Rehabilitation Engineering
A fresh perspective helps NIB associated agencies improve processes, jobs and employees’ lives
LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

Often in life, attention to small details can make or break us. Whether it’s a morning routine that always seems to leave us rushing to get out the door, or an approach to work that’s replicated because “we’ve always done it that way,” it’s easy to fall into a rut.

But while tried-and-true practices are certain to produce results, over time they may no longer produce the best results. Technology is evolving at a rapid pace, and as it evolves, taking a second look at how we do things can provide benefits in our daily lives at home and in the workplace.

This issue of Opportunity profiles a department at NIB dedicated to taking a second look at projects and processes at NIB associated agencies. NIB’s rehabilitation engineering department focuses on improving ergonomics and efficiency and – most importantly – making jobs accessible to people who are blind.

NIB’s rehab engineers are on the frontlines of carrying out our mission to increase the opportunities for people who are blind to achieve economic independence through employment. Free of the burden of the status quo, they redesign workspaces and improve processes, expanding career choices and helping NIB agencies compete in the marketplace.

Providing that fresh perspective is just one way NIB is working to expand career choices for people who are blind.

Kevin A. Lynch
President and Chief Executive Officer

Since 1938, National Industries for the Blind (NIB) has focused on enhancing the opportunities for economic and personal independence of people who are blind, primarily through creating, sustaining and improving employment. NIB and its network of associated nonprofit agencies are the nation’s largest employer of people who are blind through the manufacture and provision of SKILCRAFT® and other products and services of the AbilityOne® Program. For more information about NIB, visit NIB.org.
REHABILITATION ENGINEERING

Input from professionals with a fresh perspective helps NIB associated agencies improve processes, jobs and employees’ lives.

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Kerry Brewer, a blind employee at Travis Association for the Blind, displays a completed field backpack, one of 5,000 the agency is supplying to the U.S. military.

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BIG IDEAS AND A BIG HEART

Dan Boucher built a reputation as a business innovator who always puts people first.

BY AMY GRAY

When Dan Boucher announced his retirement from IFB Solutions (IFB) in December 2016, he was saying goodbye to a central part of his life for the past 47 years. Boucher is well known for his big ideas, but he's just as well known for his commitment to excellence and attention to the people who help bring his big ideas to life. Colleagues say Boucher always values the team working with him, recognizing the critical role others play in the success of large projects.

When he joined NIB in 1969, Boucher could not have known he was embarking on a career that would span more than four decades. In 25 years at NIB he was part of tremendous growth, developing strategies to diversify NIB and associated agency business lines as vice president of marketing. Among Boucher's biggest projects are the launch of the writing instruments program with the now-ubiquitous SKILCRAFT® U.S. Government pen, the office products line and AbilityOne Base Supply Centers™.

"Reflecting back, I now realize just how important the pen program was to our industry," Boucher said. "It opened the door to a whole world of opportunities and not just in the office products field. Its success demonstrated the extraordinary capabilities of people who are blind to produce high quality, diversified products."

Boucher's success at NIB helped prepare him for his next venture, as president and CEO at Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind (now known as IFB Solutions) from 1996-2007. When Boucher arrived in North Carolina, he looked for ways to grow and expand IFB beyond manufacturing, to include service lines and other enterprises.

One of Boucher's most innovative projects is the impulse merchandising program at military commissaries across the country. The impulse program places items such as hair ties and chip clips produced by NIB associated agencies along commissary shelves. Impulse merchandising and other Boucher-inspired programs helped IFB go from a struggling agency to a leader in the industry that now employs more than 450 people who are blind, with sales exceeding $130 million.

After 11 years as president and CEO of IFB, Boucher assumed an advisory role as executive chairman, where he set out to advance the mission and create more employment opportunities for people who are blind. One of Boucher's biggest successes is the 2014 merger with Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind, which helped both organizations leverage workforces and resources. The merged entity is now one of the largest agencies for people who are blind in the U.S. Employment in Arkansas has grown from 40 employees to more than 70.

Boucher attributes his success to following the Five H's: honesty, humility, hard work, heart and humor. While he loves growing the business, Boucher has always maintained the true value of any organization lies with its people. Famous for knowing every employee and his or her personal story, Boucher recognizes every major employee celebration or heartache with a personal card or message of support that emphasizes his availability to help, even outside the workplace. His employee-focused approach has made IFB an exceptional organization with engaged and motivated employees at every level.

Even in announcing his retirement, Boucher continued to focus on people, noting that “[M]ost of my best memories are from relationships developed over the years with suppliers, customers, peers, NIB and the U.S. AbilityOne Commission”, many of which resulted in lasting friendships.”

Amy Gray is communications project manager at National Industries for the Blind.
AN ACCESSIBLE WATCH THAT DOESN’T LOOK THE PART

BY DOUG GOIST

Before smartphones became our primary timepiece, most people wore a wristwatch to keep themselves on schedule.

