

# 2016 Annual Report

**NEW MEXICO**  
**Commission for the Blind**  
and

New Mexico Commission for the Blind  
**State Rehabilitation Council**

# 2016 Annual Report

New Mexico Commission for the Blind

and

New Mexico Commission for the Blind  
State Rehabilitation Council  
July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016

## New Mexicans with Vision Loss

Number of persons in New Mexico who are blind or who have serious difficulty seeing

|              |          |               |
|--------------|----------|---------------|
| Male         | -        | 31,515        |
| Female       | -        | 37,106        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>=</b> | <b>68,621</b> |
|              |          |               |
| Under 18     | -        | 3,059         |
| 18 to 64     | -        | 38,267        |
| 65 and Older | -        | 27,295        |

### Definition and Scope:

The term vision loss refers to individuals who reported they have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses or contact lenses, as well as those who are blind or unable to see at all.

### Data Source:

U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey (Census)

1-Year Estimate/Updated April 2016

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# Introduction

*T*he Commission for the Blind provides vocational rehabilitation and independent living services to persons who are blind or visually impaired, enabling them to become more participating and contributing members of society. Persons who are blind or visually impaired lead normal lives, have families, raise children, participate in community activities, and work in a wide range of jobs. They are social workers, lawyers, teachers, engineers, machinists, scientists, supervisors, and business owners. The real challenge is to educate people who are blind or visually impaired

about their own potential, and to educate society about the capabilities of persons who are blind or visually impaired.

The Commission believes persons who are blind or visually impaired are normal, and blindness, in and of itself, is not a barrier to leading a normal and productive life. The Commission provides services that enable persons who are blind or visually impaired to enhance their abilities and assume roles in the community as working, taxpaying, and contributing citizens.

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) was created pursuant to the federal Rehabilitation Act, which is now Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The SRC works in close partnership with the Commission by helping to formulate vocational rehabilitation policies and priorities. The primary product of this partnership is the Commission's portion of the Combined State Plan, which is developed jointly between the SRC and the Commission.



# Mission Statement

*O*ur mission is to enable persons who are blind to achieve vocational, economic, and social equality by providing career preparation, training in the skills of blindness, and above all, promoting and conveying the belief that blindness is not a barrier to successful employment or to living an independent and meaningful life.



Greg Trapp  
Executive Director

*“Whether you are the parent of a child diagnosed with a visual impairment, an individual who has been in an accident and has become blind as a result, a person who is a senior with age-related macular degeneration, or whether you have any one of a number of other conditions that might have caused your blindness, the New Mexico Commission for the Blind is here to let you know that blindness is not a barrier to leading a full, meaningful, and productive life.”*

# Commissioners



Greg Trapp, J.D.  
Executive Director  
Albuquerque



Arthur A. Schreiber  
Commission Chairman  
Albuquerque



Dallas Allen  
Commissioner  
Albuquerque



Jim Babb  
Commissioner  
Albuquerque



## NEW MEXICO COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND

2200 Yale Blvd., S.E.  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106  
(505) 841-8844  
**FAX:** (505) 841-8850



December 14, 2016

The Honorable Susana Martinez  
Governor of the State of New Mexico  
State Capitol, Fourth Floor  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87503

Dear Governor Martinez,

In accordance with Section 28-7-15 through Section 28-7-23 NMSA 1978, the Commission for the Blind submits its Annual Report for the state fiscal year ending June 30, 2016.

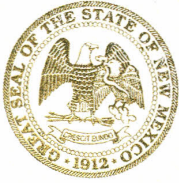
The most significant development during this report period is the ongoing implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The Act took effect on July 22, 2014, replacing the Workforce Investment Act. According to the final set of "Standards and Indicators" issued under the Workforce Investment Act, the Commission ranked 1st in the nation for the percent of clients with competitive employment outcomes, 1st for the percent of clients with significant disabilities, 1st for clients who primarily rely on their own earnings after receiving services, and 8th for the starting wage compared to the average state wage. One of the most significant changes under the new law is the requirement that 15 percent of our federal vocational rehabilitation funds be spent on provision of certain Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to students aged 14 to 21. While increasing some services to youth, this change reduces the amount of funds that are available to serve adults. Despite this additional requirement, the Commission is serving all eligible clients.

