group dedicated to this population. EMS has provided a draft copy of the needs assessment which CBVH and the SRC have reviewed to determine which groups of legally blind individuals are un-served or underserved in New York State. The results of this first needs assessment will yield information for the second needs assessment which will assist in determining what services these individuals are not receiving and how best to provide those services. EMS has already agreed to continue working with CBVH to complete the second needs assessment which will provide information that will direct CBVH and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) in the development of goals, priorities, policies and program development.

In addition to the formal needs assessment, CBVH uses a variety of means to identify unmet needs and to determine ways to meet those needs.

CBVH conducts annual Town Meetings/Open Forums where consumers and stakeholders are given an opportunity to share thoughts and concerns about the services provided by CBVH as well as other issues affecting individuals who are legally blind. CBVH utilizes the information gathered at the Town Meetings/Open Forums to improve service delivery to its consumers. This year, CBVH will hold town meetings in February in Buffalo, Albany and Queens.

CBVH has contracted with 17 private not-for-profit community rehabilitation programs to provide a variety of VR services. CBVH conducts annual negotiations with these contract agencies to determine the level of service needed throughout the state as well as the types of services needed. CBVH district office staff also attends these

negotiations. Contracts are regularly reviewed and amended to reflect the service needs of CBVH consumers. In addition, Quality Assurance Reviews are completed periodically for each contract agency, to evaluate the quality services being provided and to refine the programs/services offered at the contract agencies.

CBVH also works closely with the SRC to obtain feedback regarding service provision. The SRC has three committees that focus on issues related to employment, children's services and needs assessment. These three committees have provided valuable input to improve the service delivery system.

CBVH currently conducts surveys of consumers who have completed services. Data from these surveys is analyzed and will be reviewed to determine how well services are addressing the needs of consumers. CBVH and the SRC Needs Assessment Committee are in the process of revising the consumer satisfaction surveys. The goal of the revisions is to develop a survey instrument that captures data reflecting not only the consumer's satisfaction with services but also how important the services are to the life of the consumer.

PROPOSED ANNUAL ESTIMATES OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED AND COSTS OF SERVICES

CBVH estimates that during FY 2009, 900 individuals will be found eligible for CBVH services. CBVH anticipates serving 4,130 individuals during Federal Fiscal Year 2009. Of the 4,130 individuals expected to receive services, CBVH expects that 4,000 individuals will be served using Title I Vocational Rehabilitation funds at a total estimated cost of \$19,600,000. CBVH expects that the remaining 130 individuals will be served using Title VI, Part B Supported Employment funds at a total estimated cost of \$300,000. The estimated cost of purchased services is \$19,000,000. The estimated cost of provided services is \$7,100,000. Provided services represent the cost of salaries and non-salaried costs of CBVH district offices, excluding Federal Non-Participating Costs.

In order to also provide information requested by RSA regarding an estimate of the number of individuals in the State who are eligible for VR services under the Rehabilitation Act CBVH has examined data from the 2000 Census. Using an incidence of legal blindness formula, CBVH estimates that there are 40,910 legally blind non-institutionalized individuals' ages 22-64 in New York State.

There are numerous factors that impact an individual's choice to seek vocational rehabilitation services and ultimately employment. There is currently no method to accurately assess how many of the estimated 40,910 legally blind individuals ages 22-64 would apply for CBVH services and be found eligible for services. Therefore, the best measure of the estimate of the number of individuals in the State who are eligible for VR services is the estimate based on historical data as noted above.

