25 Years of Life-Changing Experiences
AbilityOne Base Supply Centers celebrate a milestone anniversary
LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

TRAINING FOR SUCCESS

For people who are blind, finding a job can often be a difficult process due to employer misperceptions about the capabilities of people who are blind. NIB is proud to provide comprehensive training and employment programs that not only help people who are blind find jobs, but empower them to build rewarding professional careers.

In this issue of Opportunity magazine, you’ll read about two programs developed by NIB that are helping people who are blind build rewarding careers and reach their full potential. The AbilityOne Base Supply Center® program, celebrating its 25th anniversary in October, has provided careers in customer service, merchandising, logistics, and management for hundreds of people who are blind. The stores provide convenient, one-stop shopping for everything from office supplies to military gear at 155 locations on military bases and federal installations across the country.

You’ll also read about the AbilityOne Contract Management Support (CMS) program, which prepares people who are blind for upwardly mobile careers in federal contracting. Through a partnership with the Defense Acquisition University, the CMS program provides training on how to close completed contracts — an area of substantial need for the Department of Defense and other government agencies. In 10 years, CMS specialists have closed nearly 500,000 contracts while identifying $2.6 billion in taxpayer dollars for de-obligation. Perhaps more impressive, many CMS specialists have been “hired away” from the program, launching careers with federal, state, and local governments as well as private sector employers.

For people who are blind, the journey to meaningful employment can be more difficult. NIB provides the tools they need to overcome those difficulties and make building a rewarding career that much more satisfying.

Kevin A. Lynch
President and Chief Executive Officer
25 YEARS OF LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCES

AbilityOne Base Supply Centers® celebrate a milestone anniversary.

ON THE COVER

Kahnia Kennedy delivers outstanding customer service at the Base Supply Center at Charleston Air Force Base in South Carolina.

02 LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT
Training for Success

04 PROFILE
Ready for the Next Level

10 10 YEARS AND COUNTING
The CMS Program helps people who are blind launch professional careers and saves taxpayers’ money.

14 EXPANDED SERVICES ADDRESS PANDEMIC CHALLENGES
Innovative approaches extend the reach of critical community support programs.

17 TECH CORNER
BARD Mobile puts the Library of Congress in your smartphone.

18 MAKING THEMSELVES KNOWN
Until recently, the Austin Lighthouse was one of the city’s best kept secrets.

20 READY TO LAUNCH
NIB associated agencies introduce and update SKILCRAFT® products.

22 NEWS & NOTES
• NIB Launches New Business Leaders Program Offering
• NYSPSP Names Employee of the Year
• Check out the New CareersWithVision
• New York Agency Marks 30 Year Partnership with 3M
• New Director at DeCA
The new chair of NIB’s board of directors looks forward to growing new opportunities for people who are blind.

BY DOMINIC CALABRESE

Surveying the efforts of NIB and associated agency employees during the coronavirus pandemic, new Board Chair Paul M. Healy, Ph.D., says their work is “inspiring.”

“I am very proud that NIB and its associated agencies have been part of a team to support our nation during the pandemic,” Healy says. “That speaks volumes for the organization, its integrity, and sense of purpose.”

Healy has been associated with NIB off and on for nearly 15 years, having first joined the board in 2005 after a colleague at Harvard Business School (HBS) recommended he look into the organization. “I quickly became very interested,” he says. Given his strong background in finance, auditing, and ethics, it was a perfect fit.

Healy soon took on the role of treasurer and chaired the NIB board of directors audit and ethics committee. When the time came to find a new CEO, he was appointed to the search committee, which after a nationwide search, selected Kevin Lynch to become the organization’s next leader in August 2008.

In 2010, Healy stepped down to deal with pressing work and family matters. “I didn’t feel I could give NIB the attention it deserved,” he explains, but he never lost interest in the organization and its work. Finding himself with more time to devote to it in 2017, he was delighted to accept an invitation to rejoin the board.

“I have always found NIB to be a well-run organization, with strong financial controls and oversight,” Healy says. He has been impressed with the effectiveness of Lynch as leader, and how he has positioned the organization to develop new business areas.

“NIB has done an amazing job developing career training programs and finding meaningful employment opportunities for people who are blind within the AbilityOne Program,” Healy explains. “But with employment leveling out in the program due to external challenges, pricing pressures, and more regulations, we need to focus more on growing opportunities outside the AbilityOne Program — in other words, what can we do to take NIB to the next level.”

In the response to pandemic, Healy sees evidence that both NIB and its associated agencies are ready to advance to that level. Headquarters staff have been “incredibly effective” at transitioning to remote work and finding new ways to accomplish their jobs, while continuing to offer training programs for people who are blind and support the associated agencies, he says.

As for NIB associated agencies, he commends their ability to make adjustments to their workplaces and support their employees. “Employees,” he says, “who have proven themselves to be incredibly brave as front line workers producing essential products and providing needed services.”

A distinguished academic, Dr. Healy is the James R. Williston Professor of Business Administration at HBS. His interests encompass a wide array of topics, including financial analysis, white collar crime, governance, mergers and acquisitions, and business ethics.

He has received numerous honors for his research, including the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants/American Accounting Association (AICPA/AAA) Notable Contribution Award for outstanding contributions to research and the AICPA/AAA Wildman Medal for contributions to practice.

During his time at HBS, Dr. Healy has served as chair of doctoral programs, chair of the Accounting and Management Unit, and senior associate dean for both research and faculty development. He teaches Masters of Business Administration and executive education courses on accounting, financial analysis, corporate boards, and ethical leadership.

Before joining Harvard Business School, he spent 14 years on the faculty at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Sloan School of Management, where he received awards for teaching excellence and served as deputy dean. A native of New Zealand, he earned accounting and finance degrees from Victoria University of Wellington, and a Ph.D. from the University of Rochester in New York.

Dominic Calabrese, a freelance writer, professor, and consultant in Columbia, South Carolina, previously served as senior vice president, public relations, at The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired.
By purchasing SKILCRAFT® products and services provided through the AbilityOne® Program, you provide meaningful employment for people who are blind or have significant disabilities.
More than 150 AbilityOne Base Supply Centers are celebrating the program’s 25th anniversary this year.

An opportunity to be part of something greater than oneself. The chance to regain a sense of self-worth and become a contributing member of society. The satisfaction in doing work that is highly valued and appreciated.

These are some of the sentiments employees who are blind or visually impaired working at AbilityOne Base Supply Centers® (BSCs) around the country expressed as the program marks its 25th anniversary this year.

The centers offer military personnel and federal employees convenient one-stop shopping for essential products. Operated by NIB associated nonprofit agencies, BSCs serve all branches of the armed forces as well as many key federal agencies and departments.

Currently, people who are blind or visually impaired working in 155 Base Supply Centers across the U.S. perform tasks from merchandising and stocking shelves, to working the cash register and processing transactions, to managing departments and stores.

Opening doors to a better tomorrow for people who are blind or visually impaired has been a core element of the BSC program from the very beginning, says NIB BSC Program Director Luis Lebron.
"Retail is the place where many people get their first real employment experience, learn how to maintain a schedule, follow instructions in a work environment, and develop various skills," Lebron explains.