People who are blind or visually impaired had two choices: a less-than-attractive plastic “talking” watch, or a “tactile” watch (sometimes inaccurately referred to as a Braille watch).

Enter the Bradley, an innovative piece of time technology I checked out at the Assistive Technology Industry Association 2017 conference in Orlando, Florida, this past January.

Named after former naval officer Bradley Snyder, who lost his sight while defusing a bomb in Afghanistan, the Bradley is a stylish and elegant timepiece invented in 2013 by MIT graduate student Hyungsoo Kim as part of his upstart company Eone.

Born out of one of the most successful campaigns in Kickstarter’s history (raising $600,000 on an ask of $40,000), the Bradley is for everyone, whether sighted, visually impaired or blind.

Eone calls the Bradley a timepiece, not a watch, because using it does not require vision. “The Bradley allows you to check time discreetly during meetings, interviews, dates, dinner with in-laws, or in dark movie theaters,” a Bradley brochure boasts.

So let’s break down the key design differences between talking watches, tactile watches and the Bradley.

Talking watches are pretty much as advertised. In most cases, wearers press a button and a chime is heard, followed by a female or male voice speaking the time and date. These watches can be difficult to hear in noisy settings and lack privacy in quiet environments – as I discovered in a very full movie theater during a very quiet scene in a very long movie.

Tactile watches are usually designed with a crystal watchface that flips up via either a push button or by using a fingernail. Once the crystal is lifted from the watch face, any hoped-for water resistance is lost. In addition, there is a real risk of bending or moving the fragile, exposed minute and hour hands.

The crystal on my tactile watch flipped up on its own at the worst times, such as every time I reached into the refrigerator and bumped the button on a shelf, until I completely sheared off the crystal.

In contrast, the sophisticated Eone Bradley, available in 16 different models, is a timepiece that is both visually and tactiley appealing.

Using two magnetic ball bearings that “float” around the top edge of the face and rest at the terminus points of the physical minute and hour hands, wearers can tell the time without using vision.

All of the models are water resistant to a limited extent (though not waterproof) and priced from $285 for the flagship model to $395 for the stainless steel and ceramic Element.

The Bradley may not be the least expensive accessible-to-all timepiece, but it is certainly the most attractive and functional option to date.

Doug Goist is program manager for IT services projects at National Industries for the Blind. A recognized leader in the field of technology accessibility, Doug has worked with the U.S. Department of Defense, the military services, federal agencies and private sector partners. In 2013, he served as the technical steering committee representative for the U.S. Agency for International Development on a study of mobile money transfer and handset accessibility in Africa.
Dave LoPresti, president of Industries of the Blind (IOB) in Greensboro, North Carolina, knew that efficiency in the agency’s Army Combat Uniform (ACU) jacket production area could be improved. He also knew that NIB’s rehabilitation engineering team were the right people for the job, and was thrilled when Gigi Dottin, NIB rehabilitation engineering program manager, came knocking at the agency’s door. “We had worked with Gigi when the program was just starting out in 2010, and I knew we would benefit tremendously from a site visit with her,” says LoPresti. “She’s a brilliant engineer.”

Rehabilitation engineering uses principles like Lean Manufacturing to assess, design and implement solutions for challenges individuals with disabilities encounter.

Rehabilitation engineering can touch on any area of life, including mobility, communications, independent living and integration into the community. The focus of NIB’s program is on converting sighted jobs to jobs that people who are blind or visually impaired can perform independently (referred to as job conversions), improving processes to increase productivity, and building skills that result in increased responsibility and compensation for people who are blind.

The program offers services like job accommodation, group and one-on-one training, safety and ergonomics assessments, facility planning, process analysis and efficiency improvements, program tracking, and employee assessments to help improve productivity. When necessary, NIB rehab
engineers will even help in designing jigs (specially designed tools that help hold, position or guide work during the manufacturing process) and fixtures (tools that hold work in a fixed location in the manufacturing process).

Site visits typically last four days, and while the visits follow similar formats, the outcomes are always customized to agency and employees' needs. Rehab engineers usually arrive at an agency on a Monday and first meet with appropriate agency staff. Next, they tour the entire facility and discuss the specific projects the agency had in mind when requesting the site visit, and the hoped-for individual and agency-wide outcomes. Once expectations have been identified and agreed to, the rehab engineers will revisit the specific contract areas, workstations and employees identified in the meetings to review work processes in detail. Based on these in-depth meetings and observations, the rehab engineering team develops recommendations and, if time allows, begins hands-on implementation of at least some of the recommendations. By Thursday, changes – whether a customized solution for a single employee or a process change to a production line – have been made. When the rehab engineers are gone, they are not forgotten: Rehab engineers are frequently asked back by agencies.