PROPOSED STATE'S GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Goals and Priorities

CBVH is in the process of revising the goals and priorities that were developed several years ago as part of a strategic planning process. These goals and priorities are being updated and revised in response to the results of the Statewide comprehensive needs assessment and in response to recommendations from RSA. The SRC has provided input into these goals and priorities. Further refinement of these goals and priorities will take place after receiving input during the State Plan Open Forums. The final goals and priorities will be submitted to RSA in the FY 09 State Plan update

Proposed Goals:

- Goal #1:** *Examine existing quality assurance processes to identify gaps and determine improvements needed to expand and enhance quality assurance activities.*
- Goal #2:** *Increase the number of competitive employment outcomes using FY 2007 data on the number of competitive employment outcomes as a baseline.*
- Goal#3:** *Increase the number of individuals from ethnic and racial minority populations who receive services, beginning with a baseline of data fro FY 2007.*
- Goal#4** *Pass the RSA Standards and Indicators.*
- Goal#5** *Purchase and Implement a new case management system.*

PROPOSED GOALS AND PLANS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI, PART B FUNDS

The goal of CBVH's supported employment program is to enable individuals with the most significant disabilities to achieve and maintain competitive employment in their communities. CBVH continues to serve all eligible individuals that need supported employment services with a goal of placing as many individuals as possible in employment.

In New York State, the administrative responsibility for supported employment programs is consolidated in the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID). In 1990, the former Department of Social Services (now the Office of Children and Family Services) Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (CBVH) entered into a "Memorandum of Interagency Understanding Regarding Supported Employment" with the State Education Department - VESID, the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), and the Office of Mental Health (OMH) governing current and future program administration. This document is updated annually, as needed. The administrative arrangement is established in accordance with Section 3, Chapter 515 of the Laws of New York of 1992.

The current contracts, which were implemented in July 1, 2004, provide opportunities for individuals with most significant disabilities and blindness to access a broad variety of supported employment programs. CBVH continues to work with VESID to refine methods to enter authorizations, cancellations and billing for CBVH consumers into the fiscal system being established to support the new contract.

CBVH has worked with generic providers of supported employment services to provide technical assistance and encourage them to extend their services to individuals who are legally blind. CBVH encourages providers to explore a broad variety of employment options for supported employment placements. In addition to the individual placement model, CBVH is working with providers to use other supported employment strategies as appropriate for the consumer.

Under the current contract, a total of 44 providers have the capacity to serve a total of 156 individuals who are legally blind, with a goal to place, train and stabilize 105 individuals who are legally blind. Because of the low incidence of blindness, VESID and CBVH contracted with several generic agencies to serve individuals who are blind, with the understanding that much of this capacity may not be used by CBVH if there are no supported employment candidates in that region. In addition, CBVH continues to access services at other providers based on additional disabilities of the consumer. This is achieved through access to a limited number of "VESID slots" or the purchase of intensive services on a fee-for-service basis. CBVH and VESID are working together so that the limited supported employment funds are utilized in the most effective manner to meet consumer needs.

CBVH maintains case management, program monitoring and oversight responsibilities for the supported employment services provided to CBVH consumers. Service providers regularly provide CBVH with individual consumer reports, and CBVH staff meet regularly with providers and consumers. Information on services to CBVH consumers is also available through data provided by contractors to the New York Integrated Supported Employment Reporting System (NYISERS).

During the past year, the four agencies who have signed on to the Memorandum of Understanding have been working cooperatively to improve collection of data on the statewide supported employment program. A planned change in the monthly reporting requirements will allow providers to complete and transmit reports on-line. This change will reduce data entry for the providers, with monthly information being automatically compiled for portions of required quarterly reports. As payment will be tied to reporting, it should also provide more accurate reporting in NYISERS. This will allow the four agencies to plan more precisely for future program needs.

CBVH will continue to work with VESID to assess performance on an ongoing basis, participate in on-site reviews, and provide technical assistance or recommend adjustments to contracts as needed.

PROPOSED STATE'S STRATEGIES AND USE OF TITLE I FUNDS FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES

As noted in Attachment 4.11 (c) State Goals, CBVH is in the process of revising the goals and priorities that were developed several years ago as part of a strategic planning process. These goals and priorities are being updated and revised in response to the results of the Statewide comprehensive needs assessment and in response to recommendations from RSA. CBVH has worked with the SRC to develop and refine the goals and priorities. Further refinement of these goals and priorities will take place after receiving input during the State Plan Open Forums. The final goals and priorities will be submitted to RSA in the FY 09 State Plan update. While strategies for several of the goals have been identified, strategies for most of the goals have not yet been identified and CBVH is looking for input during the open forum process.