The Commission is dedicated to the goal of helping blind persons become self-supporting and participating members of society. The following report details the ways in which the Commission accomplished this goal.

Respectfully,

  
Greg D. Trapp, J.D.  
Executive Director

  
Arthur A. Schreiber  
Commission Chairman



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December 14, 2016

The Honorable Susana Martinez  
Governor of the State of New Mexico  
State Capitol, Fourth Floor  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87503

Dear Governor Martinez,

Pursuant to Section 105(c)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act, the State Rehabilitation Council submits its Annual Report for the federal fiscal year ending September 30, 2016. The Council worked closely with the Commission to implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, including significant areas of change such as the strengthening of relationships with partner agencies, and the requirement that 15 percent of vocational rehabilitation funds be reserved for provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). Our accomplishments include:

- \*The Council helped the Commission to adopt its portion of the Combined State Plan under the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, including adopting new goals and priorities.
- \* The Council made recommendations that resulted in revisions to the Manual of Operating Procedures and other policies.
- \* The Council made recommendations for the construction of an apartment facility at the Orientation Center.

The following Annual Report details the accomplishments of the Commission for the Blind and State Rehabilitation Council.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas P. O'Brien".

Thomas P. O'Brien  
Chair  
State Rehabilitation Council



# State Rehabilitation Council Members Commission for the Blind

*F*or the State Fiscal Year July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016, and the Federal Fiscal Year October 1, 2015 through September 30, 2016.

## Council Members

Thomas P. O'Brien, Chair ▼ Edgewood  
Urja Lansing, Vice-Chair ▼ Albuquerque  
Lila Martinez, Secretary ▼ Las Cruces  
Coby Livingstone, Executive Committee ▼ Albuquerque  
Peggy Chong, Executive Committee ▼ Albuquerque  
Bernadine Chavez, Client Assistance Program ▼ Albuquerque  
Paula Seanez, 121 Project ▼ Navajo Nation  
Lucy Birbiglia ▼ Albuquerque  
Christine Hall ▼ Albuquerque  
Brienne Kotschwar ▼ Albuquerque  
Greg Trapp, Executive Director, ex officio ▼ Albuquerque



Thomas P. O'Brien  
SRC Chairperson

# State Rehabilitation Council

## Goals and Priorities

**O**n Friday, February 13, 2015, the Rehabilitation Services Administration announced that it would award 2016 grants based on the 2015 State Plan to reduce the burden of working on two plans at the same time. As a result, the Commission did not submit a State Plan in July of 2015. Instead, the Commission began work on the Combined Plan to be submitted pursuant to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Accordingly, the Council met on December 4, 2015, and again on February 22, 2016, and adopted the following Goals and Priorities to be submitted as a part of the Combined Plan:

a. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by partnering and working with community colleges and one-stop centers to more effectively utilize services available through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Wagner-Peyser programs.

**Agency Response:** The agency will work cooperatively with the identified partner entities by designating specific liaisons and points of contact, by providing information, and by entering into cooperative agreements where appropriate.

b. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by working cooperatively with the New Mexico Department of Health so as to develop opportunities for competitive and integrated employment for persons who are blind or visually impaired, which will be accomplished

by working in partnership with the Medical Assistance Division, the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and the Behavioral Health Services Division.

**Agency Response:** The agency will work cooperatively with the Department of Health, with the Medical Assistance Division, with the Developmental Disabilities Supports Division, and with the Behavioral Health Services Division. The agency will designate specific liaisons and points of contact for each of these entities, will provide information as appropriate, and will enter into a cooperative agreement with the Department of Health.

c. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by using the Orientation Center to provide employment preparation training for adults and transition students, including through the addition of an apartment training facility to be constructed

adjacent to the Center. The proposed apartment facility will increase the capacity of the Orientation Center, will enable the Orientation Center to provide more realistic training, will eliminate the need to rent costly and less appropriate private apartments, and will reduce the number of instances in which costly out-of-state training will be necessary to meet the needs of consumers.