"Traditionally, these experiences have not been available to people who are blind or visually impaired, but the BSC program changed that."

BSCs offer opportunities for individuals to advance into management positions, where they fine tune their organizational, people, and business management skills in a real world environment. Going forward, Lebron expects more people who are blind will move into BSC management.

“As folks move up the ranks, I expect to see more regional managers and even agency BSC directors who are blind or visually impaired,” he says.

Providing Opportunity

Employees like Kim Utley, manager of the BSC at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, operated by Baltimore-based Blind Industries and Services of Maryland (BISM), are a testament to the program’s power to change lives.

The oldest of three children, Utley, who was born and raised in Delaware, studied nursing at college and hoped to pursue a career in health care. Her plans took an abrupt turn when she was involved in a near-fatal car accident that took the sight in one eye and left only limited vision in the other.

Becoming involved with the BSC program in 1997 helped Utley find a new career path when she had difficulty landing a job after receiving a diploma in medical transcription.

“After going on several job interviews, I was approached by my vocational rehab counselor, who asked if I wanted to interview for a retail associate’s position at a small store that was opening on the Dover Air Force Base,” Utley recalls. Since she had worked in retail while attending college, she decided to apply.

One of three interview candidates offered a job, Utley started training in November and in March of 1998, became the first associate who is blind working in BISM’s BSC Division.

“I saw a sparkle in Kim and was impressed with her right from the start,” says Ken Barnett, BISM’s vice president of sales and marketing, who started the agency’s BSC program. Recognizing Utley’s potential, he provided her with not only the assistive technology to help her carry out her duties, but encouragement and support.

For her part, Utley received excellent reviews. Working her way up to store manager in 2004, she became the first person who is blind to assume that role in any of the BSCs.

Along the way, she has mentored dozens of associates, helping them excel in their jobs, and received numerous citations for her own work, including the national Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award from NIB in 2001.

Utley’s tenure has been marked by excellent customer service as reflected in numerous special events she holds at the store featuring the latest in SKILCRAFT® products.

Deemed essential during the COVID-19 pandemic, Utley and her staff have dealt with challenges keeping the Dover Base Supply Center open during the crisis and stocked with masks, disinfectants, hand sanitizers, and other crucial products for customers, while also keeping her staff safe.

“As the military downsized and started working from home, the BSC staff worked to protect employees and maintain a safe..."
workplace,” Utley explains. Masks were required and frequent hand washing and social distancing were strictly followed.

“More recently, the Air Force started ramping up and bringing personnel back to the base. As a result, we have also brought in associates to meet the demands of the increased business,” she says. “We are still doing whatever it takes to make sure we are providing the best customer service possible while safeguarding those around us.”

Looking back on her 22 years with the BSC, Utley appreciates the opportunities afforded her by BISM. “They have given me a chance to grow as a person and to serve others. I have also been blessed by having great mentors like Ken who have offered me invaluable guidance along the way. I am so grateful to work here!”

Building on Experience

Andy Bacon of The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc., in Washington, is another BSC success story. One of two district managers, he oversees three stores operated by the Lighthouse at nearby Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

A California native who relocated to Washington when he was just nine months old, Bacon lost his eyesight at age 39 as a complication of high blood pressure. The Washington State Department of Services for the Blind referred him to the Lighthouse.

Bacon, who had some previous retail and administrative experience working in an auto parts store, was hired for an assistant manager’s position in the Lewis-McChord BSC. His retail skills, ability to work with all types of people, and willingness to go the extra mile helped propel him through the ranks to store manager and then district manager.

He says participation in NIB’s Business Management Training program in 2010 helped make him a better manager. “My experience with the NIB program was invaluable in helping me become more comfortable as a public speaker, more adept at networking, and being able to look at new ways to tackle problems,” he says.

The ability to think outside the box is serving Bacon well during the COVID-19 pandemic. “Like everyone else, we have special challenges in dealing with the coronavirus,” he says. “For example, to offset shortages of things like liquid soap, we were able to find spray products that served the same purpose.”

Noting that the BSC program has opened doors for many people who are blind or visually impaired, he says “BSCs have furnished a fantastic on-the-job educational experience for those of us who are blind or low vision because we can learn from each other, share ideas, and develop additional skills.”

Developing a sense of fellowship with the military personnel BSC employees serve is another strong asset of the program, Bacon says, citing pre-pandemic beepball games between his team and area soldiers. He is looking forward to the opening of the agency’s new AbilityOne Base Supply Center in Seattle early next year, which will serve members of the United States Coast Guard.

Growing Into a Career

For Shannon Fayle of Arizona, the BSC program provided a lifeline to gainful employment when other jobs were unavailable due to her vision and hearing impairments.

A native of Idaho Falls, Idaho, Fayle hoped to pursue opportunities in criminal justice or veterinary technology when she moved to Arizona, but vision loss made that difficult. Instead, she found work washing dishes and bagging groceries before going through vocational rehabilitation and finding a job at the BSC operated by Arizona Industries for the Blind (AIB) at Luke Air Force Base.

As a customer service specialist, Fayle assists military personnel and federal employees, performing tasks from answering questions to ringing up sales at the cash register and ensuring back orders are filled. In addition, she excels at merchandising and has played a major role in ensuring both the Luke BSC and the BSC at Yuma Marine Corps Air Station comply with best practices and AbilityOne® Program requirements. And she has trained personnel at all three AIB-operated BSCs on AbilityOne products and proper labeling of shelf tags.

As a result of her efforts, the agency recognized her as its Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year in 2018. “Winning the Employee of the Year award was huge,” she says. “It made me feel that I was accepted and acknowledged for my capabilities.”

Fayle appreciates the way managers not only treat employees who are blind with respect and appreciation, but actively seek out their opinions on day-to-day operations. “Employees are engaged with our managers and recognized as partners with a stake in the success of the overall operation.”

When the Washington State Department of Services for the Blind referred Andy Bacon to the Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc., in Seattle, he already had some retail and administrative experience. Hired for an assistant manager position at the BSC at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, he quickly moved up the ranks to become a district manager for the BSC program.
Fayle and her co-workers have kept busy meeting the challenges posed by the coronavirus. “We’ve been actively involved in supplying the base with all their COVID needs, as well as working with Wing Command on product lines and availability issues,” she explains. To ensure safety, all store employees wear masks at work, routinely sanitize registers and doors, and practice social distancing.

Looking to the future, Fayle says she would like to help NIB create platforms that are even more user-friendly for associates who are blind. “My own philosophy is you always look for ways you can improve and work at being as independent as you possibly can while challenging yourself.”

Regaining Self Respect
George Mason, a customer service representative at the very first BSC, opened at Fort Bragg in 1995, commends the program for its support of the military and for the critical role it plays in helping people who are visually impaired take pride in themselves and the work they do.

“The BSC program has helped me regain my self-respect and my dignity,” he says.

In fact, it was after seeing employees who are visually impaired working at the store operated by NIB associated agency LCI that Mason became convinced it could be the right career move for him too.

A Mississippi native who grew up in Chicago, he worked as a certified nursing assistant for 18 years until deteriorating eyesight forced him to stop. Researching new employment opportunities, Mason came across an agency called Services for the Blind and submitted an application “hoping that they could help me find a job,” he recalls.

