



2025 SPRING NCSAB CONFERENCE

Conference Theme: "How to Thrive and Strive in 2025"

Hyatt Regency Bethesda

One Bethesda Metro Center

7400 Wisconsin Ave, Bethesda, MD 20814

APRIL 9 – 11, 2025

Agenda

(Subject to Change)

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025

- 8:00 am** NCSAB Exhibit Hall *(Regency Foyer)*.
NCSAB Registration *(Regency Foyer)*.
- 9:00 am** CSAVR / NCSAB General Session #5 – Navigating Order of Selection in VR: Balancing Financial Pressures, Regulatory Compliance, and Service Demand. *(Hyatt Regency Ballroom)*.
Presenters:
- **Theresa Koleszar, Director, IN-C**
 - **Carol Pankow, Project Director, VR-TA-QM**
 - **Melissa Diehl, Program Manager, GWU**
- 10:00 am** **Networking Break.** *Use this opportunity to network with peers and visit exhibits highlighting tools, technology, and services.*
- 10:30 am** CSAVR/NCSAB General Session #6 – RSA Update: Supporting Your Success. *(Hyatt Regency Ballroom)*.
Presenters:
- **Chris Pope, Acting Commissioner, U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration**



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- ***Ashley Brizzo, Training & Service Programs Division, U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration***
- ***Michael Quinn, Chief, Data collection & Analysis Unit, U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration***

11:30 am CSAVR Closing Session.

11:45 am CSAVR Adjourns.

Lunch (*On Your Own*).

1:30 pm – 1:45 pm **NCSAB Opening, Welcome and Meet the New State Directors.** (*Regency Ballroom III/IV*). Join us for our opening welcome session, where we recognize new state directors and attendees and get a conference overview.
Presenter: Dorothy Young, Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services and NCSAB President

1:45 pm to 2:15 pm **RSA Updates.** (*Regency Ballroom III/IV*). Mr. Quinn will share recent updates regarding the performance assessment of vocational rehabilitation programs. He will also share observations from RSA-911 data regarding services to individuals with blindness or low vision. Moderated by President Dorothy Young
Presenter: Michael Quinn, Chief, Data Collection and Analysis Unit, U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration



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- 2:15 pm – 3:00 pm** **Policy Update.** *(Regency Ballroom III/IV). A comprehensive update on federal policies, legislative developments, and efforts impacting vocational rehabilitation and services for individuals who are blind or have low vision. Moderated by President Dorothy Young*
Presenter: Catriona Macdonald, President, Linchpin Strategies
- 3:00 pm – 4:00 pm** **Kids Like Me Bookshelf: Using Generative AI and Real-Life Models to Boost Self-Determination in Transition-Age Clients (NIDILRR).** *(Regency Ballroom III/IV). In this session, we'll introduce the NIDILRR funded "Kids Like Me Bookshelf" (KLMB) and share how it is transforming self-determination skills among BVI teens and young adults. We'll explore how the program showcases stories from luminaries and how teens report feeling more confident. We'll then unveil a new web-based tool that can be used to craft stories. Moderated by President Dorothy Young*
Presenter: Marty Schultz, President, ObjectiveEd
- 4:00 pm – 5:00 pm** **NCSAB Breakout Sessions:**
Breakout Room 1 – Transition & Employment (Old Georgetown Room on Meeting Room Level)
Session Title: Oklahoma BEST-STEP. *Oklahoma Rehabilitation Services' Building Employment Skills for Today and Summer Transition Employment Program (BEST-STEP) helps youth with disabilities ages 16-21 years gain meaningful summer work experience, while improving employment readiness skills. Learn more about this five-week, two-part career planning and paid on-the-job free summer job training program. Moderated by Tracy Brigham.*
Presenter: Renee Sansom Briscoe, Transition Coordinator, Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services



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Breakout Room 2 – Technology & Independent Living (Cabinet/Judiciary on Meeting Room Level)

Session Title: Technology: Using AI for Agency Staff

Join this session to learn how the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind is using Artificial Intelligence. They will share how agency staff are using an AI service to enhance their work. The session will conclude with a discussion about how AI products are being used by blind and low vision participants for employment and independent living tasks. Moderated by Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes

Presenters:

- ***John Oliveira, Commissioner, Massachusetts Commission for the Blind***
- ***Sven Akerman Jr., Modern Technology Executive, Outlook Insight LLC***
- ***Fred Jones, Director, Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired***
- ***Shirley Robinson, MS, CRC, Blind Services Coordinator, Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency***
- ***Rachel Hollen, Business Enterprise Program Director, Delaware Division for the Visually Impaired***
- ***Anthony Meholic, Director of Cybersecurity and Chief Information Security Officer, The Bancorp***

5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

NCSAB Welcome Reception & Exhibitor Showcase – “How to Thrive and Strive in 2025.” *(Regency Foyer). Kickoff your NCSAB conference experience with a Welcome Reception, where you’ll catch up with industry colleagues, make new friends, and create connections. Conference exhibitors will also share special presentations.*



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THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 2025

8:00 am

NCSAB Registration & Exhibit Hall Opens. *(Regency Foyer).*
NCSAB General Session and Exhibitor Showcase with Dorothy Young, NCSAB President. *(Regency Ballroom III/IV).* NCSAB President Young highlights the tools and resources from the exhibition hall, providing a brief overview of exhibitors.