“Rehabilitation engineering is a very popular service from an individual level and an agency-wide point of view,” says Paul Diamonti, director of rehab and product engineering at NIB. “Agencies and their employees know that it makes them stronger, and stronger agencies meet their operating goals, which in turn helps them provide other much-needed services.” Since the program launched in 2010, NIB rehabilitation engineers have conducted more than 200 site visits to associated agencies and completed 177 successful blind conversions.

Improving Processes at Industries of the Blind and Alphapointe

Even at agencies with strong rehab engineering programs of their own, consultation with another expert can dramatically improve productivity virtually overnight. In late November 2016, Dottin's collaboration with JeQuan Bailey and Colby Templeton, rehab engineers at Industries of the Blind, more than doubled the daily production of ACU jackets.

Before the visit, IOB produced about 70 jackets a day. After observing production and taking time trials, the team came up with changes to the workflow for assembling jackets, as well as changes to the layout of machines, to eliminate down time. In the previous “U” shape layout some machines were skipped, lowering productivity and efficiency. The new configuration and workflow reduces wait time and improves production.

“By the end of the week, we had already improved production of the jackets from 70 to about 160 a day,” says LoPresti. “Today we are making an average of 226 jackets a day, thanks to the recommendations, which were simple steps that really work. JeQuan and Colby know our operations like the back of their hand, but getting that fresh perspective can make a real difference. NIB's rehab engineers always arrive with an open mind, and spend a lot of time talking and listening to our employees. This time was no different.”

The changes help agencies like IOB compete in the manufacturing world. To do that, says LoPresti, they must eliminate any process that isn’t efficient.

Jerry Brokaw, production manager at Alphapointe in Kansas City, Missouri, turned to NIB’s rehab engineering...
program when the agency secured a large contract with an international fast food brand. “We landed a contract to supply mechanical wax pencils, which we call china markers, for the company’s North American stores,” Brokaw explains. “We needed to make a three-fold increase in our annual production, just to support this customer. To respond to their immediate needs, we turned to NIB’s rehabilitation engineers to help us improve production efficiency and support the increased volume.”

Before the January visit, employees assembled the markers, which consist of six parts, from start to finish at their individual work stations. Some employees could assemble about 1,200 markers a day; others assembled about 500. Assembly includes inspecting each completed china marker for quality before placement in a finished-product container.

To speed up production, NIB rehab engineers recommended that some employees work in teams, rather than individually. The first person on the team assembles the first four parts of the marker, the second person assembles the last two parts, inspects it for quality and places it in the finished-product container. Within a few days, the teams were assembling about 1,600 markers a day, a 60 percent increase in efficiency. NIB rehab engineers also recommended changing to larger, gravity-fed storage bins that could hold more marker components, which reduces down time because they do not have to be refilled as often. Alphapointe employees are currently using cardboard prototypes that are working out well, Brokaw says.

As a result of the recommendations, Alphapointe has formed more teams in the marker production area and is looking at other product lines to see where the team approach can be used to increase efficiency.

“It’s a great service,” says Mike Stephens, vice president of operations at Alphapointe. “We get so busy just trying to get through the day that we often don’t devote the time to review how we work. NIB’s rehab engineers have the time and figure out the best way.”

“We’ve used the service probably half a dozen times in the past two or three years in both our Kansas City and New York locations,” adds Alphapointe President and CEO Reinhard Mabry. “I’m sure we will again, because we’ve found it improves safety and ergonomics. It’s an extremely valuable service for agencies.”

A Blind Conversion at Lighthouse Louisiana

In late December 2016, NIB rehab engineers had a chance to tour all three of Lighthouse Louisiana’s facilities in Baton Rouge and New Orleans, Louisiana, and Gulfport, Mississippi. When rehab engineers make a site visit, their observations may result in suggested process improvements in several areas that can be implemented immediately or down the road. These visits resulted in recommendations for process changes at each location, including adding guards and safety controls in the Gulfport facility’s mop production process to convert it to a job people who are blind can perform, and improvements to a pillow turning process. At the Baton Rouge facility, the use of a car jack was recommended to improve ergonomics in the cup making area.

The job accommodation suggested in the paper towel manufacturing area at the New Orleans facility is a great example of the impact job conversions can have, offering employees who are blind more independence.

Lighthouse Louisiana’s New Orleans facility produces, among many other products, paper towels. An employee who is legally blind runs one of the paper towel machines and performed most of the job without assistance from a sighted co-worker, but couldn’t monitor the alignment when a new roll of craft paper was loaded. Because proper alignment is critical, the employee needed to call a sighted
employee every time a new roll was added, which resulted in regular delays before a sighted employee was available to come check the alignment. Installing a security camera that displays feed in real time and adding a larger monitor made it possible for the employee to see the security feed better. Marking tape was added on two rollers so he could align the machine without assistance, allowing him to work independently and be more productive.

