Inside NSITE
NIB’s talent management enterprise
NSITE takes a holistic approach to career development and placement
Opportunity is published quarterly in the winter, spring, summer, and fall. It is also available at NIB.org/opportunity.

Angela Hartley  
Executive Vice President  
and Chief Program Officer

Jennifer Click  
Editor-in-Chief

Mike Johnson  
Director, Communications

Paul M. Best  
Program Director, Marketing and Design

Jermaine Eubanks  
Communications Design Specialist

Editor’s note: Some photos used in this issue of Opportunity were taken prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
Opportunity welcomes news and stories about the careers and capabilities of people who are blind. Email communications@nib.org.

To add or change a mailing address, contact communications@nib.org.

Since 1938, National Industries for the Blind (NIB) has focused on enhancing the opportunities for economic and personal independence of people who are blind, primarily through creating, sustaining, and improving employment. NIB and its network of associated nonprofit agencies are the nation’s largest employer of people who are blind through the manufacture and provision of SKILCRAFT® and other products and services of the AbilityOne® Program. For more information about NIB, visit NIB.org.
People who are blind often have difficulty navigating the job market. Even those with great qualifications can find it challenging to launch a satisfying career, often due to employer misperceptions.

NIB has been working for years to address those misperceptions amongst employers, educating them and their employees about the capabilities of people who are blind. Now, NIB’s new talent management enterprise, NSITE, is taking that work to the next level, offering a new group of employers a continuum of services, from identifying candidates for open positions, to ensuring candidates have the skills to succeed, to job placement services and accessibility support.
In this issue of Opportunity, you’ll learn about NSITE and its groundbreaking work with state vocational rehabilitation agencies, private-sector employers, and people who are blind, visually impaired, and/or veterans. From innovative training programs to educating employers and their staffs on working with people with disabilities, NSITE takes a holistic approach to the employment equation, not only helping people who are blind or visually impaired land a job, but providing ongoing support to ensure placements work out for both the new employees and their employers.

At NIB, we’re delighted to have NSITE carrying our mission of creating, sustaining, and improving employment to more job seekers and employers. We invite you to join us in this exciting new endeavor to empower people who are blind, visually impaired, and/or veterans to build rewarding careers in any field they choose.

Kevin A. Lynch  
President and  
Chief Executive Officer
INSIDE NSITE

NIB’s talent management enterprise NSITE takes a holistic approach to career development and placement.

ON THE COVER

NSITE offers a continuum of services to both job seekers and employers.
04 LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT
A Vision for Talent

08 PROFILE
Senator Bill Cassidy, M.D., built a career serving people in need.

24 REINVENTING JOBS
NIB’s productivity engineers improve safety and efficiency, while expanding opportunities.

31 IT STARTS WITH US!
Highlights from the 2022 NIB/NAEPB National Symposium.

36 AGENCY SPOTLIGHT
Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services prepares people in Pittsburgh for career success.

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

49 NEWS & NOTES
- NIB Launches Entrepreneurial Initiative
- In-Person Lean Six Sigma Training Returns
- New Video Spotlights Associated Agency VisionCorps
- NIB Hosts Agency Finance Leaders
- SKILCRAFT Capabilities Highlighted in New Video
- NIB Agency Patents Medical Device for Field Use
PROFILE

SERVING THE UNDERSERVED

Senator Bill Cassidy, M.D., built a career serving people in need.

BY DOMINIC CALABRESE

In a time of intense partisanship, U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA) consistently reaches across the aisle to work with members of both political parties and get things done for Americans.

A strong supporter of the AbilityOne® Program, the former medical doctor has been a tireless advocate for bipartisan legislation to assist adults and children facing health challenges.

In 2021, he joined forces with Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon to introduce S.2108, the Work Without Worry Act, which removes a work disincentive for people with serious lifelong disabilities such as Down Syndrome, cystic fibrosis, cerebral palsy, or intellectual disabilities.

The Act promotes financial security by ensuring people who have an eligible medical condition that began before age 22 will not lose the Social Security Disabled Adult Child (DAC) benefit due to earnings from their own work. The

Before he got into politics, Senator Bill Cassidy spent years working to help Louisianans access health services.
DAC amount is based on the earnings history of the recipient’s parent, which is generally higher.

Previously, recipients could lose the right to receive DAC benefits in the future if they earned too much income and their parent was not yet receiving Social Security benefits. The legislation treats all individuals who develop severe medical conditions before age 22 the same, regardless of when their parents claim Social Security benefits. If passed, the law is estimated to improve the lives of nearly 6,000 people over the next 10 years.

“Americans with disabilities deserve the freedom to work without worry to secure their own financial future,” Cassidy maintains.

A native of Highland Park, Illinois, Cassidy grew up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He excelled in his studies, earning a Bachelor of Science from Louisiana State University (LSU) in 1979 and a Doctor of Medicine from its School of Medicine in 1983.

In 1990, Cassidy joined LSU Medical School, teaching students and residents at a hospital for people who are uninsured. He also co-founded the Greater Baton Rouge Community Clinic, which provides free health and dental care to people who are employed but lack health insurance, and created a private-public partnership to vaccinate 36,000 children in the greater Baton Rouge area against Hepatitis B at no cost to schools or parents.

Following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2006, he led a group of volunteers in converting an abandoned department store into an emergency health care facility, providing basic services to evacuees.
That same year, Cassidy got involved in politics and was elected to the Louisiana State Senate. Two years later, he was elected to the U.S. House, representing Louisiana’s Sixth Congressional District. In 2014, he was elected to the Senate. Cassidy is also an advocate for people with dyslexia. After learning their daughter had the learning disability, Cassidy and his wife, Dr. Laura Cassidy, now a retired general surgeon, helped found a public charter school for children with dyslexia.