8:30 am - 9:15 am

Unlocking Opportunities: Maximizing Federal VR Funding Through Community Reinvestment Act Investments. *(Regency Ballroom III/IV).* This session will highlight how North Carolina's Division of Services for the Blind and Florida Division of Blind Services successfully leveraged Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) investments to expand funding opportunities and enhance workforce development initiatives through strategic partnership. Moderated by Dacia Johnson

Presenters:

- **Cynthia Speight, Director, Division of Services for the Blind, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services**
- **Jordan Thomas, Chief of Rehabilitation Field Services, Division of Services for the Blind, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services**
- **Robert L. Doyle III, Division Director for the Florida Department of Education's Division of Blind Services**
- **David Leon, SVRA Technical Assistance Liaison, VRTAC-QM Community Reinvestment Act Special Project, National Disability Institute**



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- 9:15 am – 10:00 am** **Creating Pathways to Employment: The Success of the Ablr Works Program.** *(Regency Ballroom III/IV). This session highlights how the Ablr Works program utilized training, collaboration, and customized support to empower individuals who are blind or visually impaired to gain meaningful employment. The session also explores the impact its collaboration with the North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind had in improving employment outcomes. Moderated by Dr. Bernice Davis*
- Presenters:**
- **John Samuel, CEO, Ablr**
 - **Logan Passey, Job Developer, Ablr**
 - **Cynthia Speight, Director, Division of Services for the Blind, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services**
 - **Elli Heim, Program Specialist for Transition Services, Division of Services for the Blind, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services**
- 10:00 am – 10:30 am** **New Directors Forum.** *(Regency Ballroom III/IV). Moderated by President Dorothy Young*
- Networking Break.** *(Regency Foyer). Use this opportunity to network with peers and visit exhibits highlighting tools, technology, and services.*
- 10:30 am – 11:15 am** **Randolph-Sheppard Update.** *(Regency Ballroom III/IV). This session will discuss recent developments, trends, and opportunities in Randolph-Sheppard cases, arbitrations, and disputes. Moderated by Rachel Hollen*
- Presenters:**
- **Andrew Freeman, Partner, Brown, Goldstein & Levy**
 - **Neel Lalchandani, Partner, Brown, Goldstein & Levy**



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11:15 am – Noon

Contracting for VR Services. *(Regency Ballroom III/IV). This is an overview of regulations and requirements for VR agencies when contracting for VR services. It addresses compliance requirements under Federal statutes, regulations, and the terms and conditions of the Federal award. The discussion will also include negotiation, development, invoicing and monitoring of contracts, with a focus on best practices. Moderated by Robert Doyle III*

Presenter: Patricia Dickerson, Fiscal Management Specialist, U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration

Noon – 1:30 pm

NCSAB Committees Working Lunch Breakout Sessions (All Sessions are on Meeting Room Level):

- **NCSAB Employment Committee.** *(Congressional Room). NSITE shares information from their workforce development initiative designed to help people who are blind or visually impaired. Moderator: Darline Graham.*
- **NCSAB Transition Committee.** *(Cabinet Room). Moderators: Juanita Barker & Tracy Brigham.*
- **NCSAB Independent Living/Older Blind Committee.** *(Judiciary Room). OIB-TAC Updates from Project Director Kendra Farrow & a review of Virginia's ILOB Program. Plus an open discussion. Moderator: Cynthia Speight.*
- **NCSAB Randolph-Sheppard Committee.** *(Old Georgetown Room). A market trends analysis with conversation on how to use this data for the benefit of the program. Moderators: Rachel Holland & Ashley Townsend.*
- **NCSAB Technology Committee.** *(Diplomat/Ambassador Room). The Technology Committee is interested in ideas from the membership about initiatives for assistive technology, Artificial Intelligence, and emerging technologies. We will discuss membership needs and strategies in these areas. Moderator: Fred Jones.*



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1:30 pm – 2:15 pm

Career Quest: Achieving Great Outcomes with the Blind. *(Regency Ballroom III/IV). A presentation on opportunities resulting from the partnership between the National Federation of the Blind and state blindness agencies. Discussion on issues related to autonomous vehicles, the policy perspectives blindness agencies offer, and innovative ways AVs can enhance employment outcomes. This session also discusses the growing work of AI. Moderated by Ashley Townsend*

Presenter: Anil Lewis, Executive Director of Blindness Initiatives, National Federation of the Blind

2:15 pm – 3:00 pm

Getting Job Seekers in Front of Employers - And Getting Them Hired! *(Regency Ballroom III/IV). This session provides insights, strategies, and practical takeaways on how to organize and implement a successful Virtual Reverse Job Fair. Topics will include recruiting and educating employers, vetting and preparing job seekers, marketing and communications planning, video testimonials, data collection, and program planning & logistics. Moderated by Juanita Barker*

Presenters:

- ***Carol Cullins, Employment Services Supervisor, Massachusetts Commission for the Blind***
- ***Daniel Martin, Employment Services Specialist, Massachusetts Commission for the Blind***



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3:00 pm – 3:45 pm

Technology Skills and Career Success. *(Regency Ballroom III/IV). This presentation aims to emphasize the importance of strong technology skills for blind and visually impaired individuals, the growing demand for digital accessibility experts, and the pivotal role organizations like the Carroll Center for the Blind play in empowering individuals to succeed in the technology-driven job market. Moderated by Shirley Robinson*

Presenters:

- ***Brian Switzer, Program Manager of Accessibility Technology, Training and Research, Carroll Center for the Blind***
- ***Billy Parker, Workforce Development, Carroll Center for the Blind and ServiceSource***
- ***Dina Rosenbaum, Chief Program Officer, Carroll Center for the Blind***

3:45 pm – 4:00 pm

Networking Break. *(Regency Foyer). An opportunity to network with peers and visit exhibits highlighting tools, technology, and services.*

4:00 pm – 5:00 pm

5 Cs of Employee Engagement: Connect. Care. Contribute. Coach. Celebrate: How to Thrive and Strive in 2025. *(Regency Ballroom III/IV). In this session, we will be offering tools and resources for supporting your agency's strategies for retaining and engaging VR staff. The session explores successful training curriculum, opportunities for making employees feel appreciated and valued, and covers activities to improve connection, and boost morale. Moderated by Darline Graham*

Presenters:

- ***Dr. Robin Freeman, Director, UA CURRENTS***
- ***Dr. Bernice Davis, Executive Director, New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired***

5:00 pm

Adjourn for the Day



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FRIDAY APRIL 11, 2025

- 8:00 am** **NCSAB Executive Committee Meeting - Committee Members Only.**
(Congressional Meeting Room - Meeting Room Level).
- NCSAB Registration and Exhibit Hall.** *(Meeting Room Level).* Use this opportunity to network with peers and visit exhibits showcasing tools, technology, and services.
- 9:00 am – 9:30 am** **NCSAB Business Meeting and Committee Reports.** *(Cabinet Judiciary - Meeting Room Level).*
- 9:30 am – 10:00 am** **Pathways to Successful Employment: Giving Back to the Blindness Profession.** *(Cabinet Judiciary - Meeting Room Level).* Learn how consumers can gain professional certifications with or without a college education through the National Blindness Professional Certification Board. The session explores the model course work and experiential training offered by the NBPCB certification board programs. Moderated by Carlos Serván
Presenter: Amy Porterfield, President of the National Organization of Blind Rehabilitation Professionals, National Federation of the Blind
- 10:00 am - 10:30 am** **Brag & Steal States Spotlight: Sharing Success and Best Practices.**
(Cabinet Judiciary - Meeting Room Level). This interactive session invites



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participants to showcase their state's most effective initiatives and success stories. Gain valuable insights, exchange ideas, and discover actionable strategies to take back to your own communities. Moderated by Greg Trapp, Executive Director, New Mexico Commission for the Blind

10:30 am – 11:30 am

Driving the Future With Autonomous Vehicles (AVs). *(Cabinet Judiciary - Meeting Room Level). This session discusses the use of autonomous vehicles by people who are blind or have low vision and shares how autonomous vehicles can create or support potential employment outcomes. Moderated by Greg Trapp*

Presenters:

- **Jeff Farrah, Chief Executive Officer, Autonomous Vehicles Industry Association**
- **Jesse Shirek, Government Affairs Specialist, National Federation of the Blind**

11:30 am – Noon

Closing Session. *(Cabinet Judiciary - Meeting Room Level). Join us for this final session to discuss takeaways from the Spring 2025 Conference and how you can get more involved with NCSAB.*

Presenter: Dorothy Young, Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services and NCSAB President

Noon

Conference Adjourns



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CONFERENCE BIOS

SVEN AKERMAN JR.

Sven Akerman Jr. is the Founder and CEO of *Outlook Insight, LLC*, a modern technology consulting firm established in 1999 with a mission to empower vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies through thoughtful technology design and implementation. With nearly 30 years of experience in the field, Sven has become a trusted partner to the public sector, helping state agencies serve individuals with disabilities—particularly those who are blind or visually impaired—through accessible, impactful solutions. and has introduced innovative tools that streamline the counselor and administrator experience, enabling agencies to meet their performance goals while improving service delivery for participants.

Sven and his team continue supporting vocational rehabilitation agencies with their Knowledge Interpreter AI tool that makes agency policies, procedures, laws, and regulations accessible, and they support agencies implementing VR Case Management systems with expert project managers, VR analysts, VR data specialists, and testing resources. Together, they have led or supported 29 VR case management system implementations across the country, always with a focus on usability, accessibility, and measurable outcomes.

TRACY BRIGHAM

Tracy Brigham is the Division Administrator for Oklahoma DRS Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. As Administrator for SBVI statewide, Brigham leads staff to provide vocational, assistive technology and independent living services, as well as Transition, Business Services, the Deaf Blind program, the Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped and the Business Enterprise Program. Brigham has been employed with DRS for over 25 years.



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Prior to being Administrator, she had primary responsibility for ODRS statewide workforce system planning and coordination with WIOA and the ODRS statewide plan. Brigham's experience includes positions as a Rehabilitation Counselor, Programs Manager, Vocational Evaluator with special training in the CVES and Transition Facilitator for Blind Services.

Brigham has earned a Master of Behavioral Science degree and is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) and LPC Supervisor in the private sector and has been an adjunct instructor at Langston University. Brigham resides in Oklahoma City and has one daughter, Shae, a local DPT who owns RCVR Performance Clinic. Brigham is also a realtor and enjoys hiking, OU sports, traveling and is involved with organizations drilling for and providing clean water to villages in remote locations in Guatemala and also with Compassion International, focusing on holistic child development worldwide.

CAROL CULLINS

Carol Cullins oversees the Employment Services Unit at the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB), where she has worked since 2014. She connects qualified blind job seekers with employers, fostering partnerships that promote workplace inclusion.

With a bachelor's in marketing from Bentley College and a master's in nonprofit management from Worcester State University, Carol has managed sales, programs, and events for a chamber of commerce, as well as the alumni affairs and admissions departments of a community college.

Taking a strategic, mission-driven approach to workforce development, Carol is passionate about ensuring equal employment access for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. She has led initiatives to expand job placement programs, strengthen employer engagement, and improve career pathways—building collaborations that break down barriers and create more inclusive workplaces.



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BERNICE DAVIS

Dr. Bernice Davis is the Executive Director of the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI). In this capacity she is responsible for the overall administration and operations of the Commission, the single state authority charged with providing education, vocational rehabilitation, independent living, assistive technology, and eye-health services for the estimated 259,000 residents of the state, who are blind, deaf-blind, or visually impaired.

Dr. Davis earned her Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the Illinois School of Professional Psychology in 1993, and her B.S. degree in Applied Psychology from Loyola University of Chicago with a minor in Anthropology. She is a licensed psychologist, as well as a certified American Management Associate, who has over 21 years of experience as a clinician and public administrator. Dr. Davis, who joined the CBVI staff in 2005, also served as the Acting Executive Director and the Executive Assistant to the Executive Director. As Executive Assistant she was responsible for the coordination of the Commission's community education and outreach activities, ensuring the agency's compliance to state and federal policies and regulations, including HIPAA, OPRA and other monitoring entities, and strategic collaborations with executive team members, state officials and community based shareholders to assess and fulfill the needs of CBVI consumers.