Kerry Sweeney, director of facilities at Lighthouse Louisiana, could not be more pleased with the rehabilitation engineering services offered through NIB. “We all tend to get stagnant, stuck in our ways. It’s great to have someone come in and take a look at our operations with a new set of eyes. Simple yet effective fixes changed a job that needed a sighted person’s help to a job that low-vision employees can do without assistance,” says Sweeney.

**Process Design at Austin Lighthouse**
New contracts frequently require agencies to design a new process from the bottom up. That was the case when the Travis Association for the Blind in Austin, Texas, landed a contract to assemble 5,000 large field backpacks for the U.S. military.

The job will employ two employees who are visually impaired and one sighted employee at the agency’s laundry facility. After touring the facility and speaking with employees, NIB rehab engineers designed a process that splits assembly of the backpacks between the two visually impaired employees. The sighted employee inspects the completed work and, using a custom-built fixture to hold the backpack frame in place, attaches the bag. The fixture allows the employee to attach the bag without hunching over or manipulating the frame, improving ergonomics. Using this process, the team produces 12 backpacks per hour.

While at the agency, the rehab engineers also looked at the warehouse receiving process with the goal of increasing productivity. After observing the current process, they changed the layout by splitting one large station into four parallel stations that share one conveyor and one table, reducing both the time required to walk containers to the end of the conveyor and employee idle time. Employing a jack to lift and tilt pallets improved ergonomics by eliminating the need for employees to continuously kneel or bend over to pick up items.

Such simple, low-tech changes can reap big rewards for agencies and employees. “NIB rehab engineers often see things we don’t see with our daily exposure,” says Keoki Butterfield, operations support manager at the Travis Lighthouse. “Every visit has been a valuable asset to us.”

Sharon Horrigan Leonard is a freelance writer based in Asheville, North Carolina.

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**Grant Helps Improve Workplaces**

NIB associated agencies can take advantage of the engineering review process regardless of size or budget. NIB’s Compensation and Productivity Improvement Grant program helps agencies with limited resources develop and implement new projects or measure the success of existing projects to improve the productivity of employees who are blind. To qualify for a grant, projects must do one of the following:

- Create a job that can be performed by employees who are blind.
- Convert a job to one that people who are blind can perform independently.
- Result in an increase in the hourly compensation of an employee who is blind or visually impaired.
- Provide upward mobility for an employee who is blind or result in a job transition between products and services that includes an increase in compensation.

Through the Compensation and Productivity Improvement Grant program NIB pays 80 percent of the costs incurred by an agency, up to $40,000 per agency per fiscal year.
GET TO KNOW NIB ASSOCIATED NONPROFIT AGENCIES

Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Headquarters: San Francisco, California
President/CEO: Bryan Bashin
Founded: 1902

Capabilities at-a-glance: Tissue packets for meals ready to eat kits, consulting for technology accessibility

Did you know? This year the agency launched the Holman Prize for Blind Ambition, a grant for entrepreneurs and adventurers who are blind to explore the world and push their limits through travel, connections, construction and communication.

More info: lighthouse-sf.org

The Lighthouse for the Blind

Headquarters: St. Louis, Missouri
President/CEO: John Thompson
Founded: 1933

Capabilities at-a-glance: Medical, office and janitorial products; paints and aerosols; kitting and packaging

Did you know? The agency provides children who are legally blind with scholarships to attend camp at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama.

More info: lhbindustries.com
Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment

**Headquarters:** Binghamton, New York  
**President/CEO:** Ken Fernald  
**Founded:** 1926

**Capabilities at-a-glance:** Paper products such as office paper and file folders, batteries

**Did you know?** The agency hosts an annual glow-in-the-dark golf tournament fundraiser.

**More info:** avreus.org

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Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind

**Headquarters:** Tampa, Florida  
**President/CEO:** Sheryl Brown  
**Founded:** 1940

**Capabilities at-a-glance:** Switchboard and mailroom operations, data entry, clerical services

**Did you know?** Tampa Lighthouse provides assistive technology and consulting services nationwide.

**More info:** tampalighthouse.org
An internship through NIB and Urban Alliance is providing the Cantos brothers another tool to shape their futures.

BY ROSEMARIE LALLY

Leo and Nick Cantos are typical high-achieving American high school seniors. They work hard in school, participate in community service, play various instruments, are applying to colleges, and love playing video and audio games in their spare time. Leo is taking AP Computer Science and teaching himself Japanese with an audio language program; Nick enjoys wrestling and rowing.

In one way though, the brothers have a greater challenge than the average high school student. Leo and Nick, along with their brother Steven, are triplets who were born blind. Resilience and determination, nurtured by the unflagging encouragement and guidance of their adoptive father, Ollie Cantos, have allowed them to surmount many obstacles on their road to independence.