When he received a call asking if he’d be interested in a customer service position at the LCI store at Fort Bragg, Mason said yes and toured the facility.

“I was very impressed right from the start when I saw people like me, with visual impairments, running the registers, stocking shelves, and even working in the warehouse,” he says. “I had hope for the first time in a long time.”

Offered a position in April 2011, he has been with the BSC ever since, performing day-to-day activities that include greeting customers and directing them to needed products, loading purchases in vehicles, and everything in between.

Mason’s reliability and hard work led to a position in the operation’s warehouse, where he receives freight and processes special orders. “I’ve been an Employee of the Month and feel that I have earned the respect of my colleagues and management,” he says. “We have a real sense of teamwork here, where we all support each other for the good of the mission.”

That ability to come together and work as a team has been a big factor in coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. “Our BSC takes action on a daily basis to fight the coronavirus,” he maintains. “We practice the three Ws: wear face coverings, wait six feet apart, and wash our hands often.”

The store’s counters, registers, and shopping carts, as well as its break room and rest areas, are cleaned several times each day.

Looking to the future, he expresses the hope of advancing within the organization. “I am so fortunate to work for a place that doesn’t define me by my disability and instead rewards hard work,” he says.

Dominic Calabrese, a freelance writer, professor, and consultant in Columbia, South Carolina, previously served as senior vice president, public relations, at The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired.

Unable to find anything but unskilled jobs due to failing eyesight, Shannon Fayle was referred to the BSC at Luke Air Force Base operated by Arizona Industries for the Blind after completing vocational rehabilitation and training. A customer service specialist, she has also played a major role in merchandising for all three BSCs operated by the agency.

LCI employee George Mason says when he witnessed people who are visually impaired working in the BSC at Fort Bragg “I had hope for the first time in a long time.”
10 YEARS AND COUNTING

The AbilityOne Contract Management Support Program helps people who are blind launch professional careers while saving taxpayers’ money.

BY ROSEMARIE LALLY, J.D.

As its 10th anniversary approaches, the AbilityOne Contract Management Support (CMS) program continues to thrive and expand, offering professional employment to people who are blind or have significant disabilities while providing an invaluable service to the Department of Defense (DOD) and other federal agencies.

The program’s roots go back to 2008, when DOD needed specialists to close out a backlog of contracts and National Industries for the Blind (NIB) was working to develop upwardly mobile career opportunities for people who are blind. Launched in late 2009 as a nine-month pilot program to train people who are blind to close out DOD contracts, the CMS pilot — carried out by NIB associated nonprofit agencies VisionCorps in Philadelphia and San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind in Texas — quickly proved a success.

In June 2010 CMS services were added to the AbilityOne Procurement List.

Soon DOD signed a five-year indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity contract with NIB as the prime contractor and manager of the AbilityOne CMS program.

Ten years and more than 750,000 contracts later, the CMS program continues to change lives as people employed in the program become trusted partners of DOD and other federal agencies.

Today, nine NIB associated agencies participate in the CMS program, which currently employs 166 people, says Wallace Neal, NIB senior program manager for CMS. Of these employees, 112 are blind, 17 are service-disabled veterans, and eight are wounded warriors. Even more encouraging, many CMS professionals have been hired by government and private employers.

CMS Basic Training

The CMS training program is open to U.S. citizens who are blind, legally blind, or have significant disabilities; have a four-year college degree or equivalent work experience; and are proficient in using assistive technology such as screen readers and magnification applications. Through an agreement with DOD’s Defense Acquisition University (DAU), participants in the CMS training program complete five online business courses totaling nearly 80 hours of instruction. Additional training and networking opportunities are available to participants through NIB’s partnership with the National Contract Management Association, which provides memberships to CMS team members.

Upon completion of training, NIB works closely with participants to help them find contract closeout positions, but finding employment hasn’t been a problem, Neal says, as the high-caliber work accomplished by CMS specialists is well-known. “I used to have to sell people on the program,” he said, “but that’s the last thing I have to do now. Federal
agencies are completely onboard; they just want to know how quickly we can close out their contracts.”

Usually working in teams composed of a clerk, three closeout specialists, and a supervisor, CMS employees review open federal contracts, verify government receipt and acceptance, identify funds that should be de-obligated and returned to the government, scan and index contract documents, and deliver completed, ready-to-close packages to federal agencies.

The program’s numbers are impressive: Since September 2010, AbilityOne CMS specialists have closed out more than 460,000 contracts with a 99.65% quality rating and identified more than $2.6 billion in funds to be de-obligated and returned to the general fund. “This program actually pays for itself,” says Billy Parker, NIB program director for employment support services.

**Professional Career Paths**

As impressive as the cost savings and efficient, timely closeout of contracts is the program’s proven ability to offer professional jobs and opportunities for career growth. “CMS is designed to provide a professional career path with real potential for people who are blind;” Parker notes. “It provides the building blocks for an individual’s trajectory to advancement.”

“The program’s most valuable achievement is giving people who are blind a sense of independence again,” Neal says. “Everyone wants to contribute and make their own way. Many CMS employees were employed before they became blind and this puts them back on track to be independent again.”

Annamarie Parker, a pilot program alumna currently employed at VisionCorps in Philadelphia, agrees. In 2009, she had 17 years of experience in procurement but no college degree and no job because of her increasing vision problems. A friend introduced her to NIB’s Parker, who told her about the upcoming pilot. “As soon as I heard about it, I knew I could do it,” she recalls. “I was so grateful for the opportunity,” she says. “It was the first time people didn’t judge me on my vision, but instead looked at what I could bring to the table.”

After finishing the DAU courses and training for a week in San Antonio, the pilot participants were assigned contracts at Fort Dix, New Jersey. “We proved we could do it and got follow-on contracts and more than 15 new clients,” Annamarie Parker says. Initially hired as a closeout specialist at VisionCorps, she was promoted to supervising and training other CMS employees and now supervises a five-member closeout team while working on completing her college degree.

What she enjoys most is teaching and sharing her knowledge with others, boosting their self-esteem in the process. “I tell my team members we can do this job as well as anyone — there’s nothing wrong with our brains, just our eyes. No one should be intimidated by the fact they haven’t done this work before, you just have to view it as a wonderful opportunity to learn skills you can take anywhere.”

**Feds Seek out CMS Talent**

As the capabilities of CMS employees have become more widely recognized by their federal counterparts, many agencies have sought them out for federal positions. “Some agencies have stated at the start of a contract that they plan to hire the whole CMS team directly once they gain experience with the project,” says Neal.

“It’s the people in the program doing the work on the ground who are responsible for its success,” he explains. “Their hard work, their willingness to learn the nuances of contracting, endear them to the federal employees they work with and lead the government to hire them.”

Billy Parker says well over 100 CMS program participants have been hired by federal and local government agencies, NIB, and private sector employers like Boeing, Northrop Grumman, and BAE Systems “We’ve had some real successes here, with

**CMS PERFORMANCE METRICS**

*as of August 31, 2020

- Contracts Received: 786,033
- Sent to Contracting Officer for Signature: 460,439
- Total De-obligations Identified: $2.6 BILLION
- Images Scanned: $9.8 MILLION
- Quality Rating: 99.65%
After a successful pilot program, contract management support was added to the procurement list in 2010 and took off. To date, more than 750,000 contracts have been received for processing in just 10 years.

many promotions. There’s so much room for upward mobility.”