He is a co-sponsor of the 21st Century Dyslexia Act, which aims to modernize federal statutes to recognize dyslexia and prevent the harm young students suffer when their learning disability is not identified. By clearly defining dyslexia, the bill aims to have it diagnosed earlier, enabling millions of students to pursue academic success.

Following successful efforts to lower the cost of health care, secure coastal restoration projects to protect Louisiana families from natural disasters, reform the nation’s mental health system, as well as other legislative accomplishments, Cassidy was reelected to a second term as senator in 2020.

Currently a member of the Senate Finance Committee, the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, the Veterans Affairs Committee, and the Joint Economic Committee, he will continue working to make life better for underserved communities.

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.

Your authorized procurement source.
INSIDE NSITE

NSITE, NIB’s talent management enterprise, takes a holistic approach to career development and placement for both job seekers and employers.

BY SHARON HORRIGAN
It’s never easy to embark on a new venture, particularly during the height of a pandemic, but that’s just what NIB did when it launched NSITE, a talent management enterprise designed to support employers and job seekers who are blind, visually impaired, and/or veterans throughout the career life cycle. NSITE offers a continuum of employment services, from identifying candidates for open positions and ensuring they have the skills for success, to job placement services and accessibility support. The enterprise takes NIB’s lifelong mission to create meaningful employment for people who are blind or visually impaired to the next level.

“Over the years, NIB has done wonderful work in fulfilling that mission,” explains Billy Parker, NSITE’s director of strategic partnerships. “But as technological innovations in recent years have expanded the types of careers people who are blind or visually impaired can move into, NIB wanted to reach out to the community beyond its associated agencies.” That reach, notes Parker, includes private-sector employers and job seekers who may or may not be connected to NIB associated agencies.

According to Parker, the continuum of employment services available to employers and job seekers makes NSITE unique. “Before NSITE, there was no single touchpoint covering both sides of the employment equation. NSITE is a one-stop shop for employers and job seekers.”

NSITE Executive Director Jonathan Lucus explains that the enterprise is about more than job placement or finding talent. “We’re forging relationships
between employers and job seekers in a way that isn’t being done anywhere else.” Developing those relationships, he notes, helps broaden NSITE’s reach into the community of job seekers who are blind or visually impaired and into the private-sector employment arena.

**Broadening the Reach**

Under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, vocational rehabilitation (VR) service programs established in U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and the five U.S. territories receive grants to provide services to people with disabilities. As an independent enterprise, NSITE has great latitude in working with those state vocational rehabilitation agencies, Parker explains.

Lucus notes that historically, state VR services were reluctant to venture beyond their own programs. Since the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many of their in-person-only programs, the agencies have become more receptive to offering different types of training delivery.

NSITE, which offers all of its training programs online, has been a good solution for state agencies seeking new ways to
Since its launch in 2021, NSITE has partnered with 23 state VR agencies to offer training, and is in partnership talks with many more. The state VR agencies and NIB associated nonprofit agencies have always recognized that “we are all rowing in the same direction,” says NSITE Program Manager Doug Goist. “NIB associated agencies and state vocational rehabilitation agencies are always seeking new ways to develop and enhance the skills of employees and job-seeking clients. NSITE is combining those efforts and in doing so, broadening everyone’s reach.”

While partnerships with NIB associated agencies and with state vocational rehabilitation agencies have helped grow the pool of talent, relationship building on the employer side is also vital to NSITE’s success. And, as with the state VR agencies, the pandemic played a role in making employers more receptive to seeking talent for their open positions through NSITE.

NSITE Director of Strategic Partnerships Billy Parker has more than 20 years of experience in disability employment, training, recruitment, and business development.

NSITE for Employers

During the pandemic,
NSITE SERVICES FOR EMPLOYERS

NSITE offers a range of services for employers who want to expand their diversity, equity, and inclusion practices by tapping into the NSITE talent pool. NSITE services are designed to ensure a successful experience for both employers and the employees placed with their organization through NSITE.

• **NSITE Direct** helps employers find the right jobseeker for open positions.

• **NSITE Flex** supplies temporary talent as employers work toward making final hiring decisions.

• **NSITE Outsourcing** helps employers manage fluctuations in workforce needs.

• **NSITE Accessibility** teams NSITE accessibility experts with employers to help organizations identify accessibility shortfalls and find cost-effective solutions.

• **NSITE Consulting** helps employers meet diversity, equity, and inclusion goals by offering training and advisory services to prepare their current employees to work with people who are blind or visually impaired.
employers realized that remote work was not only possible, but in many ways, even more effective in terms of productivity. In that way, the timing was fortuitous for NSITE’s launch. The pandemic helped employers realize that not all work had to be performed in an office, and that many employees preferred not to work in an office.

Remote work is particularly beneficial for people who are blind or visually impaired, explains Goist, because it removes a traditional barrier to employment that many of them had to overcome in the past when seeking employment: reliable transportation to and from a work location. In addition, the pandemic led to rapid development and adoption of the technology remote employees need to do their jobs from home, technology that benefits the workforce of people who are blind or visually impaired.

Lucus says the effective advocacy work done by NIB and other organizations to make employers aware of the talents of people who are blind or visually impaired — as well as the push for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace — has made employers more receptive to NSITE’s services. “Younger workers not only want diversity in the workplace,” says Lucus, “they expect it.”

To date, Parker says NSITE has teamed with Bristol Meyers Squibb, Capital One, Amazon, and the American Red Cross to land internships and jobs for NSITE participants. “These companies are doing incredible work. They’re breaking down long-standing barriers to employment for people who are blind and visually impaired.”
NSITE for Job Seekers
For job seekers who are blind, visually impaired and/or veterans, NSITE offers NSITE Connect, which lists job openings from NSITE employers. In addition, NSITE offers extensive training and development opportunities to help job seekers learn or hone skills to advance in their careers.