Outreach activities that will be incorporated into the strategies as appropriate, and the needs assessment will help to identify individuals with the most significant disabilities who are minorities. The outreach activities will be tailored to address the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities who are minorities.

CBVH performance on the Standards and Indicators provides positive information about CBVH's current policies and practices with respect to the equitable provision of services and in particular, services to individuals who are minorities. The needs assessment will also identify any barriers to equitable access and participation in the VR and supported employment programs. In addition, CBVH will use the results of the needs assessment and information learned from the standardized Senior Counselor reviews to make any needed improvements in these areas.

Goal #1: Examine existing quality assurance processes to identify gaps and determine improvements needed to expand and enhance quality assurance activities.

Strategies

1. Through a grant provided by RSA, work with the Region II, RRCEP to examine current quality assurance processes and develop approaches to expand and improve quality assurance activities.
2. Work with CBVH district offices to increase counselor involvement with consumers during the provision of contracted services.
3. Expand evaluation of consumer satisfaction with contract services.
4. Communicate the nature and scope of the quality assurance plan to contract agencies.

Goal #2: *Increase the number of competitive employment outcomes using FY 2007 data on the number of competitive employment outcomes as a baseline.*

Strategies

1. Using information from the needs assessment and other sources, conduct an evaluation to identify the reasons for the decrease in employment outcomes;
2. Continue expanding relationships with employers and business associations to encourage hiring CBVH consumers;
3. Strengthen partnership with VESID to take advantage of provider networks providing services to individuals with disabilities other than blindness;
4. Continue to establish linkages with state, local, and community non-profit organizations that provide free services to individuals interested in setting up their own business.

Goal#3: *Increase the number of individuals from ethnic and racial minority populations who receive services, beginning with a baseline of data fro FY 007*

Strategies

1. Using data from the Needs Assessment, determine which specific populations are unserved/underserved
2. Determine what strategies are most likely to reach those populations.
3. Increase culturally sensitive marketing and outreach activities to those populations, using strategies identified as effective in other locations;
4. Work with other OCFS divisions to collaborate on initiatives that will expand and increase CBVH's ability to work effectively with individuals from ethnic and racial minority populations.
5. Work with ethnic minority communities to identify new referral sources as well as potential sources of translators.
6. Translate written materials and brochures into other languages in addition to the ones currently available in Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, and Russian.

Innovation and Expansion Funds

Innovation and expansion funds were used during 2007 to fund seven ATCs across the state. These ATCs provide technology assessment and training to CBVH consumers through contracts with CBVH. ATC staff meets with CBVH at least twice a year to share best practice information, learn about new equipment and to address issues that arise during the year. As requested, ATC staff provide training and demonstrations of new equipment to CBVH district office counselors. Available innovation and expansion funds will continue to be used to fund the ATCs at a comparable level in the next fiscal year.

PROPOSED EVALUATION AND REPORT OF PROGRESS IN ACHIEVING IDENTIFIED GOALS AND PRIORITIES AND USE OF TITLE I FUNDS FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION

CBVH evaluates progress toward achievement of goals and priorities (objectives) on an ongoing basis. Progress achieved during the past year is reported as activities completed to address the strategies associated with each goal and objective. Many of the strategies listed to achieve the objectives are ongoing activities. Where appropriate, objectives that have been met are noted. CBVH is reporting on the goals and objectives in the current VR State Plan. As noted in other FY 2009 VR State Plan Update attachments, the goals and priorities have been revised. CBVH will report on the progress toward meeting the new goals and priorities in the next 2010 VR State Plan update.

Goal #1:

Provide a standard of excellence in rehabilitation services for the legally blind population in New York State.