Scott Collins is a CMS professional hired at NIB. Collins, who has retinitis pigmentosa (RP), began looking for a career change in his early thirties. A professional swim coach and sporting goods store manager, he realized he needed an office job due to his declining vision and pursued federal jobs for nearly a year with no luck. His perseverance paid off when he met Billy Parker at a job fair for people who are blind or visually impaired and learned of the CMS program. He enrolled in the DAU classes and, upon completing training, was offered a position with Virginia Industries for the Blind. But a year-long delay in obtaining a security clearance forced him to renew his job search and he ultimately was hired by Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind to work on closeout services for the National Institutes of Health (NIH). After three weeks on the NIH contract Collins was promoted and moved to Ft. Meade, Maryland, for a 14-month stint. His exemplary performance soon led to a position at NIB as an associate contract administrator.

Less than two years later, Collins was promoted to contract administrator at NIB. He now develops pricing for closeout team costs and submits team metrics to the U.S. AbilityOne Commission®, “Doors are always opening at NIB,” he says. “They’re interested in promoting people who put in the time and effort.”

Collins stresses that there’s no one-size-fits-all approach. “Some closeout specialists stay in that position for 10 years and are perfectly happy; others want to move up the ladder,” he notes. “It’s all a personal choice.”

When Collins’ 6-year-old daughter asked how he does his work with reduced vision, he brought her and her younger brother to his office to show them the assistive technology he uses. It was a proud moment.

“I’m a very lucky person and it all comes back to CMS. You can learn and succeed with very little previous experience if you want to work hard and have the right mind set,” Collins says. “I’m not judged here. I don’t have to make excuses for my vision, hide anything, or feel second-rate. Coworkers are supportive, assistive tech is provided that allows me to do my work — it just takes all those fears away. I love working here.”

Although government employment was his original goal, Collins is now more interested in helping people like himself. “Working here at NIB is like coming full circle in helping others,” he says. “It makes me feel good and I’m proud of what I do.”

Rapid Success Leads to Expansion

Although the CMS program has grown quickly, creating many new jobs for college graduates who are blind or visually impaired, NIB’s Parker hopes to see it expand to more federal agencies. “Once federal employers see a CMS team in action, they’re excited to support the program,” he says.

One example is Thomas D. Robinson, the retiring director of contracting for the Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, who was appointed to the U.S. AbilityOne Commission in 2013 and just completed a term as chairperson. He became a proponent within the Air Force after learning about the program and its results.

“Thanks to Mr. Robinson’s support, we have close out specialists working on Air Force contracts in multiple locations across the country,” says NIB’s Parker. “The largest team is based at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, and several have transitioned to positions with the federal government.”

NIB also would like to provide greater opportunities by expanding the program’s scope to include pre- and post-award contract work. Carolyn Madison, director of the CMS program for VisionCorps, shares that vision. The agency is pursuing a strategic plan to expand to serve all contract administration needs, including invoice reconciliation and pre- and post-award processes, she says.

Madison’s CMS staff has grown from 12 employees in 2016 to 53 in 2020. With offices in Philadelphia; Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania; Washington, D.C.; and Bedford, Massachusetts, VisionCorps has 6,424 contracts in process, the largest with the Army Intelligence and Security Command and the Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA). VisionCorps’ superior output led to follow-on contracts from DOD and the Department of Commerce, Madison says.

“I think of the CMS program as a launching pad to other opportunities,” she says. “We want to provide the skills that make people who are blind or visually impaired competitive in the marketplace.”
To this end, she conducts training in pre-award processes, such as putting together solicitations, requests for quote, or requests for proposal, to make sure her staff members are fully equipped to compete in the job market. “Our folks have been so successful in getting jobs because they can address the pre-award process.”

Retired Army Lt. Col. Jack Bednar, site manager of the Virginia Industries for the Blind (VIB) CMS program at DCMA in Chester, Virginia, tells a similar story of growth and expansion. VIB’s program started with nine employees in September 2014 and has grown to 55 positions supported by VIB in Chester and VisionCorps in Philadelphia, he said. VIB closes an average of 350 contracts each month.

Bednar credited the program’s success to employees’ dedication and teamwork. “We’re like a family and we support each other like family,” he says. “These people are contributing and involved. There’s no one I’ve met here who doesn’t want to work hard and be successful.”

Some participants have become first-time homeowners and others have met their spouses on the job, he says. “This program gives people purpose and helps them build a good life.”

Noting that “permanent employment is the goal,” Bednar says DCMA has hired 11 CMS employees into professional federal positions over the past five years.

Recruitment a Constant Effort
“Recruitment is the hardest piece,” Bednar said, noting that VIB’s efforts include a permanent announcement on Virginia’s state employment website. Other program managers and participants agree that identifying and recruiting eligible candidates is one of the biggest challenges facing the program.

Building awareness of the program is the first hurdle, as many college graduates who are blind are unfamiliar with CMS. Collins says NIB is working “to build a pipeline to place college grads in knowledge-based work.”

“NIB has an incredible recruitment database,” Madison notes, adding the best recruiting tool seems to be word of mouth. “People who’ve gone through the program are ‘walking billboards,’ the best advertisement we could possibly ask for.”

Collins is proof of that — he recruited his brother, Jim, who also has RP, into the CMS program after Jim lost his job as an accountant due to diminishing eyesight. After an unsuccessful seven-month job hunt, Jim contacted NIB and was connected with Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI), which hired him for a contract with the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) in Richmond, Virginia.

After completing the DAU training, Jim began work with CABVI in February 2018. Six months later he was hired by DLA for a GS-9 post-award contract specialist position. Since then, he has moved up to a GS-11 role and anticipates another promotion in the coming year.

Jim says the CMS program was crucial to his success. “It gave me the opportunity to get my foot in the door. The people are so supportive. It was just a breath of fresh air after all those months of job hunting, to suddenly feel like ‘Oh, this is going to work, I can do this.’ ”

As more federal contract officers become familiar with CMS employees and their outstanding work product, government hiring of program participants will become more common. Recruiting new participants to fill the positions of those hired away remains a constant effort, but it’s a sign to NIB and its associated agencies that the program is working as it should.

“I like to think we’re assisting people to reach their goals,” says Madison. “Every time one of my contract specialists comes in to tell me they’ve found a job outside our agency, you’d think I was the proud mother! That’s the most satisfying success in this program.”

Rosemarie Lally, J.D. is a freelance writer and editor based in Washington D.C.
PANDEMIC CHALLENGES LEAD TO EXPANDED SERVICES

Embracing innovative approaches extends the reach of NIB associated nonprofit agencies’ critical community support programs.

BY ROSEMARIE LALLY, J.D.

The COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying restrictions on personal interactions have been difficult for everyone, but they can be especially difficult for people who are blind, who often rely on their sense of touch and may feel particularly isolated. NIB associated nonprofit agencies are developing innovative ways to meet the challenge, using creativity to restructure and continue delivering community services they know are critical to their clients’ well-being.