PATRICIA DICKERSON

Patricia Dickerson has been a financial management specialist with RSA since 2020. Before joining RSA, Mrs. Dickerson served as financial analyst with the Federal Aviation Administration, and prior to joining the Federal workforce, she held various positions in state government including grants manager, budget analyst, and financial manager. Mrs. Dickerson holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Ohio Dominican University.

ROBERT DOYLE III

Robert Lee Doyle, III, is the Director of the Division of Blind Services (DBS) as of July 15, 2013. As director, he oversees services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired through 10



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district offices, the Career Technology Training Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Braille and Talking Book Library and local community rehabilitation programs. The division serves Floridians of all ages, from babies to senior citizens.

Prior to joining the Division of Blind Services, Director Doyle served as the director for the Division for the Visually Impaired with the Department of Human Services in Delaware. He is the past president of NCSAB and CSAVR. He continues to serve on the Executive Committees of both organizations. He holds a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in public administration, both from the University of Illinois.

JEFF FARRAH

Jeff Farrah serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the Autonomous Vehicle Industry Association (AVIA). AVIA is the unified voice of the AV industry and represents the world's leading technology, trucking, ridesharing, automotive, and transportation companies. Jeff is passionate about the promise of autonomous vehicles to deliver a world that is safer, provides greater mobility to those in need, and eases supply chain challenges. He is regularly called upon to testify on Capitol Hill and in state capitals, and is widely sought out by policymakers, transportation experts, and the press to discuss autonomous vehicles.

Before leading AVIA, Jeff served as General Counsel of the National Venture Capital Association (NVCA), where he championed the public policy to support the American entrepreneurial ecosystem and managed legal and operational aspects of the association. During Jeff's tenure, NVCA prevailed in several key policy campaigns for venture investors and VC-backed companies.

Prior to NVCA, Jeff was Counsel to the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation where he advised Senate Majority Leader John Thune (then Chairman) and members of the committee on technology, telecommunications, and internet policy. Previously, Jeff served as General Counsel to U.S. Senator Scott Brown, advising on a range of policy and legal matters. During the 2012 presidential election, Jeff was a member of Senator



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Romney’s Trade Policy Advisory Committee. Before his Senate career, Jeff was an attorney at a leading Washington, DC law firm for international trade matters.

ANDREW FREEMAN

Andrew Freeman is a partner in the Baltimore law firm of Brown, Goldstein & Levy. His law practice focuses on civil litigation, including Randolph-Sheppard, civil rights, and personal injury cases, class actions, commercial litigation, and appeals. A fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, Andy has been recognized by *Best Lawyers* as Baltimore “Lawyer of the Year” in six different categories and by *Lawdragon* as one of the 500 leading lawyers in America.

For over 35 years, Andy has been a national leader in the fight to protect the rights of blind entrepreneurs under the Randolph-Sheppard Act. He has represented blind managers, state licensing agencies, teaming partners, the National Association of Blind Merchants, the National Federation of the Blind, and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind throughout the United States in Randolph-Sheppard arbitrations, trial courts, and appellate courts. He has represented or co-counseled with the states of Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, Virginia, and Washington in a variety of Randolph-Sheppard cases against federal agencies.

Andy has won several precedent-setting Randolph-Sheppard cases, including *NISH v. Cohen* and *NISH v. Rumsfeld*, which established the application of the Act to military dining facilities, as well as the first decisions to apply the Act to the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Veterans Canteen Service. These cases also established that federal agencies could not charge commissions on vending machine receipts. He has won numerous Randolph-Sheppard arbitrations holding that State Licensing Agencies were entitled to troop dining contracts at military bases.



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ROBIN FREEMAN

Dr. Robin Freeman serves as the Director of the University of Arkansas CURRENTS, a nationally recognized training and consultation center in the College of Education and Health Professions. Robin has served as Director of UA CURRENTS since 2016. Robin's mission is to add value to people's lives. She achieves this through transformative coaching, training and speaking on leadership and organizational development for rehabilitation professionals. Robin is an author, small business owner, and a nationally certified John Maxwell trainer and speaker. She is also a certified Professional Coach & a True Colors facilitator. She holds an Ed.D. from the University of Arkansas Fayetteville. She & her husband Orlando reside in Northwest Arkansas. Go Hogs!

ELLI HEIM

Elli Heim started working with the NC Division of Services for the Blind in 2005 and is currently serving as the Program Specialist for Transition Services. Her previous work experience includes serving visually impaired and blind individuals as an Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. For a few years she gained valuable experience as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with the general VR agency in NC (EIPD), serving people with a variety of disabilities. Before entering the VR world, she worked with children and families in diverse roles within the school system, including work with the Head Start program and mental health services. Elli completed her primary and secondary education in Germany and obtained her Pediatric Nursing Degree prior to moving to the United States. Elli graduated with a Master of Arts in Counseling from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and currently holds the CRC certification. Elli has resided in many places before moving to Eastern NC but now calls Greenville, NC home.

RACHEL HOLLEN

Rachel Hollen began her career in the hospitality and food industry. After spending 10 years working with and managing small businesses, Rachel took her customer service expertise to manage an optometrist office. While there she helped the business grow and become a well-



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established practice. With 18 years of private industry experience, she moved to the State of Delaware's Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI). Within Delaware's DVI she worked with Education and Orientation and Mobility units. Currently, she is the Program Director for the Business Enterprise Program. She has been with Delaware's BEP for 4 years now, 6 years total with the state. Rachel's organization, communication, customer service expertise, and leadership skills have accelerated her to be added as Randolph Sheppard Committee Chair with NCSAB. When she isn't advocating for Randolph Sheppard programs, she enjoys spending time with her husband and their three-year-old daughter, especially when they can play outside with their two dogs.