Objective A

CBVH will continue to provide to eligible adult consumers the information, specialized training, education, and support services needed for them to live and work confidently in their communities.

During Federal Fiscal Year 2007, CBVH placed 388 individuals in competitive employment, a 2.6% increase from the 378 individuals placed in competitive employment in FFY 2006. The average wage increased from \$ 25,257 in 2006 to \$27,600 in 2007, an increase of 8.5%. (Please note that the 2007 average wage was skewed by the wages of one individual.)

As noted in this attachment, CBVH has actively worked to increase referrals from eye care providers by educating them and their staff about the services available through CBVH. Though CBVH continues to serve a large percentage of individuals with multiple disabilities, placement numbers have increased from FY 2006. CBVH will continue efforts to identify individuals who are legally blind who are in need of VR services and will continue efforts to improve the employment services available to consumers so that those who need services are identified and served.

Strategies

1. Develop a program to identify, share and adapt Best Practices with Home Office and District Offices.

- In collaboration with the Regional II Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program (RRCEP), CBVH hosted a Vision Rehabilitation Institute in May 2007. The Institute provided opportunities for staff from CBVH and private agencies for the blind to network and to participate in workshops focusing on new initiatives and best practices in the field of vocational rehabilitation. The Institute focused on employment issues, including: employment in the public sector, assessment techniques for the visually impaired, working with youth in employment, defining skills in the workplace, disability disclosure, defining skills for the workplace, dispelling benefits myths, and placement success stories.
 - CBVH Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) met in the Fall 2007. The full day meeting included a presentation on counselor involvement in the VR process with a particular focus on assessment and placement. Counselors also had the opportunity to share information and discuss best practices on these topics.
 - CBVH counselors continue to share information and best practice ideas through two ongoing workgroups that meet via teleconference on a monthly basis. One group addresses the unique issues of working in rural areas; the other addresses mental health issues.
2. *Design the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) to be a more effective document to promote consumer involvement, self-determination, and self-advocacy.*

Completed: Revised IPE forms and a revised IPE policy were issued in May 2006. Internal quality assurance reviews have focused on evaluating the effectiveness of the new form and policy, particularly to determine the extent to which the new process and form help to promote consumer involvement, self-determination and self-advocacy.

3. *Continue to explore more diverse training options and programs.*
- CBVH district offices have worked with a total of seven private agencies for the blind to develop curriculums for soft skills training to assist consumers to be prepared to pursue and maintain employment. Programs vary, but include such topics as effective communication and self-advocacy, employer expectations and work culture, balancing work and family life, interviewing skills and resume development, disclosure of disability, effects of employment on benefits, and financial planning.

- In 2007, two CBVH employees completed training as Global Career Development Facilitators. The 120 hour course satisfies the educational requirements for the Global Career Development Facilitator Credential granted by the Center for Credentialing and Education. The curriculum is designed to provide practical help and skills development to those who currently are front-line workforce career development workers. Graduates are enthusiastic about training their peers and setting up new opportunities for consumers. Three additional staff are now participating in the 2008 GCDF training
- Many youth were involved in prevocational programs, where they explored career options and acquired work related skills; or pre-college programs, where they worked on self-advocacy skills, research techniques and study skills. Three well-attended pre-college programs were held at the Jewish Guild for the Blind, The Lighthouse and SUNY Albany.
- CBVH is working with a number of providers who are developing or refining vocational skills programs for careers in general customer service, call centers, office support and administrative assistance.

Objective B

CBVH will continue to provide to legally blind children and youth the information, specialized training, and support services to enhance their ability to live and work confidently in their communities when they become adults.

Strategies

1. Identify, share and adapt Best Practices with Home Office and District Offices.

The CBVH Children's Coordinator meets with Children's Consultants at least once a year to provide an update on policies and issues relating to children who are legally blind. These meetings offer Children's Consultants the opportunity to share ideas and discuss strategies and approaches to effectively work with families, school personnel and community programs.