Growing up with their mother and grandmother, the boys’ world was largely restricted to school and church until they met Ollie in 2010, when he agreed to mentor them. Ollie, a lawyer with the U.S. Department of Education, is blind and had mentored many young people who are blind. This time though, it quickly became apparent that the bond with his mentees was stronger than usual. Things went so well the first evening they met, Ollie recalls, that he didn’t notice the time until the friend who arranged the meeting mentioned that they should probably get going since they’d been talking with the boys for three hours.

Ollie knew within a few months that he wanted to adopt the brothers and share custody with their mother. The boys shared that vision, referring to him as their “dad” after knowing him only five months. The adoption was finalized in 2015.

Ollie knew within a few months that he wanted to adopt the brothers and share custody with their mother. The boys shared that vision, referring to him as their “dad” after knowing him only five months. The adoption was finalized in 2015.

Under Ollie’s tutelage, the brothers grew in confidence, skills and independence. “My expectations for the boys are just as high as for anyone else,” he explained. “I encourage them to take initiative and do things for themselves, to excel in school, do volunteer work, develop professional expectations. And they have responded by doing their best. I tell them to forge their own paths, and to blow their former expectations out of the water!”

And they have done just that. In addition to participating in various extracurricular activities, the brothers are all close to achieving the rank of Eagle Scout. They have had numerous speaking engagements before government agencies, church congregations and non-profit organizations. They participate in a business distributorship with their father and have had paid internships with tech companies. All have applied to colleges and are awaiting their acceptance letters.

Ollie said the brothers’ growing self-sufficiency has changed their view of blindness. “They used to view it as a tragedy – today it’s just an incidental factor.”

This year, Leo and Nick are participating in a paid internship at National Industries for the Blind through a partnership with Urban Alliance (UA), which arranges internships, formal training and mentoring for under-resourced youth. UA focuses on helping motivated students from low-income households, relying on high school counselors to encourage students to apply to the program, according to Executive Director Alessandra Colia. Participating corporations, or “job partners,” make a $12,500 tax-deductible donation, which sponsors one student’s participation in the year-long program. The program currently has more than 60 participating interns in Northern Virginia, and hundreds across the country.

Nick and Leo were eager to apply. “There was a lot to work through – writing essays, getting...
recommendations, getting our parents’ permission,” Nick said. “But we did it and it’s worked out for us.”

Applicants participate in a four- to six-week pre-work program, during which they meet daily with the UA team to learn “soft skills” such as getting to work using public transportation taking initiative, time management, appropriate workplace dress and interview skills. After completing the pre-work program, applicants interview and those who are selected receive internship assignments.

Nick and Leo stood out as being “on top of things and very adaptable” from the start, according to their program coordinator, Isabel Alcalde. “They learned the transportation routes quickly and adapted well to being in a professional environment,” she said, noting that they have become increasingly independent and skilled at problem-solving.

“They’re both very motivated, very enthusiastic, very articulate. Leo has great computer skills and is working in the call center. Nick was more interested in communications work, so he is developing a congressional district office mailing list and working with Excel spreadsheets,” Gallagher said. “They’re developing more confidence in their work, interactions with people, and independence and mobility.”

Leo, currently working with Oracle to track items ordered online and ensure AbilityOne.com customers get the products they need, says the internship is his “favorite part of the day.” He also enjoys the computer classes he’s taking in high school and plans to major in computer science. His ultimate goal is “to work in computer law for a tech giant, like Microsoft or Google.”

“Nick and Leo are a great example to other youth in the program – they face extraordinary challenges and yet operate just like everyone else,” Alcalde said. “They clearly articulate their career interests and what they want.”

Noting that the organization hasn’t worked with many students with disabilities, she credited the brothers with “moving UA to be even more inclusive and more creative in incorporating different technologies to help students succeed.”

“At NIB, Nick is honing his research and Excel skills, working on a project for the communications department. Leo said he appreciates the team approach to work at NIB. “Learning to ask questions, help others, communicate clearly, and tackle problems together will be helpful skills later in working with a team of computer specialists.”

Nick enjoys refining his Excel skills and improving his online research skills.

Both boys credit their father with teaching them to better navigate their surroundings, ask for help when needed, become more self-sufficient and pursue their own interests. “He taught us how to have fun,” said Nick.

Leo also credits his dad with helping him master basic life skills. “I’ve learned how to cook, clean, do my laundry, fold my clothing. And I’ve learned how to follow through, how to make sure I get things done. That creates a layer of independence and freedom for me.”

“Once you master the small things, the big things fall into place,” says Leo. For the Cantos brothers, the big things seem to be falling into place just fine.

“Ollie always says ‘Once you master the small things, the big things fall into place,’ ” says Leo. For the Cantos brothers, the big things seem to be falling into place just fine.