NATASHA JERDE

Natasha Jerde is the Department of Employment and Economic Development- State Services for the Blind Director. She proudly carries out the mission to facilitate the personal and vocational independence of Minnesotans who are blind, visually impaired, or Deaf Blind. She is a University of Wisconsin-Stout alum where she received a bachelor's degree in vocational rehabilitation and a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling and vocational evaluation. She has a certification in Deaf Blindness from Northern Illinois University. Natasha started her career as a vocational evaluator and Deaf Blind rehabilitation counselor at State Services for the Blind. She went on to become a vocational rehabilitation supervisor and then the Director of Policy and Program Administration, overseeing policy development, training, quality assurance, and data analytics. For several years, Natasha was also the adjunct sign language instructor at UW-Stout.

DACIA JOHNSON

Dacia Johnson's leadership within the Oregon Commission for the Blind reflects a career dedicated to expanding opportunities for individuals who experience vision loss. As the Executive Director of the Commission, she plays a pivotal role in guiding the agency's efforts to deliver exemplary employment and independent living services to Oregonians who are blind.



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Over the course of more than twenty-eight years, Dacia has specialized in Vocational Rehabilitation, consistently striving to improve employment outcomes and independent living services for individuals with disabilities.

Dacia's commitment to data-driven decision-making, process improvement, and performance management is evident in her leadership style.

Educationally, Dacia holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Western Oregon University and a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Portland State University. She proudly carries the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) credential.

Dacia's has actively participated in various state and national committees and organizations. This includes serving as President for the Council of State Administrators in Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB). Her involvement in national efforts reflects a commitment to enhancing systems, streamlining business processes, and contributing to leadership development within the national public vocational rehabilitation program.

FRED JONES

For the past 22-years Fred Jones has been the director of the State of Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired which is the Vocational Rehabilitation Agency for people who are blind in Vermont. Prior to this position, he was a Special Education Consultant for seven years at the Vermont Agency of Education and taught in Vermont schools as a special educator and Teacher of the Visually Impaired for an additional seven years. He has a master's degree from Peabody College of Vanderbilt University in Blindness Education (M.Ed.)

Fred believes that blind and visually impaired students can build the skills they need to compete and succeed in high quality careers. His experience as a legally blind student and 35 years of professional experience in the field of special education and blindness have given him a unique perspective to find strategies and provide leadership to meet these needs.



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He has served as Chair of the Governor’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, which promotes the benefits of employers hiring people with disabilities. The GCEPD and the Governor also give awards each year to exemplary businesses. Fred has also served as the Designated State Entity as a partner with the Statewide Independent Living Council to oversee Vermont’s State Plan for Independent Living.

NEEL LALCHANDANI

Neel Lalchandani is a partner at the Baltimore-based firm Brown, Goldstein & Levy. At BGL, he represents individuals, nonprofits, and companies in a diverse array of civil rights and commercial matters. Neel has significant experience with complex litigation in both state and federal courts as well as in arbitrations. He has successfully resolved cases involving employment discrimination and retaliation, unpaid wages, wrongful convictions and police misconduct, reasonable accommodations and disability discrimination, fair housing, and the Randolph-Sheppard Act. Neel is a graduate of Stanford Law School and clerked for the Honorable Roger L. Gregory, Chief Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, and for the Honorable David O. Carter on the United States District Court for the Central District of California.

DAVID LEON

David Leon has worked with individuals with disabilities for over 25 years. He has worked for a community services board, community rehabilitation program and the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services. In his current role as the VADARS Director for Workforce Programs, Mr. Leon serves as the agency lead on employer engagement activities, the Ticket to Work program, financial empowerment initiatives and several federal grants. He is the project director for the RSA DIF PATHWAYS grant and recently completed a NIDILRR grant related to Financial Empowerment initiatives where he served as Co-Principal Investigator. He has provided technical assistance on Financial Empowerment, work incentives, Ticket to Work and Partnership Plus to other state vocational rehabilitation agencies and federal programs.



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Mr. Leon has served as an SME for SAMHSA projects and currently is a consultant for the CRA initiative through the National Disability Institute. Mr. Leon is a credentialed Benefit and Work Incentives Practitioner through Cornell University and holds a master's degree in education from The George Washington University where he received the Donald C Linkowski Award for outstanding rehabilitation counseling student. Mr. Leon also serves on the board of directors for the National Employment Network Association

ANIL LEWIS

Currently employed as the executive director for Blindness Initiatives for the National Federation of the Blind, located in Baltimore, Maryland, Anil Lewis coordinates outreach, marketing, and fundraising activities for a national nonprofit organization. He leads a dynamic team of individuals responsible for the creation, development, implementation, and replication of innovative projects and programs throughout a nationwide network of affiliates that work to positively affect the education, employment, and quality of life of all blind people.

As the director of Advocacy and Policy for the NFB, Lewis was responsible for a variety of public policy and strategic programs. Most notably, he was the legislative lead of the NFB's efforts to repeal Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, an obsolete provision that allows employers to pay workers with disabilities less than the federal minimum wage. As the director of Strategic Communications for the NFB, Lewis coordinated the public relations campaign for the NFB's Blind Driver Challenge™, an innovative research project to develop nonvisual access technology that made it possible for a blind person to safely and independently operate an automobile.

CATRIONA MACDONALD

Catriona Macdonald has served as an NCSAB policy advisor since 2005, advising State Licensing Agencies and the organization on Randolph-Sheppard issues, Older Blind, and other vocational rehabilitation priorities. She is the President and Founder of Linchpin Strategies, a boutique



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public policy firm that was recognized by National Journal as one of Washington, DC's top women-owned government relations providers. Ms. Macdonald graduated with a master's degree in public policy from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

DANIEL MARTIN

Daniel Martin is the Employment Services Specialist for the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, serving Greater Boston and Northeastern Massachusetts. He helps job seekers with vision impairments enhance their applications, refine job search strategies, and develop interview skills. He also supports employer outreach, fostering partnerships with businesses committed to workforce diversity.