Reaching Across the Globe

The LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired in San Francisco has long offered a full slate of community support services ranging from health and wellness programs and orientation and mobility classes to a forum for discussing the day-to-day challenges of blindness. While COVID-19 concerns have required some reimagining of how best to provide services, they haven’t diminished the agency’s commitment.

“Staying in touch with those in the community who depend on our services is critical, so we’ve come up with creative solutions for providing virtual services,” Director of Community Services Anthony Fletcher says.

The LightHouse’s comprehensive health and wellness program — which includes yoga classes, guided meditation sessions, and an “Optimal Health, Optimal You” class in which participants set weekly health goals to “stay fit and fierce” — is now offered virtually using Zoom and other apps. A six-week orientation and mobility program, formerly offered in-person, now prepares participants to travel independently through online training using GPS and tactile maps, or “TMAPs,” created by the LightHouse.

Similar changes were made to deliver other programs in a virtual format: Adaptive technology training with one-on-one instruction is now provided online; a “Tech Together” support group meets weekly through Zoom to share information and tips on new platforms and apps; and “The Business of Blindness,” formerly offered as a weekly coffee hour at the LightHouse’s downtown offices, is now a phone chat focusing on advocacy, politics, and history.

Throughout the pandemic, the LightHouse has also continued its vibrant community outreach programs for young people. The Youth Employment Services Academy, a summer program designed to help teenagers and young adults learn independent living skills to transition to post-secondary opportunities, connects student-interns with mentors who are blind or visually impaired. The immersive four-week, in-person program morphed into a six-week program to compensate for the loss of hands-on experiences during the pandemic.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for LightHouse youth programs was cancellation of its Enchanted Hills Camp, which regularly hosts more than 600 campers and their families for one-week sessions throughout the summer. To overcome the setback, LightHouse introduced “Virtual Campfire” Zoom Alphapointe’s new online learning platform hosts opportunities for students who are blind or visually impaired, their parents, and vision loss professionals.
meetings on Saturday evenings and held week-long online camps, enabling people around the globe to share the fun.

Other social and educational services that have continued as virtual offerings include movie nights, trivia contests, and board games. Video updates about wildlife at Enchanted Hills and efforts to rebuild a portion of the camp lost to the 2017 wildfires are shared with viewers. A four-part Zoom series offers virtual concerts performed by people from all over the country who are blind or visually impaired.

In many cases, the move to virtual programming has helped the agency reach more people, Fletcher says, citing its leadership training for youth camp counselors, which has trained a larger number of counselors online.

“Our philosophy is: ‘Whatever you were doing, find a way to keep doing it.’ We’ve extended our reach to so many additional people in the virtual sphere, reaching thousands with our concerts and campfires. Although the LightHouse is really looking forward to meeting with our students face to face again — it will still be our first choice — virtual programming is here to stay,” Fletcher says. “We’ll be continuing virtual campfires, concerts, talent shows, independent living skills training, and other online presentations.”

New Learning Platform Developed
Rehabilitation and educational programs offered by Alphapointe, headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri, also have pivoted to virtual services, according to Senior Manager of Public Policy Scott Thornhill. “We’re working to identify new gaps in our services, especially those for children and senior citizens,” he explains.

The agency recently launched Infopointe, a new online learning platform that hosts opportunities for students who are blind and visually impaired, their parents, and vision loss professionals. One well-received example is “Expanded Core Curriculum Thursdays,” a nine-part webinar series that presents sessions on compensatory skills, orientation and mobility, social interaction, independent living, recreation and leisure, sensory efficiency, assistive technology, career education, and self-determination. Additional sessions focus on the rights of students with disabilities and preparing for online job interviews.

The Infopointe platform also provides informative weekly sessions on topics such as resumé building, social distancing, and using public transportation during the pandemic. Since late spring, the platform has facilitated the provision of rehabilitation and education programs to 650 individuals, with sessions available for replay on the Alphapointe YouTube channel.

“We lacked this reach before, but with virtual programs we’ve got people from as far away as Alaska attending our webinars,” he explains. “Vocational rehabilitation therapists, occupational therapists, counselors, and teachers of the visually impaired are using our webinars as part of their curriculum.”

Adopting virtual solutions has resulted in unanticipated benefits as well. A new telemedicine program for seniors that offers assistance with activities of daily living, including cooking, laundry, and taking medications, has allowed therapists to continue providing Independent Living Assessments virtually. The result: Occupational therapists and other professional instructors served more than 300 senior citizens by phone or through virtual services since mid-March, Thornhill says.

“The question now is how can we take what we’ve created and learned forward after the pandemic is over?” Thornhill says. “Our mission is to empower people who are blind through employment and opportunities for personal development, and we want to keep that at the core of everything we do, including virtual services, as we expand the number of people we serve.”

In the post-pandemic world, Alphapointe plans to continue using Infopointe to disseminate information, and telemedicine to deliver services in a time-efficient manner, he says. “Our clients consider us essential — their needs are too important for us not to continue to find new ways to provide services.”

Although many services have moved online, Chris Ament of VisionCorps provides socially distanced orientation and mobility training in person.

Since late spring, the Infopointe platform has facilitated rehabilitation and education programs for 650 people who are blind or visually impaired.
Adaptability Boosts Options

“The pandemic has taught us to be adaptable and to go with the changes as we’ve adapted to governmental recommendations,” says Chris Ament, vice president of rehabilitation and education for VisionCorps, located in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. “Our primary concern is the safety of our team and our clients.”

While some face-to-face interactions are still necessary, such as taking clients with limited transportation options to medical appointments or grocery shopping, converting most in-person services to virtual platforms has allowed the agency to serve more people in a larger geographic area while keeping staff and clients safe, Ament says. Noting that 290 individuals were served in July alone, Ament says many online programs implemented in response to the pandemic are proving to be highly efficient means of delivering services to even more people. For example, occupational therapy services, in which a therapist assesses a client’s home environment and suggests minor modifications to make day-to-day tasks safer and easier, were easily adapted to an online format. VisionCorps plans to continue providing these services online after the pandemic.

Support groups hosted by the agency on topics such as technology, low vision aids, medication management, and self-advocacy are similarly expanding their reach. “Now that we’ve gone virtual we are able to serve more clients in this setting with fewer resources,” Ament says. Weekly meetings of its “Mobility Motivation” group and a book group also are available online.

Successful online services for children include a program that delivers materials to children’s homes, allowing them to work on art projects. They consult one-on-one online with instructors throughout the project and share their completed artwork with each other online.

Amanda Hardman’s 3-year-old son, Cole, has participated in VisionCorps programs since he was three months old. Since the pandemic, at-home visits with his vision specialist have transitioned to virtual sessions using an iPad to work on letter and number recognition through puzzles and Play-doh to learn shapes. Cole also does work with his parents, most recently enjoying an assigned sensory activity — playing with sand on his beach vacation.

“The pandemic has affected so many things, but luckily a 3-year-old adapts easily to change,” Hardman says. “VisionCorps was creative in responding, so it hasn’t affected their ability to provide vision services to Cole.”