Children's Consultants are encouraged to attend local training sessions to further increase their knowledge and skills.

2. Explore the feasibility of dedicating a transition counselor in each District Office to provide transition services to legally blind youth, pending the availability of funding.

OCFS/CBVH has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the New York State Education Department's Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) allowing for the transfer of federal funds from the State Education Department to CBVH. The MOU has enabled CBVH to hire four transition counselors to work exclusively with transition-age youth who are legally blind. The goal of the three-year project is to improve the transition of youth who are legally blind from school to post-school, living, learning and earning.

3. Continue to provide technical assistance to facilitate the integration of legally blind children in community-based youth programs.

To prepare for adulthood, youth who are legally blind need to be involved in community-based activities to develop and demonstrate their competencies. CBVH Children's Consultants and VRCs continue to establish partnerships with schools to encourage the development of work-based learning opportunities in the community. In addition, CBVH works directly with employers to develop work opportunities for youth.

Children's Consultants work closely with a number of recreation programs to encourage the integration of legally blind children into the programs. O&M instructors often provide in-service training sessions to familiarize camp staff with issues pertaining to blindness.

4. Continue to promote Braille literacy.

CBVH Children's Consultants and VRCs who work with transition age youth attend Committee on Special Education (CSE) meetings as often as possible to discuss the unique needs of each individual student and when appropriate, to reinforce the importance of Braille instruction. CBVH staff emphasize the high correlation between the use of Braille and future employment.

Objective C

CBVH will continue to increase utilization of available resources in order to maintain its commitment to meeting the rehabilitation needs of older individuals who are legally blind.

Strategies

1. Identify, share and adapt Best Practices throughout CBVH.

The recommendations made by the CBVH and contract agency staff to improve services to older individuals who are legally blind were implemented in early 2007. These changes resulted in improved services to this consumer group. CBVH will continue to obtain feedback from contract agency staff and will share this information to encourage the use of best practices for older individuals who are legally blind across the state.

2. Update existing policy pertaining to older consumers to achieve optimal levels of service.

As noted above, the CBVH workgroup convened and analyzed the Title VII, Chapter 2 Older Blind program. The program has served increasing numbers of seniors over age 55 in New York State, as efforts have been made to serve more people through the Older Blind program rather than through the VR program as Homemakers. The workgroup is implementing changes for the 2007 contract year that will provide more flexibility in service provision for agencies, and better data to evaluate case intensity. These flexibilities are expected to give agencies better ability to provide quality service in a more efficient manner. Efficiencies are also expected by use of technology, streamlined procedures, and more emphasis on after-service quality assurance reviews.

Goal #2:

Increase outreach and expand awareness of services and career opportunities in response to the needs and aspirations of the legally blind population in New York State.

Objective D

CBVH will continue to increase the public's understanding and awareness of CBVH's mission in order to provide services to consumers who lack knowledge of the scope of services offered and provided through CBVH.

Strategies

1. Build and enhance relationships and collaborative activities with Health Care/Rehabilitation Professionals and their staff.

CBVH District Offices have worked during the past few years to strengthen relationships with local ophthalmologists and optometrists and other community based organizations. This was a focus of local strategic plan in several district offices and the efforts have been successful in identifying individuals in need of CBVH services.

2. *Enhance the CBVH website to include available information on related programs and services.*

A CBVH website liaison oversees the CBVH website. The information on the CBVH website is updated as needed. The website currently includes a broad range of information including: general information about CBVH programs; special information for employers; an SRC link that includes dates of upcoming meetings and the most recent annual report; information about the State Plan Open Forums; the VR Manual; District Office locations and contact information; information about community resources and links to useful websites.

Several CBVH forms have been added to the website to increase access for the general public.

The CBVH brochure is available in English, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese and Russian. It is posted on the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) website in each of these languages.

Objective E

CBVH will continue to address the needs of unserved, underserved, and difficult-to-serve groups who are legally blind.