With a B.S. in Broadcast Journalism from Emerson College, Daniel built a background in writing and production before transitioning into employment services. A former participant in the agency's job development programs as a legally blind consumer, he now helps organize them. Drawing on his own career shift, he guides clients in leveraging transferable skills and self-advocacy while educating employers on accessibility, accommodations, and inclusive hiring practices.

ANTHONY MEHOLIC

Anthony Meholic, CCISO, CEH, CCFE, serves as Director of Cybersecurity and Chief Information Security Officer at The Bancorp Bank N.A., Wilmington, Delaware. He previously contributed to the Federal Reserve Bank's Secure Payments Steering Committee, enhancing payment security alongside key stakeholders.

With over two decades of IT experience, Mr. Meholic has held key roles at The Bancorp, JPMorgan Chase, and Citibank. His expertise includes encryption key management, security reviews, risk assessments, and penetration testing. He has been integral in developing compliance programs aligned with the NIST Cybersecurity Framework and regulatory



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standards such as PCI, GLBA, HIPAA, GDPR, and CCPA. As The Bancorp's GDPR Data Protection Officer, he played a critical role in establishing the bank's Privacy Program.

A Michigan State University graduate, Mr. Meholic frequently speaks at industry conferences and serves on Cybersecurity Advisory Boards for Rutgers University and Ithaca College. He has authored numerous articles for outlets such as *Tech Target*, *Information Security Magazine*, and *Hackin9 Magazine*. Additionally, he is a contributing author to the *Information Security Management Handbook, 6th Edition*.

JOHN OLIVEIRA

John Oliveira was appointed Commissioner of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) in September 2023.

Oliveira held numerous roles at MCB since joining in 1987, including 10 years as Deputy Commissioner before his appointment as Acting Commissioner in April 2023.

Oliveira first joined MCB as a rehabilitation teacher, providing adaptive living skills to MCB's consumers. From there he moved through the Commission holding a number of roles, but always focused on supporting the mission of MCB, and overseeing the opportunities for people who are blind and visually impaired in Massachusetts. He has also held the positions of vocational rehabilitation counselor, employment services supervisor, director of training and staff development, and director of assistive technology, allowing him to learn every facet of MCB. Through case work and leadership positions he constantly found solutions for consumers with complex needs that would grant them autonomy, whether through employment opportunities or consumer services.

BILLY PARKER

Billy Parker works in workforce development for both the Carroll Center and ServiceSource. He has an extensive background in disability employment, program management, training, and recruiting. Billy previously worked at NIB as Director of Strategic Partnerships and Employment Support Services.



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LOGAN PASSEY

As the Job Developer of the Ablr team, Logan works with both the candidates of the Ablr Works program as well as Ablr's clients to help find solutions to DE&I hiring and especially how to get the right candidate for the right role.

Before Ablr, Logan had 6 years of Business Development and sales experience helping companies in the IT & Engineering industries build out and grow their teams to complete initiatives on time and within budget. Logan is a strong believer in the saying, "Decisions determine destiny". His passion for helping others find ways to achieve their goals has brought him to Ablr.

AMY PORTERFIELD

Amy Porterfield is the President of Saavi Services for the Blind where she oversees comprehensive blindness rehabilitation training centers throughout the state of Arizona. Amy additionally contracts with a variety of states where she provides professional development to Vocational Rehabilitation Programs around the country in the area of Blindness rehabilitation. Currently, Mrs. Porterfield serves as the president of the National Association of Blind Rehabilitation Professionals: a proud division of the National Federation of the blind.

MICHAEL QUINN

Michael Quinn has served as *Chief* of the Data Collection and Analysis Unit since 2024. From 2021 to 2024, Mr. Quinn served as a *Management and Program Analyst* within the Data Collection and Analysis Unit. Prior to joining RSA, Mr. Quinn had a 22 year career with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, serving as the agency's *Program Evaluation Coordinator* from 2009 to 2021. Mr. Quinn holds a Master of Health Science in Rehabilitation Counseling from Louisiana State University.



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SHIRLEY ROBINSON

Ms. Shirley Robinson has served within the blindness community for 20+ years. After earning her master's degree and CRC in 1997, from Georgia State University she began her career as a vocational Specialist with the Center for the visually impaired in Atlanta. This led to her present affiliation with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, vocational rehabilitation program where she served as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. In 2008, she completed the Vision Specialist Certification Program through Mississippi State University's Graduate Studies program. In April 2009, Ms. Robinson was promoted to the position of Rehabilitation Unit Manager for the Metro Blindness Services Unit. In September 2016, Ms. Robinson was promoted to Service Area Manager overseeing the DeKalb and Rockdale County Areas. Then in October of 2017, she was promoted to Assistant Director of Blind Services. Most recently, in October 2020, Ms. Robinson was promoted to Coordinator of Blind Services with GA VR.

Aside from training, Ms. Robinson serves as the Employment Committee Chair with the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind, and Board Member of the National Rehabilitation Professionals Division of the National Federation of the Blind. In addition, she sits on the advisory boards with Tools for Life and the Audible Universal Information Access Service. Ms. Robinson was also the 2018 and 2019 President of the Georgia Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Association Division. Her passion is assisting the blind community and developing methods for improving the lives of individuals with disabilities in Georgia.

DINA ROSENBAUM

Dina Rosenbaum has been the Carroll Center's Chief Program Officer since 2015, where she oversees all the programs and services provided by the agency to individuals with vision loss. She is a graduate of Boston University with a Bachelor of Science degree in special education and has a master's degree in computers in education from Lesley University. In 1984, Rosenbaum came to The Carroll Center where she served as Director of Technology and managed the center's newly created and federally funded computer training program. In 1998, she took on new responsibilities as Director of Marketing, a newly created position to enable



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the Center to expand their constituents, better connect with professionals and make the Center more visible in the community.