Rosemarie Lally is a freelance writer and editor based in Washington, D.C.
AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

BETTING ON SAFETY
New maintenance, repair and operations products are helping the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Rochester, New York, grow employment opportunities.

BY JENNIFER BROZIC

More than a century after its founding in 1911 by four graduates of the New York State School for the Blind, the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI) in Rochester, New York, continues to fulfill its founders’ dream of helping people with vision loss lead full, productive lives.

ABVI provides a wide range of vision evaluation and rehabilitation services designed to help people who are blind or visually impaired maintain their independence and navigate their communities. The agency serves adults and children in nine counties in western New York.

According to Joe Kells, ABVI’s director of sales and business development, the low vision center is the soul of the organization. People learning to live with vision loss or degenerative diseases that lead to blindness are often referred to ABVI for evaluation, rehabilitation services, adaptive equipment and recommendations for improving residual vision.

In 2016, the agency reached 1,700 children through its early vision screening program, 25 percent of whom were referred for follow-up care. An additional 1,800 people received services through ABVI’s low vision center.

In addition to providing vision services, ABVI is committed to creating jobs for people who are blind or visually impaired. The agency employs 136 people, 83 of whom are blind, in multiple lines of business, including manufacturing and fulfillment, sewing, contact centers and food services.

In 1994, ABVI teamed up with Goodwill of the Finger Lakes to enhance its ability to offer employment opportunities to people facing barriers to independence. The affiliated organizations operate 14 Goodwill retail stores throughout western New York. The revenue generated from the sale of donated goods is reinvested in services and programs for people served by the agency.

New Business Development
The majority of jobs at ABVI involve supplying products and services to the federal government, through the AbilityOne® Program, and the state government, through the New York State Preferred Source Program for People Who Are Blind, which NIB manages. The agency works constantly to develop new products and services to meet customer needs while creating jobs for people who are blind or visually impaired.

A good example of product development efforts is ABVI’s line of right-to-know products. When the Occupational Safety and Health Administration issued a Hazard Communication Standard in 2012 that changed labeling requirements for toxic and hazardous substances in the workplace, ABVI seized the opportunity to create products to help customers comply with the new requirements.

The SKILCRAFT® Global Harmonized System Information and Safety Data Sheet products make critical safety information easy to organize and readily accessible.

Patricia Solomon is one of 60 employees in ABVI’s contact center, which fields more than 400,000 calls per year for federal, state and commercial clients.
available to anyone who needs it. The line runs the gamut from a three-ring binder to store safety data sheets (SDS), to an information center complete with a wall-mountable rack and communication station that includes Globally Harmonized System label elements and hazard and SDS information.

The product line has created several jobs for people who are blind, but ABVI isn’t the only agency to benefit from development of the products. The West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind, in San Angelo, produces the yellow binders used for storing SDSs.

“We’ve been sourcing the binders from them for three years, and it’s worked beautifully,” Kells said.

Kells identified another new business opportunity when he saw a team member using lockout tagout devices while repairing equipment in one of ABVI’s production spaces. Noting the way the employee organized the devices in a tool bag, Kells decided to explore the possibility of creating kits that would include all of the materials and devices needed for specific lockout tagout scenarios. With ABVI’s existing kitting, fulfillment and textile capabilities, the new line seemed like a perfect fit.

After confirming demand for the product, Kells worked with a vendor to determine the right mix of components for the markets ABVI serves. The agency launched the SKILCRAFT lockout tagout line in August 2016, offering everything from individual padlocks to specialized kits for electrical and valve lockouts, to wall-mounted device stations. Production is on pace to create three full-time jobs in ABVI’s kitting and sewing operations.

A Myriad of Opportunities
Barry Falligan, a supervisor for Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) fulfillment who is visually impaired, has been with ABVI for 31 years, working in nearly every department at some point. “Practically all of the jobs that have come through the agency, I’ve probably had a hand in it somewhere,” he said.

Today, he supervises fulfillment of orders for EPA documents, and lends a hand with packaging lockout tagout devices and preparing them for shipping.

Falligan appreciates the confidence ABVI leadership has in his abilities. “They’ve given me responsibilities, and helped me grow, sometimes when I wasn’t sure I was ready for that next step,” he said. “They believe in me.”

Angelo Ercolamento, a manufacturing manager who is visually impaired, supervises production of the Global Harmonized System products, managing a team of 15 employees who are blind, visually impaired or have cognitive impairments.

Since joining ABVI 30 years ago, he has worked in many different roles, including purchasing, inventory control, production and database administration. He’s also witnessed many changes within the agency as ABVI has expanded services and programs to serve more people in the community.

Ercolamento says one thing that hasn’t changed over the years is the commitment to get the job done. “The folks that work with me, my peers and the management team, all work toward a common goal. Everyone’s on the same page.”