Strategies

1. *Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) to identify the unserved and underserved and their needs.*

CBVH and the SRC Needs Assessment Committee agreed to have a formal needs assessment conducted by Essential Management Services (EMS). The staff at EMS completed the formal needs assessment for CBVH in November 2007 which focused on determining which New Yorkers who are legally blind are unserved or underserved. CBVH is in the process of reviewing the results of the EMS needs assessment to determine the unserved and underserved legally blind individuals in New York State.

2. *Each District Office will strengthen collaborative relationships between the District Office and the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), the Office of Mental Health (OMH), the State Office for the Aging (SOFA), Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID), Independent Living Centers (ILCs) and other public and private organizations that provide services to individuals with other disabilities; education systems; and deafblind groups, schools, and agencies.*

CBVH District Offices have identified local activities to support implementation of this strategy. Many of the activities are ongoing and CBVH staff have routine contact with many state and local agencies and schools as appropriate to the needs of an individual consumer. However, several new ideas and initiatives have been developed as a result of focusing on this strategy. CBVH District Offices have many collaborative connections with both local public and private organizations in their communities. In several District Offices, CBVH staff are members of county placement and transition consortiums along with representatives from VESID, OMRDD, OMH and ILCs. Many CBVH staff across the State attend community wide events and open houses that bring together staff from various local human service organizations to share information about their respective agencies. CBVH staff also participate on local committees, along with staff from VESID, OMH, OMRDD, local school districts, and deafblind transition teams. While these committees have varying goals and objectives, CBVH participation strengthens local connections and relationships for the benefit of CBVH consumers.

Objective F

CBVH will continue to encourage programs that increase the number of professional and para-professional staff with the skills needed to serve the legally blind population.

CBVH maintains working relationships with six university programs that offer Rehabilitation Counseling, one program that offers Orientation and Mobility (O&M) and Rehabilitation Teaching (RT), and a variety of programs that train O&M and RT assistants.

Goal #3:

Seek to increase productivity by developing, expanding and replicating cost-effective programs and technology.

Objective G

CBVH will continue to develop standards of practice for its provider agencies to facilitate higher quality service delivery.

Strategy

Review programs and methods of provider agencies to determine best practices in delivery of quality services that result in successful outcomes.

CBVH reviewed six contract agencies between July 2006 and June 2007, including the Helen Keller National Center that provides services to individuals who are deafblind through a contract with CBVH. All seven Adaptive Technology Centers under contract with CBVH were also reviewed.

The external Quality Assurance Program continues to expand and includes an increased use of quantifiable measures and telephone calls to consumers who received services. The Quality Assurance Program is an important process that assesses contract compliance and service quality and helps to strengthen relationships and communication with contract agency staff.

Part of the Quality Assurance Program includes a report, provided to each agency reviewed, with an improvement plan for any contract service not meeting the standards set by CBVH. The Director of Field Operations works with CBVH District Office staff to monitor the contract agency's adherence to the improvement plan.

Objective H

CBVH will continue to improve technology services for vocational rehabilitation consumers to assist them to obtain competitive employment.

Strategies

1. *Implement guidelines for equipment repair and train counselors in related procedures.*

Completed: Based on recommendations from a CBVH workgroup, revisions to the repair and warranty guidelines for the Consumer Technology procurement contract have been implemented. These revisions have streamlined repair and warranty processes and have resulted in an easier process for consumers and CBVH staff needing equipment repairs.

2. Work with local school districts on behalf of transition-aged consumers to have those local school districts provide and fund the needed adaptive technology service and devices for both in-school and home use.

CBVH VRCs continue to advocate for students to receive necessary adaptive technology to enable them to participate in and benefit from educational programs. VRCs work with school district personnel to remind them of their responsibility to fund adaptive technology devices for home use if the IEP team has determined that the student will need the technology in that setting in order to receive a free appropriate public education (for example, to complete homework assignments).

Objective I

CBVH will continue to improve technology tools for CBVH Staff to function efficiently in the provision of services to consumers.