“The pandemic has really increased the feeling of isolation for a lot of people who are blind because so much of what is out there is inaccessible to our clientele,” explains Ament. “The biggest strength of virtual programs is that they foster the feeling of belonging to a community, so our clients don’t feel like they’re in this alone.”

VisionCorps is reaching out to the 1,600 clients in its database to let them know that the agency is there for them. “Just receiving an email helps people feel less isolated,” explains Vice President and Chief Development Officer Megan Tomsheck. The agency’s rehabilitation team provides information on how to videoconference with family or stay safe on public transportation and also is creating a new online program to discuss the pros and cons of guide dogs. “We’re trying to educate our community on what we can do for them,” Tomsheck says. Virtual meetings of service clubs, like the Lions, allow agency representatives to spread the word to a larger audience.

“Your world shrinks quite a bit when you have vision loss later in life,” Bill McCahan, a retired teacher and VisionCorps client says. “Connection with others going through similar challenges is so important.”

The quick adoption by NIB associated agencies of online platforms for service delivery have helped continue the connection that is so critical to a sense of community, despite the pandemic. “The world will be different when this is all over,” McCahan says, “but we’re resilient and we can change with it.”

Rosemarie Lally, J.D. is a freelance writer and editor based in Washington D.C.
TECH CORNER

BARD MOBILE: 
THE LIBRARY 
OF CONGRESS 
IN YOUR 
SMARTPHONE

BY DOUG GOIST

For many, the long pandemic of 2020 has resulted in significant Zoom, social media, Netflix, and other remote technology fatigue. For avid readers who are blind or visually impaired, however, the nationwide shutdowns are providing time to rediscover the value of remote access to tens of thousands of best-selling Braille and talking books and magazines.

The U.S. Library of Congress National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) program, a longtime free service for Americans with disabilities living both in the U.S. and abroad, has rapidly caught up with today’s technology-driven culture.

Its original 1970s-era large talking books discs (think vinyl LPs) morphed into 80s- and 90s-era four-track audio cassette tapes and, in the 2000s, became digitized into small cartridges played on a much-improved but still bulky proprietary digital NLS talking book player.

With the emergence of smartphones like the Apple iPhone in 2007, NLS talking books and magazines for the first time became available for download to smart devices through the Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) Mobile app for iOS and Android.

In this economically difficult year for many Americans, cost-cutting is rising on the priorities list — and this can be doubly true for people who are blind, who may find a monthly subscription to Audible books becoming a luxury item behind rent, food, and other bills.

That is where the true value of the NLS program lies for many of us with a print disability. Available through local libraries, signing up for the NLS Braille and Talking Books program is a simple and straightforward process. Once approved, applicants can immediately begin accessing everything from Consumer Reports, The Economist, People, and Rolling Stone to tens of thousands of unabridged bestselling books and novels.

Here the BARD mobile app really shines. With just a few finger swipes and taps, BARD Mobile users can instantly download titles to their phones and tablets. The interface is very accessible and intuitive; books can be searched by title, author name, and/or ISBN number. A simple double-tap adds desired books or magazines to your “Wish List,” and, depending on the speed of your wi-fi or cellular connection, downloads it to your device in less than a minute with an audible doorbell chime to let you know the title is on your “Bookshelf.”

Virtual bookmarks can be inserted on desired pages; you can speed up and slow down the human readers — all of whom are professionally trained and highly skilled volunteers — and enjoy unabridged content to your heart’s content, including descriptions of photo captions and charts, and reference materials such as glossaries.

Braille readers are also supported, as NLS has content available in digital Braille Ready Format (BRF) allowing readers to access them through their chosen braille displays.

So, while the coronavirus pandemic has unquestionably been a dark cloud in our daily lives, for those of us with print disabilities, the rediscovery and appreciation of the free NLS BARD Mobile and Online program is something of a silver lining and welcome mental escape from today’s difficult reality. To apply to the NLS program, visit the NLS home page at www.loc.gov/nls/, click on Enrollment and Equipment, then Register for BARD and Get BARD Mobile. Or call the NLS toll-free number at 1-800-NLS-READ for more information on how to apply through your local library.

Doug Goist is program manager, workforce development/services technology 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.
MAKING THEMSELVES KNOWN

With 450 employees, the Austin Lighthouse is a fairly large employer that until recently was also one of the city’s best kept secrets. Its response to the COVID-19 pandemic is changing all that.

BY SHARON HARRIGAN

Founded in 1934, the Travis Association for the Blind in Austin, Texas, more commonly known as the Austin Lighthouse, has a long history in the city. But if you ask President and CEO Jim Meehan, the first thing he usually hears after giving visitors a tour of their facilities is “We had no idea you were here.”

“We have 450 employees, 250 of whom are blind or visually impaired. That makes us a pretty big employer in the city, yet most people in the community don’t know we’re here,” he says. But the NIB associated nonprofit agency’s secret may be out after an impressive response to the COVID-19 crisis that includes making and donating nearly 5,000 cloth face masks to area nonprofits.

Humble Beginnings

When the Lighthouse doors first opened in downtown Austin, people from the city and surrounding county who were blind or visually impaired canned peaches and worked at looms to weave mats that were sold door-to-door. During World War II, they began making deck mops for the U.S. Navy and cotton web belts for the military that are still manufactured today.

It continued to grow and diversify, and by the 1970s, The Lighthouse was also manufacturing machine gun slings, cargo tie-down straps, binders, and bottled lotion soaps and shampoo, among other things.

As manufacturing increased over the years, the mission expanded to include education and training as well. Today, the Lighthouse offers tuition-free training and education services to help individuals who are blind or visually impaired learn how to live independently and safely navigate the world.

Its robust vocational services division offers training in job readiness skills, including learning technical skills on the computer, how to write effective cover letters and resumés, and workshops on effective interviewing techniques. A mentoring program teaches participants how to conduct online job searches and how to apply for jobs. Other training services include courses on assistive technologies such as JAWS and ZoomText.

These services help people who are blind find jobs outside of the
Lighthouse, says Training Manager Thomas Stivers, who lost his sight at age 14. “Since I’ve been here, I’ve seen a lot of people come into the company, learn something valuable, and then move on outside the company,” he says. “One of the things I value most about working here is that being blind doesn’t make me special or unique. It just makes me a normal employee, a colleague.”

The Lighthouse, says Stivers, is all about creating opportunity. “I think I’ll probably be here for a while. It depends. I mean it depends how long Jim stays before I can move into his job,” he says with a laugh.

**Staying True to Its Mission**

The Lighthouse has never forgotten its core mission to provide employment for Texans who are blind or visually impaired. Continuing to diversify its offerings has helped grow its workforce to the size it is today.

In 1996, the Lighthouse moved into the warehousing and distribution business when it entered a contract to store and distribute trouser belts for the military. The warehouse and distribution arm grew exponentially over the years and has required moves to larger locations several times. Today, the Lighthouse operates its warehousing and distribution centers from nearly 1 million square feet of warehouse space, with two distribution centers holding more than 9,400 unique line items.