Kells couldn’t agree more. “It’s definitely a team effort. Everyone here at ABVI is focused on executing great business cases that create and sustain more employment for our colleagues who are blind,” he said. “That’s happening here every single day.”

Jennifer Brozic is a freelance writer based in Ellicott City, Maryland.
NEW PRODUCTS

READY TO LAUNCH

These new products produced by NIB associated agencies are now available to federal government customers through the AbilityOne® Program.

Office Products
1. SKILCRAFT® Erasable Re-Write Pens
SKILCRAFT® Erasable Re-Write Pens let you write, erase and rewrite without damaging documents. Gel ink provides a smooth writing experience while the specially designed eraser removes mistakes without a trace. Available in black or blue ink, choose retractable medium-point pens or stick pens available in medium or fine point. Produced by West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in San Angelo, Texas.

2. SKILCRAFT® Eco-Bottle Retractable Gel Pens
Help reduce pollution from plastic water bottles while completing important writing tasks with SKILCRAFT® Eco-Bottle Retractable Gel Pens. Made from 100 percent recycled plastic water bottles, these medium point pens feature quick-drying gel ink for a smooth writing experience with no smearing or smudging. Available in black or blue ink; produced by West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in San Angelo, Texas.

3. SKILCRAFT® Printable DVD-Rs
Compatible with leading printers, SKILCRAFT® Printable DVD-Rs provide 4.7 GB of storage capacity or 120 minutes of video recording time in a write-once format with 16x recording speed. Choose 50-disc spindles of thermal or inkjet printable discs with a white matte surface for quick and easy labeling. Discs are TAA compliant and carry a lifetime limited warranty. Produced by North Central Sight Services in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

4. SKILCRAFT® Silver Thermal Printable CD-R
Compatible with leading thermal printers, SKILCRAFT® Silver Thermal Printable CD-Rs provide 700 MB of storage capacity or approximately 80 minutes of audio recording time in a write-once format with 52x recording speed. Available in a 100 disc hub, discs are TAA compliant and carry a lifetime limited warranty. Produced by North Central Sight Services in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

Maintenance, Repair and Operations
5. SKILCRAFT® Step Stool Tool Boxes
SKILCRAFT® Step Stool Tool Boxes offer the all-in-one convenience and storage of a tool chest, seat and step stool. Durable plastic tool box and step stool has a fully integrated leg design that supports up to 325 pounds and a removable top tray that creates an extra-deep bottom storage area. Available alone or with a 25-piece general home repair toolkit. Produced by Industries for the Blind in West Allis, Wisconsin.

6. SKILCRAFT® Peel-and-Stick Nonskid Tapes and Treads – Coarse
Perfect for high foot-traffic areas and areas exposed to extreme conditions, SKILCRAFT® Coarse Peel-and-Stick Tapes and Treads provide non-skid traction for safety. Available in a 40-foot roll, these tapes and treads can be applied to smooth or rough surfaces and are TAA compliant. Produced by Industries for the Blind in West Allis, Wisconsin.
Nonskid Tapes and Treads feature extra-large mineral particles backed by a high performance, pressure-sensitive adhesive. Easy to install on stairs, ship and plane decks, construction vehicles, oily wet areas, machine shop and warehouse floors, and recreational vehicles, choose pre-cut pieces or rolls in grey or black. Produced by Louisiana Association for the Blind in Shreveport, Louisiana.

7. SKILCRAFT® Peel-and-Stick Nonskid Tapes and Treads – Conformable
Easy-to-install conformable slip-resistant tapes and treads are comprised of minerals adhered by durable resin to a pressure-sensitive adhesive-backed aluminum film. Easy to install around irregular surfaces such as grated metal, they’re perfect on stairs, ladders, loading ramps, platforms, warehouse floors and vehicles. Black treads are available in three sizes. Produced by Louisiana Association for the Blind in Shreveport, Louisiana.

8. SKILCRAFT® LED T8 2 Foot Tube Light
The SKILCRAFT® LED T8 2 Foot Tube Light lasts five times longer and uses 44 percent fewer watts than traditional fluorescent T8 lights. Featuring simple plug-in installation, the universal bulb is both A and B type – if the ballast fails simply snap the wires and connect to 120V. Shatterproof, impact resistant, multi voltage (120/220/277), mercury-free tube light is suitable for damp locations and carries a 10 year warranty. Produced by Industries of the Blind Inc. in Greensboro, North Carolina.