Strategy

Continue to provide training to enable staff to be efficient in current technology, including specialized training to enable visually impaired staff to be efficient in current technology tools.

Adaptive Technology Centers (ATC) provide training and equipment demonstrations to CBVH to enable staff to be aware of new technology. CBVH District Managers make arrangements for staff training through their local ATC. As this staff training component was deleted from the last Adaptive Technology Center contract, it is currently purchased using the purchase order payment process. This contractual change was made to accommodate differing upstate and downstate training needs.

In addition, as a reasonable accommodation, CBVH provides individualized training to staff that are visually impaired or have other disabilities to enable them to use the available technology to enhance job performance and better serve CBVH consumers. This training is provided through OCFS or private vendors, as appropriate.

Objective J

CBVH will take steps to implement policy consistently throughout CBVH.

CBVH District Office staff routinely receives training in the implementation of new policies. Ongoing supervisory monitoring of the implementation of new or revised policies helps to maintain consistent application of these policies. CBVH holds an annual meeting for VRC's. This meeting provides the opportunity to clarify policy issues and for VRC's to discuss policy and procedures in a large group setting leading to an increase in consistent understanding of policy. CBVH implemented an internal quality assurance review process in February 2007 that standardizes the routine supervisory reviews. Data is entered in a statewide database that is monitored by CBVH management staff.

Strategy

Establish a regular schedule of Quality Assurance review.

With the expanded scope of agency reviews, the current rate is six to eight reviews per twelve-month period. Each agency will be reviewed at least once during a three year period; however, if the initial review indicates that the contract agency is not meeting the standards set forth in the contract, the agency will be reviewed six months after the initial review to determine whether the problems that resulted in contract standards not being met have been corrected.

Progress In Achieving Supported Employment Goals

The current supported employment delivery system has allowed all eligible individuals with the most significant disabilities who are interested in supported employment to obtain that service.

Goal #1: The goal of CBVH's supported employment program is to enable individuals with the most significant disabilities to achieve and maintain competitive employment in their communities.

Goal #2 Under the current contract, a total of 44 providers have the capacity to serve a total of 156 individuals who are legally blind, with a goal to place, train and stabilize 105 individuals who are legally blind.

In 2007, 142 individuals received supported employment services. Twenty-five individuals obtained and have maintained integrated employment in the community.

Standards and Indicators

During Federal Fiscal Year 2007, CBVH passed the Standards and Indicators for the second year in a row, meeting the required performance levels for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Standards, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, and 1.6. CBVH continued during FFY 2007 to submit a quarterly Program Improvement Plan (PIP) documenting progress toward achievement of 1.1 and 1.5, as well as Standard 2.1. Since CBVH met slightly different standards in FFY 2006 and FFY 2007, the agency will continue to report Quarterly on the PIP until stability in these areas is achieved.

CBVH's difficulty in meeting Standard 1.1 is primarily the result of an intentional decrease in the number of older individuals served through the VR program with a goal of Homemaker, implemented through contract and policy changes in calendar years 2004 and 2005. In both FFY 2006 and FFY 2007, CBVH increased the number of individuals placed in competitive employment, however, since the number of Homemakers closed successfully continued to decrease, CBVH's overall VR closure numbers also decreased. As of 1/1/08, CBVH has elected to provide non-employment bound consumers age 55 and older with services through the Adaptive Living Program (ALP). This shift from the vocational rehabilitation program to other funding sources will extend the overall decrease in VR closures, despite the increases in competitive placements. To counter the decrease, CBVH is also working with counselors to further increase the number of competitive employment closures. CBVH expects to successfully meet performance indicator 1.1 by no later than September 30, 2010.