Under normal, non-pandemic circumstances, employees in the warehousing and distribution center process thousands of orders, receive an average of 10 truckloads of new merchandise, and ship out between 5,000-6,000 packages, all on a daily basis, says Meehan. It’s a huge operation, and one that Joe Perez, a warehouse specialist who lost his sight at age 56, is proud to be a part of.

“I’m really fortunate that this place is here for us, not only to give us a job, but to teach us skills that we can transfer to other jobs,” Perez says. “This job not only taught me how to work here, but I believe the skills I’ve learned here, I can take someplace else. This place is a blessing.”

The Lighthouse continues its tradition of manufacturing goods for the U.S. military, making more than 2.75 million apparel items each year. In addition, the agency produces cleaning supplies, sunscreen, and award plaques.

In highest demand during the coronavirus pandemic are the GOJO Purell hand sanitizers and soaps the agency makes for state and federal government customers. When the pandemic first hit, Meehan says the Lighthouse ramped up production of Purell products by 400 percent, increasing from 35,000 cases per month to 150,000 cases per month.

To accommodate the surge in demand, production in other areas of the facility was slowed and employees moved to the Purell lines. Nearly 100 employees are now working on the lines, which run 12 hours a day six days a week. Employees in the shipping department, he says, are working 12 hours a day seven days a week. In May, the agency shipped its 3 millionth bottle of hand sanitizer.

Helping the Community Stay Safe

Lighthouse Marketing Coordinator Brandye Lacy says she is most proud of the roughly 5,000 cloth face masks the agency has made and distributed throughout the Austin community in response to COVID-19.

“When the pandemic hit, we wanted to do something so our employees, their families, and the greater community felt safer,” says Lacy. “We decided to make face masks and give them away.” In addition to employees, the agency has provided thousands of facemasks to area nonprofits including those serving children, the homeless, the elderly, and other vulnerable populations.

“We bought bolts and bolts of fabric from retailers in the area,” says Meehan, who notes that they were especially proud of the masks they made for the Texas School for the Deaf. “We made those with clear plastic windows in them so they could read lips,” he says.

“Most people don’t know we’re here, and when they do find out, they assume we must not be very sophisticated because there’s a lot of people who are blind working here,” says Meehan. “The assumption is that people who are blind can’t. Those are the kind of barriers we’re working to knock down, to let the community at large know that we’re here, we have capabilities and a diverse workforce, and that people who are blind CAN.”

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

READY TO LAUNCH

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

1. Dymo®/SKILCRAFT® Digital Shipping Scale
   The Dymo®/SKILCRAFT® Digital shipping scale with LCD screen provides accurate reading of shipping weights within 1/10 ounce and includes a tare function for measuring the weight of package contents. Scale with 25-pound capacity is compatible with Windows and Macintosh operating systems and can be powered via USB cable or three AAA batteries. Scale measures 1.8-inch x 8.3-inch x 9.2-inch. Produced by Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill of the Finger Lakes in Rochester, New York.

2. Dymo®/SKILCRAFT® Industrial Rhino™ Nylon Label Tape Cassette
   Label tags, panel markers, voice/data components, terminal blocks, wire, cables and more with the Dymo®/SKILCRAFT® Rhino™ 4200 industrial nylon label tape cassette and white nylon labels for use with portable hand-held thermal transfer labeling systems. UV, moisture, and chemical resistant for general use indoors or outdoors. TAA compliant, assembled in the U.S.A. Produced by Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill of the Finger Lakes in Rochester, New York.

3. SKILCRAFT® Privacy Shield® Privacy Filter Frame Made with 3M™ Materials
   Prevent visual hacking of data in every environment with the SKILCRAFT® Privacy Shield® Privacy Filter Frame. Quality 3M™ materials provide world class “black out” privacy — those directly in front of the monitor can view the screen with incredible image clarity, but when viewed from an angle, the screen appears dark. Lightweight filter is easy to remove for shared viewing with no damage to monitor. Custom cut for specific devices, be sure to confirm model and size before ordering. Produced by Beyond Vision in Milwaukee.

4. SKILCRAFT®/AVERY® Clean Edge® Business Cards
   Design and print your own premium business cards with ease with SKILCRAFT®/AVERY® Clean Edge® Business Cards. High-quality uncoated heavyweight cardstock optimized to produce sharp, clear text can be printed on both sides. Clean Edge technology ensures cards snap apart easily, leaving a smooth edge. Compatible with inkjet printers. Produced by North Central Sight Services in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

5. SKILCRAFT®/AVERY® Tent Cards
   Add a professional touch to conferences and events with SKILCRAFT®/AVERY® Tent Cards. Embossed tent cards made of premium heavyweight cardstock can be printed on both sides. Choose from two sizes, compatible with laser and inkjet printers. Produced by North Central Sight Services in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

6. SKILCRAFT®/AVERY® Adhesive Name Badges
   Create professional name badges for your next meeting or event with SKILCRAFT®/AVERY® Adhesive Name Badges that stick securely to fabric, yet remove cleanly. Unique peel-away design allows you to easily separate badges while the backing stays intact until ready to use. Safe for most fabrics; produced by North Central Sight Services in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

7. SKILCRAFT®/AVERY® Surface Safe® Sign Labels
   Maintain compliance and warning signs without breaking your budget with SKILCRAFT®/AVERY® Surface Safe® Sign Labels made of durable, professional-grade materials that stick securely, remove cleanly, and resist water and chemicals. Choose from four sizes compatible with laser and inkjet printers. Produced by North Central Sight Services in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

8. SKILCRAFT®/AVERY® Durable Self-Laminating ID Labels
   Create perfect laminated labels without bubbles or wrinkles with SKILCRAFT®/AVERY® Durable Self-Laminating ID Labels. Perfect for warehouse and storage environments, the UV-resistant material provides extra protection against water, scuffs, tears, and smudges. Permanent adhesive labels stick to a variety of surfaces, including metal, glass, and plastic. Available in two sizes; produced by North Central Sight Services in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.
9. SKILCRAFT® Clean All-Purpose Cleaner
Cut through grease, soap scum, food stains, and more with SKILCRAFT® Clean All-Purpose Cleaner. This EPA Safer Choice and USDA Bio Preferred-certified formula is ready-to-use and safe for all hard surfaces. Contains no VOCs, fragrance, or dyes. Produced by LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired in San Francisco.

10. Photoluminescent Products
Increase safety in smoky or dark environments with rechargeable photoluminescent products produced by Cincinnati Association for the Blind. Choose from helmet bands and grip wraps made of industrial-grade, high temperature-resistant silicone; photoluminescent signs and sign conversion kits that provide an immediately illuminated evacuation path; or adhesive labels and tapes to illuminate baseboards, stairwells, ladder beams, tools, railings, apparatus, and more. Charge with any light source (sun, artificial, or low light) to illuminate surroundings for hours. Made in the U.S.A.

11. SKILCRAFT® Lockout Tagout Safety Padlocks

12. SKILCRAFT® Lockout Tagout Fuse Blockout
Place SKILCRAFT® Lockout Tagout Fuse Blockout devices where fuses have been removed to prevent workplace accidents. Devices available in two capacities are made of durable plastic and accept one safety tag. The two-way device fits fuse sizes of 1/4, 9/32, 13/32, and 9/16 inch; the four-way device fits fuse sizes of 13/16 or 11/16 inch, and blade-type fuses. Six per package; produced by Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill of the Finger Lakes in Rochester, New York.