NSITE’s multiple points of entry are a bonus, says Lucus, because job seekers with work experience may not need in-depth training, but would want to use NSITE Connect to find new career opportunities. Job seekers lacking extensive work experience can use the training and development pathway to acquire the skills and experience needed to embark on their career of choice. “We meet people where they are in their careers,” explains Lucus.

Job seekers are coming to NSITE from a variety of sources, says Parker. While NIB associated agencies are referring some of their clients and many job seekers are working with state vocational rehabilitation programs, a healthy share of participants are not associated with either. “They’re finding us on their own,” he says.
NSITE offers more than employment opportunities, training, and development for people who are blind or visually impaired, explains Goist, who is himself blind. “For job seekers who are blind or visually impaired, doors aren’t exactly closed, but it’s more like they’re ajar, so it’s harder to push in. After a while, confidence starts to fade. NSITE gives these job seekers a real chance. It turns their world around, particularly when they participate in some of the training and development we offer. Their confidence skyrockets.”

**NSITE Training and Development**
NIB’s career training and development programs are now delivered by NSITE, a move, notes Lucus, that allows high-quality programs developed over years at NIB to reach a wider audience. All of NIB’s established training and development programs, many of which were delivered in-person only, are now being re-launched for virtual delivery and will be available through NSITE’s training and development portal.

People who are blind, visually impaired, and/or veterans can develop advanced computer skills through the Professional Mastery of Office Technology for Employment (ProMOTE) program, learn about contract administration through the Contract Management Support (CMS) training program, and take a variety of classes through the Business Leaders Program.

In partnership with Orion Global Talent, in May NSITE graduated 11 students in the Sourcing Specialist Certificate program, which provides the education and training necessary to enter a human resource career in candidate sourcing. A part of the employment
recruiting process, sourcing professionals identify passive candidates (people who are not actively seeking a new job) and provide that information to recruiters, who contact the candidates about openings within their organizations.

**Training for Tech Careers**

As demand for employees in the information technology field continues to grow, NSITE is working with some well-known companies to help people who are blind, visually impaired, and/or veterans gain a foothold in the industry. Through a partnership with Google, NSITE is helping job seekers earn their choice of a Google IT Support Professional certificate; a Google IT Automation with Python certificate; or a Google IT Data Analytics, Project Management, and UX Design certificate.

Job seekers interested in careers in the cybersecurity industry can earn a Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA) credential through NSITE’s CISCO Networking Academy. The intensive, 40-week, instructor-led program is the first Cisco training program in the U.S. specifically adapted to the learning styles of people.

Learning and Leadership Program Director Marianne Haegeli has worked to address learning needs in nonprofit, public, and private environments for more than 15 years.
who are blind or visually impaired. Participants not only receive instruction in how to install, configure, and troubleshoot networks using Cisco software, but also learn soft skills like communication and leadership.

In March 2021, NSITE received a grant of more than $95,000 from the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation to fund the academy. In another example of NSITE’s success in building partnerships, Lucus notes that most Cisco Networking Academy participants have come from referrals by state VR agencies, which cover the costs of the program for their clients.

NSITE U
NSITE Learning and Leadership Program Director Marianne Haegeli says the current offerings are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to robust training and development opportunities to prepare job seekers to enter growing career fields. NSITE is looking forward to launching a virtual training university, NSITE U, in the coming months.

NSITE U will be home to the current suite of training and development programs; some free foundational courses; some fee-based, on-demand courses; and more extensive courses like the Cisco Networking Academy and the Sourcing Specialist Certificate program. While many courses will be self-paced, NSITE U aims to offer cohort components where learners communicate with one another. Clear start and end dates will encourage participants to complete programs in a timely manner.

Learners completing select NSITE U coursework and programs will earn a digital credentialing badge that can be added to their
online profiles and shared with potential employers. Employers will be able to click on the credential and view detailed information about the coursework and training completed to earn it.

Some of the training programs will feature hands-on workplace learning. A recent example is the Sourcing Specialist Certificate program, where graduates completed coursework independently over 12 weeks and met virtually with other participants each week. After completing the coursework, learners applied their learning in a part-time, six-week work experience.

“We’ve partnered with Bristol Meyers Squibb for the work experience portion of the program, and it’s been a wonderful experience,” says Haegeli. “Students do sourcing work independently from home, but meet once a week with their Bristol Meyers Squibb representative. At the end of the work experience, they get to attend an event where some of the sourced candidates they identified are hired.”

NSITE U is also launching a sales training program that will consist of eight modules, and exploring the feasibility of a supply chain certificate program. The ultimate goal, says Haegeli, is to offer people who are blind or visually impaired a variety of career-level learning tracks. “We want to be a partner throughout their career progression,” she says.

Within a year, NSITE U wants to offer a full arc of career learning and development opportunities, with courses that meet the needs of participants wherever they are in their career — from basic training courses to extensive development programs.
that open up pathways to career advancement.

Haegeli admits it’s an ambitious goal, but says it’s one the NSITE team is determined to accomplish. “We have the best team ever here at NSITE, and incredible support from NIB.”

Lucus agrees. “We’ve just launched year two of this venture, and it’s amazing to see how much we’ve accomplished in such a short time. I’ve heard from so many people who are blind or visually impaired who say they’ve been waiting for this. We could not have done it without NIB’s unflagging support.”

Lucus says the NSITE team has no plans to slow down. “We want to be everywhere. We want to continue to grow, add to our talent pool, increase the number of participating employers, and expand our education and development opportunities so we can offer more pathways to fulfilling careers,” he says. “This is just the beginning.”