Standard 1.5, which measures the difference between the average hourly wage earned by consumers closed as employed during the federal fiscal year and the state average hourly wage, presents a challenge to CBVH. New York State has a very high average hourly wage, which makes it a challenge to achieve a federal standard that is the same for all blindness agencies nationwide, irregardless of the vast differences between wages state to state. CBVH did not pass this Standard in FFY 2007. CBVH will continue to focus on good assessment and planning in order to train and place individuals in the highest level of employment for which they are interested and qualify, in order to improve overall performance on this Standard.

CBVH did not meet Standard 2.1, which measures service rates to minority individuals, as compared to service rates for non-minority individuals in FFY 2007. The recently completed Needs Assessment points to the huge variety of racial and ethnic minorities who live in New York City and its surrounding areas as a factor making it difficult for New York CBVH to achieve this Standard. In addition to having a diverse and multi-ethnic staff, CBVH will strive to identify and implement ways to break down the additional barriers that make it difficult for individuals from minority groups to achieve successful employment.

Innovation and Expansion Funds

Innovation and expansion funds were used during 2007 to fund seven ATCs across the state. These ATCs provide technology assessment and training to CBVH consumers through contracts with CBVH. ATC staff meets with CBVH at least twice a year to share best practice information, learn about new equipment and to address issues that arise during the year. As requested, ATC staff provide training and demonstrations of new equipment to CBVH district office counselors. Available innovation and expansion funds will continue to be used to fund the ATCs at a comparable level in the next fiscal year.

PROPOSED QUALITY, SCOPE AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

The Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) continues to have primary responsibility for supported employment programs and other integrated employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in New York State. A memorandum of understanding is in place covering the respective roles and responsibilities of CBVH, VESID, the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) and the Office of Mental Health (OMH) in supported employment for consumers who are blind.

Since 1989, the number of community agencies utilizing Supported Employment grant funds under Title VI-B of the Rehabilitation Act to provide supported employment services to individuals who are blind has expanded from eight to 44. The grant awards stipulate adherence to all requirements set forth in Title VI-B of the Rehabilitation Act. Targeted populations include individuals with multiple disabilities who are aging out of educational programs, individuals in day treatment and long term extended employment and those who have been unable to maintain employment in integrated community settings. The "individual placement" is the prevailing model; however, this does not preclude consideration of alternatives including the "enclave" and "affirmative business". The 44 agencies are located in major cities and in suburban and rural areas across the State.

Supported employment services are delivered through the VESID contracting system, as agreed under Section 3, Chapter 515 of the Laws of New York of 1992. CBVH transfers its supported employment funds to VESID, but retains case management responsibility for individuals in the intensive service phase. Under the contract, individual agencies have agreed to serve individuals who are blind in specific counties. If CBVH wishes to use another agency (for instance, one that is designated to serve individuals with traumatic brain injury) they may be able to use VESID capacity for that disability group if it is available. Occasionally CBVH uses Title I funds for intensive services, if an individual is being served by an agency who can best meet the individual's unique service needs but the agency is at contract capacity. Under the agreement, OMH and OMRDD provide extended follow-along services for individuals who meet their respective eligibility criteria. Individuals who do not meet their criteria may receive extended services through designated VESID funds or through natural supports in the work place. Individuals in extended services may request Post Employment Services or, if necessary, ask to have their cases reopened.

Traditional vocational rehabilitation services continue to be available to supported employment candidates using Vocational Rehabilitation funds in the development as well as the execution of Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). In this regard there is no distinction from other vocational rehabilitation consumers.

Quality assurance is a matter of ongoing concern. Providers receive Guidelines for Supported Employment which are updated as needed and convey the expectations for quality services. VESID quality assurance staff, with input from CBVH and other partners, are currently establishing new case review form protocols to gather information that can be used to monitor and improve services. CBVH district office staff are invited to participate in reviews of agencies in their catchment area; however, they typically participate only in reviews of agencies that are serving consumers who are blind.

The CBVH supported employment coordinator and staff regularly monitor reports and contract implementation. The coordinator regularly talks with CBVH district office, staff, contractors and state monitors to address progress and opportunities for program improvement, providing technical assistance and training as needed.