9. SKILCRAFT® Pro-Grade Socket Sets
Made of high-grade chrome nickel steel, SKILCRAFT® Pro-Grade Socket Sets feature lobular openings for greater turning power without deforming the fastener. Designed for quick engagement on both 6 and 12 point fasteners, included accessories feature unique finger fit handles and a narrow pear-shaped head for easy access to confined work areas. Now available in ¼ inch, ⅜ inch and ½ inch deep or shallow drive; produced by Beyond Vision in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

JanSan Products
10. SKILCRAFT® Pump Bottle Cleaners
Purchase individual bottles of SKILCRAFT® Glass Cleaner and SKILCRAFT® General Purpose Cleaner, two popular products previously available only by the case. Biodegradable, biobased and environmentally preferred SKILCRAFT® Glass Cleaner with ammonia and anti-fogging agents is perfect for windows, mirrors, chrome and other non-porous materials. Non-flammable and non-toxic SKILCRAFT® General Purpose Cleaner works on grease, dirt, soap scum, food stains and fingerprints without the use of phosphates, abrasives or dyes, making it perfect for aquatic use. Produced by the Lighthouse of Houston in Houston, Texas.

11. SKILCRAFT® ProPerformance Linear Low Density Can Liners
Recommended for puncture and tear resistance, SKILCRAFT® ProPerformance Linear Low Density Can Liners are now available in 12-16 gallon capacity. Designed for multi-purpose workloads and perfect for disposing of sharp or jagged objects, these liners contain 10 percent post-consumer recycled content. Produced by Envision Industries in Wichita, Kansas.

These and thousands of other products are available for purchase at AbilityOne.com, GSAAdvantage.gov, your local AbilityOne Base Supply Center or through AbilityOne authorized distributors. For more information about how to purchase SKILCRAFT and other products produced by people who are blind, visit NIB.org/products.
NIB PRESENTS PROMOTE PROGRAM AT ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE

Doug Goist, NIB program manager, services/IT projects, teamed up with TCS Associates CEO Bryan Moseley and Director of Accessibility Harris Rosensweig, for a presentation on the Professional Mastery of Office Technology for Employment (ProMOTE) training program at the Assistive Technology Industry Association conference in January. ProMOTE is a unique, four-week program that provides assistive technology users who are blind or have low vision advanced training in the computer skills essential to success in today’s fast-paced business environment.

NIB worked with TCS Associates, consultants specializing in accessible electronic and information technology, and The Carroll Center to develop the program. A train-the-trainer program was recently launched to teach agency and qualified assistive technology instructors how to execute ProMOTE to prepare more people who are blind for career success.

NEW ABILITYONE BASE SUPPLY CENTER OPENS AT CAMP MABRY

Texas National Guard leaders joined representatives from ibMilwaukee for the grand opening of the ibSupply AbilityOne Base Supply Center™, during a ceremony at Camp Mabry in Austin, Texas, March 16, 2017. The opening of the store provides an opportunity for the Texas National Guard to partner with ibMilwaukee in creating employment for veterans and other people who are blind, as well as providing readily available and quality-made office, janitorial, industrial and business supplies for National Guard units.
NIB WELCOMES NEW ASSOCIATED AGENCY

NIB is pleased to welcome The Sight Center of Northwest Ohio in Toledo to the NIB network. The Sight Center offers a unique blend of programs and services to help people of all ages work, learn, play and live independently with permanent vision loss.

With its unique blend of multi-disciplinary services that provide direct support to people of all ages and socio-economic levels, the Sight Center, which maintains a satellite location in Findlay, Ohio, offers rehabilitation services, orientation and mobility training, a low vision clinic, and training and assistance with the use of adaptive technologies.

APPLICATIONS OPEN FOR 2017 ROEDER SCHOLARSHIP

Applications for the 2017 Joseph Roeder Scholarship are now available on the NIB website. The scholarship provides a one-time award of $2,500 for an undergraduate or graduate student who is legally blind to pursue a college degree in a business-related field.

The scholarship is named for Joe Roeder, senior accessible technology specialist at NIB from 1997 until his death in 2010. Roeder was instrumental in the development of the Section 508 electronic and information technology accessibility standards of the Rehabilitation Act, which require all federal government agencies to provide accessible data and information for employees with disabilities.

Visit http://nib.org/roeder to apply. Materials must be submitted online no later than Friday, May 5, 2017. The winner will be announced in June.

DATES ANNOUNCED FOR NIB AND NAEPB 2017 EVENTS

NIB and the National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind (NAEPB) are changing the format of 2017 events.

The NIB/NAEPB National Symposium, slated for June 27-28, 2017, will focus on developing agency employees who are blind and acknowledging outstanding performance. The event incorporates recognition of agency employees of the year and national award winners, and training for the Advocates for Leadership and Employment, who will also visit legislators’ offices on Capitol Hill.

The NIB/NAEPB National Conference and Expo, scheduled for October 4-6, 2017, will be a dedicated event for comprehensive training on the AbilityOne Program and discussion of business development and other topics relevant to growing sales and employment. This event will include the Expo and NIB Marketplace, deep-dive breakout sessions, customer/partner speakers and recognition of outstanding customers and partners.