Sharon Horrigan is a freelance writer based in Asheville, North Carolina.
Previously known as Rehabilitation Engineering, NIB’s Productivity Engineering program offers a wide array of services to associated nonprofit agencies. Programs include facility planning, safety and ergonomics assessments, training, process analysis, and efficiency improvements all designed to boost employment for people who are blind while ensuring workplace safety.

“We believe the name Productivity Engineering better aligns with the services we offer,” says Program Director Gigi Dottin. “Our core mission is accommodating people who are blind or have other disabilities so they can perform in a safe, productive, and efficient way.”

The old name, Rehabilitation Engineering, implied a focus on individuals and some assumed the team could assist an employee in regaining physical and/or cognitive abilities, she explains. Productivity Engineering, on the other hand, clearly communicates the emphasis on overall processes, from improving efficiencies and addressing safety and quality issues, to helping with ergonomics and product flow.

“We help our associated nonprofit agencies be as competitive as they can be,” Dottin explains.

Expert Experience
The team consists of Danny Truneh, senior productivity engineer; John Sorboro, productivity engineer; and technical trainers,
MEET THE PRODUCTIVITY ENGINEERS

Gigi Dottin, Program Director, Productivity Engineering and Technical Training
Gigi has a degree in industrial engineering and lengthy experience as a manufacturing engineer supervisor. She is a Certified Manufacturing Engineer (CME), Certified Quality Improvement (CQIA), and a Six Sigma DMAIC Green Belt.

Danny Truneh
Senior Productivity Engineer
Danny has worked in manufacturing engineering and engineering change control on product specifications and assembly instructions. He also has experience in special equipment design and as a research assistant at Georgia Tech Research Institute.

John Sorboro
Productivity Engineer
A manufacturing engineer and project engineer for 15 years, John has also worked in the semiconductor industry. He is a Six Sigma DMAIC Green Belt with training in computer assisted design (CAD), 3D modeling, and Factory Jack software.
Barbara Hutton and Marisol Cespedes De Matos, who focus on training and cross-training, workstation setup, and other areas.

Dottin first joined NIB in 2010 as a rehab engineer. She left for a stint at Caterpillar, where she worked with Truneh and Sorboro, then returned to NIB as Rehab Engineering program manager in 2016, becoming program director in 2020. One of her first moves after returning to NIB was recruiting Truneh and Sorboro to join the team, which she calls “One of the best decisions I ever made.”

“Productivity Engineers are the ‘boots on the ground,’ ” says Truneh, an aerospace engineer with an extensive background in manufacturing engineering. “We may be contacted to provide assistance to an individual or an entire production unit,” he explains, emphasizing that services vary based on the needs of each associated agency.

“Danny and John will do whatever they can to offer an effective solution to a particular problem, whether its designing and building tools, jigs, and fixtures; providing efficiency enhancements; or making recommendations on using space more effectively,” Dottin says.

The team embraces Lean methodology including 5S (sort, set in order, shine, standardize, and sustain), a process based on Toyota Motors’ production system.

“This foundational Lean manufacturing technique is designed to eliminate waste from the construction process, ensure the workplace is clean and organized, increase production, and reduce costs across the board,” Sorboro explains.
At the Productivity Engineering Forum held at Bosma Enterprises in April, Arhea Lazzelle (left) of Blind Industries and Services of Maryland, worked with Donovan Beitel (center) of Alabama Industries for the Blind, and Ted Haefele (right) of Lighthouse Louisiana to build a structure using limited supplies.

The result, he says, is higher employee satisfaction.

A major focus for the Productivity Engineering team is working with NIB associated agencies to convert jobs previously held by sighted employees to jobs employees who are blind or visually impaired can perform. These “job conversions” are in keeping with NIB’s mission of expanding employment for people who are blind or visually impaired.

**Assisting Across the Nation**

NIB associated agencies across the country utilize the
talents of the Productivity Engineering team on a wide variety of projects.

Truneh and Sorboro worked with the Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired to develop a new layout in its gadget area that improves safety and flow. At Industries of the Blind in Greensboro, North Carolina, Dottin and Sorboro helped improve process flow and removed bottlenecks in a production process while Cespedes De Matos provided training to employees.

At Bosma Enterprises, Indiana’s largest and most comprehensive employment and training provider for people with vision loss, Dottin and Truneh evaluated the agency’s medical kitting process. They put together a plan to clean up excess material from the production area and created an International Standards Organization (ISO) Class 8-certified cleanroom for packaging kits for surgical settings.

“We really appreciate the assistance that the Productivity Engineering team offered us,” says Doug Pingel, Bosma’s vice president of operations. “Coming from the outside, they brought an invaluable perspective and pointed out things that we on the inside might have missed.”

The Productivity Engineering team had another big success at Milwaukee-based Beyond Vision, an NIB associated agency that provides a broad array of services from call center support to assembly and packaging; machine shop capabilities; and kitting projects for the federal government, military, and major corporations.

Working with Jeff Duchrow, who oversees engineering for the agency, Dottin’s team first
created a fixture that allows employees to assemble a wood pallet collar used in shipping medical equipment, which increases safety and efficiency for employees building crates.

The team then installed a crane for lifting and stacking the completed assembly, allowing Beyond Vision to better allocate resources by utilizing one employee who is visually impaired to operate the crane while shifting a second employee to other duties.

“It was a win-win for everyone,” says Duchrow. “We were able to offer one of our visually impaired employees increased responsibility by enabling him to operate the crane, while making our overall operation more efficient and productive, and improving ergonomics.”

Addressing Agency Concerns
The annual Productivity Engineering Forum hosted by the team offers agency personnel a platform to discuss best practices, compliance safety requirements, conversion projects, and challenges that many of the agencies face in day-to-day operations. After two years of virtual Forums, the team was excited to hold an in-person event at Bosma in April.