JOHN SAMUEL

John Samuel is the author of *Don't Ask the Blind Guy for Directions* and the Co-founder & CEO of Ablr, where he helps organizations become more inclusive by removing barriers that limit access for people with disabilities in education, retail, entertainment, and employment. As someone who is blind, John's mission is deeply personal, he strives to eliminate the challenges he has faced for others. With over two decades of leadership experience, John has worked both domestically and internationally. As CEO of Aster Cameroon, a global telecom infrastructure joint venture, he built a \$45 million business that expanded internet access across Africa. He later joined Homestrings, an award-winning crowdfunding platform, helping raise capital for startups in emerging markets. John holds an MBA from George Washington University and a BS in Accounting from North Carolina State University.

RENEE SANSOM BRISCOE

Renee Sansom Briscoe holds a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and brings extensive experience to the field as the Statewide Transition Coordinator for the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS). She currently serves as the President of the Oklahoma Rehabilitation Association (ORA) and is an active Board Member of the Down Syndrome Association of Central Oklahoma (DSACO). Additionally, she contributes to national and statewide efforts as a Transition Committee Member for the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) and participates in numerous other committees across Oklahoma.

Renee began her journey with DRS in 2007 as a Bilingual Rehabilitation Counselor, serving the Hispanic unit statewide with both adult and transition caseloads. In 2015, she transitioned to the role of Program Manager for the Oklahoma Rehabilitation Council (ORC), where she has been instrumental in shaping policies and collaborating with various organizations. Her



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extensive committee work included the Workforce Boards, National Coalition for State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC), Oklahoma Transition Council (OTC), Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), ABLE Tech Advisory Council, and the VR/SBVI State Plan Team.

Before joining DRS, Renee gained experience in Job Placement for Projects with Industry in Texas and completed multiple internships with the Developmental Disabilities Services Division. Her expertise in rehabilitation and dedication to advocacy continue to impact individuals with disabilities across the state and beyond.

MARTY SCHULTZ

Marty Schultz is a co-founder of ObjectiveEd, which builds digital curriculum for students with a disability, including blind/low-vision, dyslexia, ADHD and autism spectrum disorder. Prior to starting ObjectiveEd, he provided Blindfold Games – over 80 audio games for blind teens and adults that have been downloaded 500,000 times.

For BLV students, ObjectiveEd provides dozens of skill-building games to reinforce the skills taught by their TVIs and O&Ms. ObjectiveEd products are used in hundreds of school districts, including some of the largest districts in the country and schools for the blind. We have won awards including the Louis Braille Touch of Genius Award, Microsoft AI for Accessibility and the American Council of the Blind's annual award.

Marty is Principal Investigator on several NSF, NIH and NIDILRR grant-funded projects. He has degrees from Carnegie-Mellon University and Harvard Business School.

CARLOS R. SERVÁN, J.D.

Carlos R. Serván, born in Lima, Peru, overcame significant adversity after losing his sight and his right hand in an explosion at age 20. Immigrating to the U.S. in 1989, he pursued higher education, earning an M.P.A. and a J.D., and dedicated his career to serving people with disabilities. As the Executive Director of the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually



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Impaired since 2017, his innovative work has earned him national recognition, including the E.B. Witten Silver Medallion Award.

JESSE SHIREK

Jesse Shirek is a Government Affairs Specialist at the National Federation of the Blind. He conducts federal and state policy advocacy work along with providing training and assistance to NFB members. He specializes in the policy areas of Fully Autonomous Vehicles, Social Security Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income, the National Library Service Talking Book Program, Vocational Rehabilitation, AbilityOne, and Randolph Sheppard.

Jesse's prior professional experience includes managing the access technology program at the New Mexico Commission for the Blind, serving as a blind skills instructor in adult services at the North Dakota School for the Blind, acting as an independent contractor for the state of North Dakota, and consulting on web accessibility and design.

He has held leadership positions in the NFB affiliates of North Dakota, New Mexico, and Maryland. Notable highlights include serving as the North Dakota affiliate president and participating on the national scholarship committee.

Jesse resides in Baltimore, Maryland, with his wife, Sherry Shirek. In his downtime, he enjoys playing guitar, attending live music events, cooking, theater, and spending quality time with friends and family.

CYNTHIA SPEIGHT

Cynthia Speight is the Director of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB). Cynthia is passionate about DSB's mission to provide essential, high-quality services that help individuals who are blind, deafblind or have low vision achieve their employment and independent living goals. She has worked in the human services field for more than 37 years. Cynthia was appointed Division Director in 2017 and has been dedicated to expanding services, resources and opportunities for consumers and



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building stronger collaborative partnerships with communities, businesses and organizations in support of DHHS' and DSB's mission. Cynthia received both her Bachelor of Science in psychology and Master of Science in rehabilitation counseling from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

BRIAN SWITZER

Brian Switzer, *CATIS* is the Program Manager of Accessibility Technology, Training, and Research at The Carroll Center for the Blind. He holds a master's degree in Ethics and Public Policy from Suffolk University, a second master's in education, a Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist graduate certificate from UMass Boston, along with a *CATIS* (Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist) certification. Prior to joining the Carroll Center, Brian served as the Training and Technology Manager at Perkins School for the Blind, where he worked with transition-aged youths and adults entering the workforce to ensure that they had the technology, pre-employment, and employment skills needed to be successful on the job.

JORDAN THOMAS

Jordan Thomas is the Chief of Rehabilitation Field Services with the Division of Services for the Blind. Jordan has been with the Division of Services for the Blind since March 2012 and has worked in many roles with the division. She worked as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Counselor In Charge, and Area Supervisor for the Wilmington and Greenville District offices. She has been in her current role since January 2022 as the Chief of Rehabilitation Field Services.