13. SKILCRAFT® Lockout Tagout Steering Wheel Cover
The SKILCRAFT® Lockout Tagout Steering Wheel Cover provides a clear warning with legend that reads “Danger Do Not Start or Move Vehicle.” Available in 16-, 20-, or 24-inch sizes with reinforced hole for padlocking cover to wheel. Produced by Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill of the Finger Lakes in Rochester, New York.

14. SKILCRAFT® Lockout Tagout Station, 12 Padlocks, Stocked Kit
SKILCRAFT® Lockout Tagout Stations provide easy access to locks, hasps, tags, and cable ties. Station measures 23 x 23 inches and can accommodate padlocks with 1.5- or 3-inch shackle length. Produced by Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill of the Finger Lakes in Rochester, New York.

15. SKILCRAFT® Lockout Tagout Station, 28 Padlocks, Stocked
SKILCRAFT® Lockout Tagout Stations provide the flexibility you need to build a comprehensive Lockout Tagout program. Station measures 23 x 23 inches; station boards accommodate padlocks with 1.5- or 3-inch shackle length. Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill of the Finger Lakes in Rochester, New York.

16. SKILCRAFT® Lockout Tagout Padlock Station Cabinet, Stocked
Help maintain safety standards with the SKILCRAFT® Lockout Tagout Padlock Station Cabinet. Metal cabinet for storing and organizing lockout devices can be used for portable storage or mounted to wall. Made in the U.S.A. Produced by Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill of the Finger Lakes in Rochester, New York.

17. SKILCRAFT® Lockout Tagout Station, Not Stocked
Provide easy access to locks, hasps, tags, and cable ties as well as other lockout devices with the SKILCRAFT® Lockout Tagout Station (not stocked). Refill the durable plastic and metal cabinet as often as needed; can be used for portable storage or mounted to wall. Made in the U.S.A. Produced by Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired-Goodwill of the Finger Lakes in Rochester, New York.

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 LAUNCHES NEW BUSINESS LEADERS PROGRAM OFFERING

NIB rolled out Business Essentials, a new training being offered through its Business Leaders Program, in August 2020. Designed for both business neophytes and the more experienced, Business Essentials builds greater understanding of the elements of business, decision-making, and entrepreneurship through online courses and a simulation.

Eight participants from six NIB associated nonprofit agencies and NIB successfully completed a pilot of the program in May 2020 and received credentialing badges from Credly/Acclaim. Participant ratings of the pilot inspired an enhancement — new precursor courses to better prepare students for work with the simulation.

CHECK OUT THE NEW CAREERSWITHVISION

American Printing House for the Blind (APH) has updated the CareersWithVision website to make it easier for jobseekers to find positions with NIB associated nonprofit agencies. A free service of NIB and APH, CareersWithVision specifically highlights job opportunities for people who are blind or visually impaired at NIB and NIB associated agencies nationwide.

The site also features the Job Seeker’s Toolkit, a free accessible, self-paced online training course that helps students and job seekers who are blind or visually impaired develop career exploration and job seeking skills. The Job Seeker’s Toolkit covers self-awareness, career exploration tools and resources, the preliminary employment process, the interview, and maintaining employment.

NYSPSP NAMES EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

The New York State Preferred Source Program for New Yorkers Who Are Blind (NYSPSP) recognized Patti Casciotti, a production services employee at the Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment (AVRE) as the program’s 2020 Employee of the Year on August 6. An avid learner willing to step into any role, Patti, who joined AVRE in January 2016, has ambitions to become a machine operator and eventual team leader.

Also nominated for the NYSPSP 2020 employee of the year award were Jagdeo Persaud, of Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany; Khadija Bari, of VISIONS in New York City; Kenneth Bailey, of Alphapointe in Richmond Hill; Richard McCines, of Southern Tier Association for the Visually Impaired in Elmira; Gary Paruta, of VIA in Buffalo; Richard Starfstein, of Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Rochester; and Joe Palmeri, of Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Utica.
NEW YORK AGENCY MARKS 30 YEAR PARTNERSHIP WITH 3M

This year, NIB associated nonprofit agency Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI)-Goodwill of the Finger Lakes, in Rochester, New York, is celebrating 30 years of working with 3M. Launched in 1990, the partnership was a first for an NIB associated agency and a private company.

Interested in producing self-stick notes for sale to federal government customers, ABVI sent a team to the 3M plant in Cynthiana, Kentucky, where Post-it® Notes are produced, to learn about the manufacturing process. 3M helped ABVI source the machines and the raw materials needed to produce the product and ABVI renovated a former knitting mill in Rochester to serve as the production facility. When the agency learned the only floor in the mill that could support the weight of the machinery was the basement, they went to work transforming it into a well-lit manufacturing space.

Over the years, the partnership that started with three products has grown to encompass 37 different products. Beyond the basic yellow note, ABVI now manufactures easel pads, flags, and page markers in many different colors and sizes, all in packaging that reads “Created by Americans who are blind using quality 3M materials.”

The relationship with NIB has grown beyond ABVI and self-stick notes. Nearly a dozen other NIB associated agencies now have products co-branded or made with quality 3M materials that run the gamut from office supplies and food service and operating supplies, to JanSan and safety products.

“Once 3M committed to working with the program, they were all in. We couldn’t have asked for a better partner. And that has continued on with the other product lines we have been able to work with 3M to bring in,” says NIB President and CEO Kevin Lynch, who notes the success of the alliance paved the way for NIB to develop co-brands with industry-leading companies such as Avery, Zebra Pen, GOJO, Diversey, Spartan Chemical, and others.

Along the way, the partnership also led to the creation of hundreds of good-paying jobs for people who are blind.

“This partnership has changed the lives of hundreds and hundreds of people and altered the destiny of the organization,” says Dr. Gidget Hopf, who recently retired as president and CEO of ABVI. “It clearly would not have been possible without this partnership. 3M made us who we are today,” said.

NEW DIRECTOR TAKES THE REINS AT DEFENSE COMMISARY AGENCY

Growing the customer base for military commissaries, especially among a younger generation of eligible service members and their families, is a top priority for William Moore, the new director and chief executive officer of the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA). In August, Moore took the reins of the global agency, which has annual sales approaching $5 billion and employs more than 13,000 people at nearly 240 commissaries.

In an August 31 meeting with DeCA senior staff Moore noted that in the pandemic environment, delivering the commissary benefit presents challenges that go beyond providing annual savings of more than 23 percent to military members, their families, retirees, and disabled vets.

“Obviously, we want to maintain safety first, especially in a COVID environment,” he said. “The most important thing we do — really our purpose — is delivering the benefit as efficiently as we can.”

ABVI employee Sam Davis assembles SKILCRAFT self-stick flags, one of 12 different self-stick flags in the SKILCRAFT self-stick portfolio made with 3M materials.

PREVIOUS PAGE NEXT PAGE
Find your next career move!

The all new CareersWithVision site includes everything from a job seeker’s toolkit to NIB agency job openings and recruiting events for people who are blind or visually impaired.

Find your next career move at aphcareerconnect.org