Among common concerns cited by participants were inaccessible software, communication challenges, supply chain shortages, price competition with the commercial market, and securing new business opportunities.

“As a result of the questions that were raised, we’re holding monthly calls to discuss concerns in detail more frequently and offer solutions,” Dottin says.
Sorboro acknowledges that a key issue for agencies is attracting manufacturing talent when they have fewer resources to offer employees compared to large companies like Caterpillar.

“It’s one of the things that our team can contribute,” Sorboro explains. “We have a combined 35 years’ worth of experience in manufacturing and can bring that experience to folks who really need it.”

“We’re confident that the factors within our control, such as support and training, will continue to yield positive results,” Dottin says. “All of us will continue working hard to ensure each agency has the tools it needs from a manufacturing perspective to increase employment for people who are blind or visually impaired.”

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.
The 2022 NIB/NAEPB National Symposium, held April 25-28 in Alexandria, Virginia, brought together the 2021 employee of the year nominees from NIB associated nonprofit agencies across the nation, along with 11 new Advocates for Leadership and Employment. Activities included public policy training, employee of the year recognition, and more!

After two busy days that included an informative general session, everyone came together at the awards banquet to recognize R.B. Irwin Award winner A. Gidget Hopf, retired CEO of the Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment-Goodwill of the Finger Lakes, and our national award winners Emily Kanis of Bosma Enterprises, winner of the 2021 Peter J. Salmon award; and Reynaldo Villareal of Valley Center for the Blind, winner of the 2021 Milton J. Samuelson career achievement award.
NIB welcomed the 2022 class of Advocates for Leadership and Employment at the Symposium. Pictured above in the front row (left to right) are Marybeth Clare with guide dog Hubble, Envision; Luigi DiRusso, Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment; Arlene Still, Bestwork Industries for the Blind; Tammy Clardy, Lighthouse for the Blind, Saint Louis; Reynaldo Villareal with guide dog Linux, Valley Center for the Blind.

Back row (left to right): Ernesto Acevedo, Central Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired; Denny Keeth, Louisiana Association for the Blind; Corey Richard, Lions Volunteer Blind Industries; Megan Sinks, Beyond Vision; Tina Hawley-Blount, Virginia Industries for the Blind; Ronnie Bellomy, Lighthouse for the Blind of Fort Worth.
“With the right attitude and perseverance, we can achieve almost anything.”

Emily Kanis
2021 Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award winner
Bosma Enterprises
Indianapolis, Indiana

“It’s very important to tell your story because it helps us gain opportunities.”

Reynaldo Villareal
2021 Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award winner
Valley Center for the Blind
Fresno, California

NIB employee
Jeannie White sings the National Anthem as the U.S. Army Military District of Washington Armed Forces Color Guard presents the colors.
“My fellow team members who are blind taught me what dignity looks like.”

A. Gidget Hopf
R.B. Irwin Award winner
Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment-Goodwill of the Finger Lakes Rochester, New York

The general session featured a panel discussion about the employment landscape with leaders of organizations representing people who are blind. Pictured left to right above are: moderator Cindy Watson, president and CEO of NIB associated agency San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind; Mark Riccobono, president of the National Federation of the Blind; Eric Bridges, executive director of the American Council of the Blind; Lee Nasehi, president and CEO of VisionServe Alliance; and Stephanie Enyart, chief public policy and research officer at American Foundation for the Blind.
“The Advocates program put me on the trajectory to where I am now in my career.”

Lise Pace
Vice President, External Affairs
Bosma Enterprises
Indianapolis, Indiana

“I wake up every day telling myself ‘Today you have to do better than yesterday.’”

Diana-Marie Soto
2021 Peter J. Salmon Employee of the Year Award nominee
IFB Solutions
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

“It gives me purpose in life to have employment with North Central Sight Services.”

John Denmark
2021 Milton J. Samuelson Career Achievement Award nominee
North Central Sight Services
Williamsport, Pennsylvania
AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

PRIORITIZING WELLNESS

Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh creates novel job opportunities with launch of first yoga studio focused on the needs of people who are blind.

BY ROSEMARIE LALLY, J.D.

When Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services (BVRS) of Pittsburgh opened its doors as a manufacturer in 1910, no one could have imagined the opportunities it would present to people who are blind or visually impaired in 2022.

Over the years the NIB associated nonprofit agency has pursued cutting-edge employment opportunities and training, while never forgetting to “honor our past and how it’s brought us to the present,” says Vice President of External Affairs Leslie Montgomery. Although BVRS has evolved with the times, its mission remains unchanged: Providing rehabilitation, training, and jobs that enable people with vision loss to lead independent lives.

In recent years, the BVRS Access Technology Center has built a reputation for helping people with vision loss gain proficiency in the use of computers, software, and other electronic devices. Beyond basic proficiency, the center also provides advanced assistive technology training through the Professional Mastery of Office Technology for Employment (ProMOTE) program.

ProMOTE takes users beyond the basic training that allows them to perform essential job and life tasks, and prepares them for competitive positions by combining formal instruction with time-sensitive projects that simulate the demands and collaboration

BY ROSEMARIE LALLY, J.D.

Prioritizing Wellness

Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh creates novel job opportunities with launch of first yoga studio focused on the needs of people who are blind.

When Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services (BVRS) of Pittsburgh opened its doors as a manufacturer in 1910, no one could have imagined the opportunities it would present to people who are blind or visually impaired in 2022.

Over the years the NIB associated nonprofit agency has pursued cutting-edge employment opportunities and training, while never forgetting to “honor our past and how it’s brought us to the present,” says Vice President of External Affairs Leslie Montgomery. Although BVRS has evolved with the times, its mission remains unchanged: Providing rehabilitation, training, and jobs that enable people with vision loss to lead independent lives.