Jordan graduated from East Carolina University in May 2007, with her bachelor's degree in Family and Community Services with a concentration in Sociology. She completed her dual master's degree at East Carolina University in Substance Abuse and Clinical Counseling and Rehabilitation Counseling. Go Pirates!

Jordan currently resides in Greenville, NC with her husband and two children.



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ASHLEY TOWNSEND

W. Ashley Townsend is the Assistant Commissioner for the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) Vocational Rehabilitation Blind and Deaf Division. Prior to his current Assistant Commissioner role, he was the ADRS Blind and Deaf Services Director of Special Programs from April 2014-December 2021. He holds a BS in Rehabilitation from Troy University and a MA in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Ashley has been directly involved with Blind and Low Vision Vocational Rehabilitation Service provision since 2009 when he became the VR Field Supervisor for North Central Alabama. He has also worked as a Job Coach for individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury as well as a General VR Counselor. Ashley has direct experience with the OASIS Program (OIB Program) and the Vision Rehabilitation Therapy and Orientation & Mobility Programs. In addition, Ashley has extensive experience with the implementation of special VR projects and initiatives, policy, and procedure development, and has overseen quality assurance for ADRS's Blind and Deaf Services Division. In his previous role as Director of Special Programs he was the state office liaison to AIDB's EH Gentry Facility and implemented/monitored ADRS's longstanding MOA's with AIDB, Troy University, and Mississippi State University.

Beginning in January of 2025 he started serving on NCSAB's Executive Committee as the co-chair of the Randolph Sheppard Committee. Previous non-profit work includes work with the Arc of Shelby County which consisted of a term as Board President and as a board member with the Alabama Chapter of the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER). Ashley is a resident of Calera, Alabama and married to Krista Townsend who is an elementary education administrator. They have two daughters Emma and Lily.

GREG TRAPP

Greg Trapp has been the Executive Director of the New Mexico Commission for the Blind since 1999. Prior to joining the Commission, he was a Senior Staff Attorney for Disability Rights New



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Mexico, where he began work in 1992. He taught Disability Law as an adjunct professor at the University of New Mexico School of Law in the fall of 1993 and worked as an Equal Opportunity Specialist at UNM from 1991 to 1992. Mr. Trapp graduated with honors from the UNM School of Law in 1990. He is currently a member of the State Workforce Development Board and secretary of the New Mexico Council for Purchasing from Persons with Disabilities. Mr. Trapp is also President-Elect of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB), and he served as NCSAB President in 2007. Mr. Trapp is also the Historian for the New Mexico Council of the Navy League of the United States.

DR. CASSONDR WILLIAMS-STOKES

Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes received her undergraduate degree in Public Health Education, and a master's degree in Adult Education from UA Little Rock. She earned a Doctor of Management in Organizational Leadership from the University of Phoenix. She has worked for the State of Arkansas for 23 years, where nineteen of those years have been in a leadership position. She served for 6 years as the Director of Juvenile Delinquency and Prevention under the Division of Youth Services, 10 years as the Deputy Director for the Division of Services for the Blind. She currently serves as the Director for the Division of Services for the Blind and thrives on helping others reach their leadership potential.

Cassandra enjoys traveling, reading and being active in her church as a Sunday School Teacher and Women's Ministry leader. She served in the U.S. Army Reserve and advocates for disabled veterans. Her long-term goal is to author books related to "How to Help Families Deal with Mental Illness" and "Mentoring Women in the Workplace."

Dr. Cassandra Williams-Stokes is a native of Little Rock Arkansas. She is married and the mother of two adult daughters and one son.



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DOROTHY YOUNG

Ms. Dorothy L. Young is a graduate of Alcorn State University (B.S.); The University of South Alabama (M.S.in Counselor Education and Minor in Rehabilitation Counseling); and Belhaven University (master's in management). Her case study at Belhaven presented a historical overview of the kinds of relationships that should exist between vocational rehabilitation counselors and individuals with disabilities. In 2000, Ms. Young began work as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, with the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind. In this position, she was responsible for working with blind and or visually impaired clients to regain, advance, or maintain employment. It was during this time that she experienced the many challenges one would face because of one's physical or mental limitations.

One of the biggest hurdles with successful job placement was the attitudes of other people that created barriers. Ms. Young began to coordinate and connect different businesses around the state to change the tendency not to hire a person with a disability. These connections enhance the abilities and skills of people with disabilities by bringing awareness and access to job site accommodations at no cost, blindness awareness training, and introduction with businesses, disability advocacy groups, and the community. Since then, Ms. Young has continued to work her way throughout the agency with various management promotions using her skills and knowledge in connecting, coordinating, and starting initiatives around the state/nationally for people with disabilities.

Several highlights of her career involved working predominantly in the community with people with disabilities: She wrote Mississippi first Technology Act State Plan. The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services applied for and received the first Model Demonstration Grant from RSA for recycling assistive technology during her tenure as the Director of Project START. The Mississippi Re-Use Program saves the state well over \$200,000.00 each year. Ms. Young started the agency's first computer recycling program that targets the fourteen poverty counties in Mississippi. Ms. Young started the agency's first assistive technology partnership



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with the MS Department of Education providing hands-on training, loaning, and demonstrating assistive technology to our great teachers and families.

In 2013, Ms. Young was promoted to the Director position for the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind Services, Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services. During this tenure, she started the agency's first Summer Internship Program for students with disabilities and the first partnership with the Governor's Job Fair Network. Both initiatives are ongoing and have helped place people with disabilities with businesses, state and federal agencies hiring year around people with disabilities. Dorothy L. Young serves on the National Executive Leadership team as the President for the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind. She is elected by her peers around the country for this position.