In recent years, the BVRS Access Technology Center has built a reputation for helping people with vision loss gain proficiency in the use of computers, software, and other electronic devices. Beyond basic proficiency, the center also provides advanced assistive technology training through the Professional Mastery of Office Technology for Employment (ProMOTE) program.

ProMOTE takes users beyond the basic training that allows them to perform essential job and life tasks, and prepares them for competitive positions by combining formal instruction with time-sensitive projects that simulate the demands and collaboration
needed in the workplace. Graduates of the four-week program master Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook, and PowerPoint, as well as internet research and creating accessible documents.

**Putting Health and Fitness First**
BVRS’ latest endeavor — Blue Awning Yoga and Wellness Studio — is the first yoga studio in the country to focus on the fitness needs of people who are blind or visually impaired while also offering them employment. BVRS President Erika Petach recalls a conversation with an employee who said she could not join a gym because her visual impairment was perceived as a liability risk.

Petach, an enthusiastic fitness proponent, gave the matter some thought and realized yoga could be a perfect activity for people who are blind because it relies on verbal cues from an instructor, with participants determining what feels best for their body. Petach sought advice from studio owners, developed a business plan, and obtained grant money to train instructors.

Blue Awning launched in March 2020 — just in time to be shut down by the COVID-19 pandemic. Undeterred,
the studio offered virtual programs throughout the pandemic, holding a grand reopening celebration in April of this year, complete with a complimentary yoga class and rooftop reception.

Blue Awning offers 15 yoga classes weekly, including vinyasa, chair, power, slow flow, and restorative, both virtually and in person for a small fee. The studio also offers other NIB agencies private virtual yoga classes tailored to individuals’ specific needs. “I love that NIB agencies can support their people and each other in this way,” Petach says.

‘Yes, People Who Are Blind Can Do This’

“What Blue Awning is doing is really revolutionary, saying, ‘yes, people who are blind can do this,’ both as an instructor and a student,” Annie Lapidus, the center’s first certified yoga instructor, says the studio is correcting common misperceptions about what people who are blind can do.
says. “We’re correcting common misperceptions about people with disabilities and illustrating for people who are blind that they can find their niche and follow their passion.”

A passionate advocate for inclusion and accessibility, Lapidus, who lost her eyesight a few years after she completed college, has served as a consultant for the Carnegie museums and an immersive theater group, working to identify existing barriers and find ways to make people feel welcome. “People with disabilities are often overlooked and that’s very isolating,” she explains. “I don’t want blindness to ever be a barrier to people reaching their goals.”

In her yoga classes, Lapidus describes poses and offers suggestions for modifying positions where needed. She focuses on modalities that are easily adaptable, such as gentle yoga and chair yoga, recently receiving certification in accessible yoga. “I get lots of feedback on how calming our class is for people,” she says. “I’m happy that we’re giving access to individuals who generally don’t have it.”

Vivian Bowser, Blue Awning’s first personal trainer, received rehabilitation training at BVRS as a high school student before attending college. Now certified as a personal trainer by the National Academy of Sports Medicine, she returned to BVRS to start her career.

Bowser, who lost her mother to diabetes, is working to become a certified nutritionist and integrate nutrition into her training work. She wants others to know diabetes and other diseases are preventable and manageable. “I find it very satisfying to see the joy people experience when they say, ‘I’m down
one dress size,’ or ‘My old suits fit again’ and you know they’re healthier now.”

Bowser encourages people with disabilities to pursue their personal goals, noting that “following another’s path isn’t always the right thing — you have to find your own way and go after your dreams.”

**Employing Craftsmen with Vision Loss**

Apart from the new wellness studio, BVRS employs 88 people in manufacturing, sewing, and contracting operations, producing quality products for commercial, state, and federal customers while providing training and good jobs for people who are blind.

The agency’s manufacturing and assembly division produces a wide variety of products, from air filters for nuclear submarines to surgical kits. Lance Ayers, who came to BVRS for training in accessible technology while in high school, returned as a utility worker after college. Over the next five years, he was promoted to shipping and receiving coordinator and also named the agency’s employee of the year in 2018.

Ayers enjoys the variety of opportunities available. This

*Vivian Bowser, Blue Awning’s first personal trainer, is certified by the National Academy of Sports Medicine and working on an additional certification in nutrition to further assist BVRS clients.*
summer, he is attending the Business Essentials program offered by NIB’s talent management enterprise NSITE. Designed for employees interested in learning about business strategies and operations, the program teaches participants about decision-making, finance, and budgeting in business.

Joanne Johnson began work in the BVRS sewing program four years ago, even though she had no sewing experience. Now she is a textiles team leader who fills in for the unit supervisor when needed, guiding co-workers and ensuring timely shipments. Named the agency’s employee of the year in 2020, Johnson says “I really like the people I work with, everyone’s very supportive of one another,” adding “I love my work and the organization and what it stands for.”

BVRS also provides services through its Employment Textiles Team Leader Joanne Johnson (right), shown here with textile supervisor Karen Murphy, had no sewing experience when she joined BVRS four years ago.
Transition Program, including assembly, packing and unpacking bulk products, pricing, and collating paperwork. These training and work experiences can lead to positions on contracts for federal and state agencies.

After taking a break to raise children, re-entering the workforce was difficult for Cathy Martina, who developed vision problems as an adult. She came to BVRS for rehabilitation training and ended up working on a contract with the IRS. The training and assistive technology provided by BVRS helped her overcome employment barriers and not only succeed in the workplace, but be named the agency’s 2022 employee of the year.

“Learning I was losing my sight was a shock, but BVRS opened my eyes to the possibilities of what I could do,” she says. “It’s gratifying to be able to get out there and contribute.”

“Renewal of hope is what we work toward,” Petach says. “For an individual who is blind to interact with other people who are blind and know they are succeeding at what they really want to do, it’s more impactful than anything I, as a sighted person, can say.”

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

OFFICE SUPPLIES

1. SKILCRAFT® 2023 Wall Calendars and Appointment Planners

SKILCRAFT® 2023 Wall Calendars and Appointment Planners help you keep track of important dates and meetings. Made of 100% post-consumer recycled paper and printed with soy inks, planner books also feature covers made using 50% recycled content bound with wire of 90% post-consumer materials. Available in a variety of sizes and styles including monthly, weekly, and daily wire bound appointment planners, 12-month wall calendars in three sizes, and two-sided erasable laminated calendars. Produced by Chicago Lighthouse Industries in Chicago, Illinois.
NEW PRODUCTS Continued from page 43

2. Mobile Pixel® SKILCRAFT® Portable Secondary Laptop Monitor
Double your screen space while working from anywhere with the Mobile Pixel® SKILCRAFT® Portable Laptop Monitor. Simply connect the monitor to your display using the USB cable to view in portrait, presentation, or landscape mode. Monitors have 14.1” screen with full HD Display but weigh only 1.8 pounds. Works with Microsoft Windows, Mac, Chrome, and Linux operating systems or connect to Android devices. Complete unit includes the Mobile Pixel® SKILCRAFT® Portable Monitor, 2-in-1 USB Type-C to USB-A cable, magnets for attaching to laptop lid, additional double sided adhesive stickers, 1”x 4” SKILCRAFT® Branded Cable Wrap, and user guide. Produced by Association for Vision Rehabilitation and Employment - Goodwill Industries of Greater Rochester in Rochester, New York.

3. SKILCRAFT® Face Mask Lanyard
Keep face masks safe, clean, and ready for use with SKILCRAFT® Face Mask Lanyards. Lightweight 36” long, ⅜” wide black lanyard strap features breakaway clasp and two sturdy metal hooks to keep masks secure and easily accessible when needed. Suitable for both disposable and reusable masks. Produced by West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in San Angelo.
4. SKILCRAFT® Patriotic Neck Lanyard
Display identity credentials and get through security faster with this red, white, and blue cord style lanyard. This 36” long, ¼” wide lanyard features a cord adjuster, side release buckle, and breakaway connection that detaches when the lanyard is pulled taut, making it safe for use in areas with machinery and other safety hazards. Assembled in the U.S.A. Produced by West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in San Angelo.

5. SKILCRAFT® Dual Card ID Holder
Keep IDs and smart cards visible yet secure and accessible with the SKILCRAFT® Dual Card ID Holder. Rigid holder with slot and chain holes for easy attachment to lanyards, strap clips, and badge reels accommodates two standard size credit cards, IDs, or Smart Cards. Vertical orientation with top-load design. Produced by West Texas Lighthouse for the Blind in San Angelo.

PERSONAL CARE

6. SKILCRAFT® Emergency Personal Hygiene Kits
SKILCRAFT® Emergency Personal Hygiene Kits are designed to meet basic hygiene needs of displaced persons in times of disaster. Kit contains basic products that help maintain personal cleanliness.
and hygiene: body wash, shampoo-rinse, comb, toothpaste, toothbrush, razor, and shave gel. Access to these basic hygiene-related products helps reduce possible infection and illness and restores a sense of normalcy in tumultuous environments. Produced by NewView Oklahoma in Oklahoma City.

CLEANING & JANITORIAL SUPPLIES

7. SKILCRAFT® Extra Wide-Angle Broom with Dustpan
The SKILCRAFT® Extra Wide-Angle broom has a 15” sweeping path for quick and easy cleaning indoors or out. Angled bristles made of heavy-duty fibers reach into corners and under tight spaces. Includes clip-on dustpan and swivel hanger for storage. Provides superior, long-lasting performance in a value priced broom and dustpan. Produced by IBVI in West Allis, Wisconsin.

8. GOJO® SKILCRAFT® Scrubbing Towels
GOJO® SKILCRAFT® Scrubbing Towels are designed to tackle tough cleaning jobs including heavy soils, tar, grease, and adhesives. Textured pre-moistened towels work quickly to scrub away dirt and soils in settings where water is not accessible. Formulated with a fresh citrus scent and skin conditioners to prevent dryness and irritation. Made in the U.S.A. Produced by IFB Solutions in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.
9. PURELL® SKILCRAFT® Surface Disinfecting Wipes
Keep guests and employees safe with PURELL® SKILCRAFT® Professional Surface Disinfecting Wipes, proven to kill COVID-19 in just 30 seconds and rated 99.9% effective against colds, flu, E. coli, strep, and other common viruses and bacteria. No-rinse formula with light citrus scent provides fast and effective cleaning of skin and food contact surfaces. Made in the U.S.A. Produced by IFB Solutions in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

10. SKILCRAFT® Coreless 2-Ply Toilet Tissue
SKILCRAFT® Coreless 2-Ply Toilet Paper specifically designed to fit existing dispensers is ideal for use in high traffic areas. High-capacity coreless rolls decrease service intervals, reduce risk of run out, and require half the storage space of standard bathroom tissue. Rolls consist of 1,000 3.85” x 4.05” perforated white sheets made of 100% recycled fiber with at least 35% post-consumer fiber. Made in the U.S.A. Produced by Outlook-Nebraska in Omaha.

11. SKILCRAFT® Lasting Power Urinal Screens
Keep public or commercial restrooms smelling fresh and clean with SKILCRAFT® Lasting Power Urinal Screens. Environmentally friendly round
polymer compound screens sit on urinal drains to deodorize with a fresh scent, eliminate virtually all splash back, and filter debris to prevent clogged drains. 100% recyclable screens available in five fragrances. Made in the U.S.A. Choose regular screens available in five scents, or extended power screens available in seven scents. Produced by VisionCorps in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

HARDWARE AND PAINTS

12. SKILCRAFT® Pro-Grade Tool Kits
Compact SKILCRAFT® Pro-Grade Tool Kits provide a comprehensive assortment of essential hand tools with a guaranteed lifetime replacement warranty. General-purpose tools that meet or exceed ANSI requirements are a valuable addition for professionals and do-it-yourselfers. Produced by IBVI in West Allis, Wisconsin.

These and thousands of other products are available for purchase at AbilityOne.com, GSAAAdvantage.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.
In partnership with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, NIB has launched an entrepreneurial program to help people who are blind stand up their own e-commerce business.

The entrepreneurs’ businesses will use NIB’s existing e-commerce technology to host a fully functional, branded, online storefront with more than 40,000 products including SKILCRAFT® office and cleaning supplies and breakroom products manufactured by people who are blind working at NIB associated nonprofit agencies.

NIB’s talent management enterprise, NSITE, is delivering training, mentoring, and hands-on experience to help the business owners succeed. The training includes advanced assistive technology skills; sales and digital marketing; and technical training on using the e-commerce platform.
In April, 16 NIB staff members participated in NIB’s first in-person, on-site Lean Six Sigma training offered at the Alexandria headquarters since the pandemic started. The training was designed to teach students to use Lean and process variation concepts to improve business processes in their own areas of responsibility and prepare them to fully participate on organization-wide process improvement project teams.

During the two-day, fourteen-hour training, students were introduced to Lean Thinking and Continuous Process Improvement using Lean Six Sigma methodology. Homework assignments reinforced concepts and methods discussed during the sessions. Lean and Six Sigma concepts were woven together to present a basic framework for Continuous Process Improvement.

Overall, 92% of NIB staff are now Yellow Belt certified or higher, as are 32 employees representing 15 different NIB associated agencies.

NIB’s Continuous Process Improvement program hosted 16 employees for its first in-person, on-site Lean Six Sigma training since the start of the pandemic.
A new video spotlights the capabilities and services available to people who are blind through NIB associated nonprofit agency VisionCorps, headquartered in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Featuring agency leadership and employees who are blind, the video gives viewers a sense of the variety of work being done at VisionCorps, from manufacturing SKILCRAFT products to providing contract closeout services to federal customers, and the opportunities employees have to build rewarding careers. Scan the QR code at right to access the video.
NIB HOSTS AGENCY FINANCE LEADERS

NIB hosted its first Finance/CFO Forum since the pandemic began at NIB Headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia May 18-20. The event brought together 24 chief financial officers and senior finance professionals from NIB associated agencies to network, learn, and leverage their agencies.

In addition to a State of the Program address, the Forum agenda covered topics including cybersecurity awareness and enterprise risk management; NIB grants, incentives, and loans available to agencies for projects that help grow employment; and roundtable discussions of topics relevant to the AbilityOne® Program. Participants enjoyed getting together after two years of virtual meetings.

Representatives from 24 NIB associated nonprofit agencies attended the Finance/CFO Forum in May to discuss a variety of topics related to growing employment opportunities for people who are blind.
SKILCRAFT CAPABILITIES HIGHLIGHTED IN NEW VIDEO

The work of employees in NIB associated nonprofit agencies is the focus of a new video released by NIB in June. In just 90 seconds, the feature showcases the wide range of SKILCRAFT® capabilities available through the AbilityOne® Program and the diversity of career choices open to people who are blind, from cutting-edge manufacturing to professional services that include supply chain management, administrative support, and contract closeout.

The video also demonstrates how NIB and its associated agencies, with more than 80 years of experience, partner with federal and commercial customers to help them fulfill their missions while creating rewarding careers for Americans who are blind. Scan the QR code above to access the video.
NIB AGENCY PATENTS MEDICAL DEVICE FOR FIELD USE

The United States Patent and Trademark Office formally approved the patent application of NIB associated nonprofit agency Alphapointe for the Junctional Hemorrhage Control Plate (JHCP). The device works in tandem with another Alphapointe patented medical device, the Tactical Mechanical Tourniquet (TMT), to stop blood loss in areas where tourniquets cannot be applied, such as the groin.

The approval is the latest in a series of developments for Alphapointe’s tactical/medical division, which now has eight patented or patent-pending products designed to improve the well-being and safety of people around the world.

“This patent is yet another step forward for Alphapointe to become one of our nation’s leading tactical/medical device manufacturers,” Alphapointe President and CEO Reinhard Mabry said. “The JHCP is a unique device, unlike anything else currently available. It’s a critical development because it fills a void for our military personnel that will save lives.”
While existing available products can address such wounds, they are traditionally only carried by medical personnel due to the weight of the devices. The JHCP and TMT are highly portable and designed to be carried and used by anyone with a minimal amount of training, making them ideal for military and first responder settings.

Tested in collaboration with military personnel at Ft. Hood Texas, Schofield Barracks Hawai’i, and Wake Forest University’s Operational Medicine Division, the JHCP is available to U.S. military branches, law enforcement organizations, first responders and the general public. It is the fourth tactical/medical product developed by Alphapointe in the last five years.

To date, Alphapointe has produced nearly 750,000 life-saving and tactical/medical devices which create sustainable jobs for Americans who are blind. In March, the agency donated nearly 5,000 medical-related items to the Ukraine Relief Effort, including 2,500 TMTs.
NATIONAL INDUSTRIES FOR THE BLIND INVITES YOU

2022 EXPO

10.5.22

Thousands of products. Hundreds of suppliers. One remarkable mission. Discover how NIB and its partners are creating jobs for people who are blind.

Save The Date