**Agency Response:** The proposed apartment project has been delayed by a significant state budget deficit that has resulted in reduced funds for new construction. The agency will work to obtain necessary approvals to construct the proposed apartment facility once funding is available. The agency has obtained architectural drawings of the proposed apartments, and is working with the Facilities Management Division with the goal of obtaining funding for construction.

d. Increase the number of consumers served through enhanced Outreach Activities; including media outreach, use of paid advertising, through increased collaboration with ophthalmologists and optometrists, and through the use of the Technology for Children program to conduct outreach to school districts.

**Agency Response:** The agency will continue to work to increase outreach to the identified groups using the recommended outreach methods. The agency sent a copy of the

annual report to every ophthalmologist and optometrist in the state. The agency staffed a table at the annual meeting of the Academy of Ophthalmology. The agency also sponsored the 2015 Getting in Touch with Literacy conference which drew more than 125 educational professionals and teachers of the blind from throughout the state. In addition, the agency sent mailings to special education directors throughout the state, and sponsored certification examinations in Unified English Braille to teachers of the blind in July and December of 2015, and conducted a workshop on Unified English Braille in September of 2016.

e. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes of transition consumers by providing enhanced Pre-Employment Transition Services, including assistive technology where appropriate as a part of an Individualized Plan for Employment, by providing assistive technology through the Technology for Children Program, by conducting increased outreach activities, by conducting educational activities to meet the specific needs of transition students, and by increasing proficient use of Braille and Braille math.

**Agency Response:** The agency will continue to work to increase services and outreach to Pre-Employment Transition Students using the identified methods. The agency

already seeks to be involved in Individualized Education Plan meetings for transition consumers starting at age 14, and the agency operates the Students in Transition to Employment Program in Albuquerque and Alamogordo. The agency also sponsored certification exams in Unified English Braille to teachers of the blind in July and December of 2015, and sponsored a workshop on Unified English Braille in September of 2016.

f. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers by providing services in a way that genuinely honors the “informed choice” provisions of the Rehabilitation Act, enabling Commission consumers to have the opportunity to obtain employment at higher levels of compensation.

**Agency Response:** The agency continues to provide our services in a way that allows our consumers to set and obtain high employment goals. This has historically been reflected by strong performance on Indicator 1.5, which measured the average starting salary of our consumers against the average state wage. Even though this Indicator is no longer in place under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the agency will continue to provide services that will enable our consumers to obtain high starting wages.

g. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers

by providing a quality and expanding Newsline system that gives consumers access to employment listings, business news, and other important information.

**Agency Response:** The agency is committed to providing a quality Newsline service. The agency updated the local Newsline software on September 2, 2014, and the agency is working on adding additional publications as a result of this upgrade, including the Alamogordo Daily News. The agency will continue to sponsor NFB-Newsline in New Mexico.

h. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by creatively and innovatively using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers and potential vocational rehabilitation consumers, including using it for provision of services to transition students.

**Agency Response:** The agency is committed to using the Skills Center to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers. As a result, the agency used the Skills Center to provide training to the Students in Transition to Employment Program in the summers of 2015 and 2016. The agency also sponsored a student seminar in November of 2015, and a college prep workshop in January of 2016. The Skills Center was also used to provide support in the area of Braille and technology training, as well as to function as a meeting place for programs related to vocational rehabilitation.

i. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the provision of independent living training to vocational rehabilitation consumers, including through the proposed apartment training facility at the Orientation Center.

**Agency Response:** The agency continues to refer vocational rehabilitation consumers to receive independent living services, recognizing the need for consumers to be able to function independently to become employed. The agency recognizes the benefit of providing training at the Orientation Center that is realistic and appropriate to the individual needs of consumers, and is therefore actively seeking to build apartments that can be used to provide more realistic and appropriate training.

j. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers who are Deaf-Blind through collaboration and partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, with the Community Outreach Programs for the Deaf, and with the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, including through the delivery of assistive technology to consumers who are Deaf-Blind.

**Agency Response:** The agency has identified a vocational rehabilitation counselor to take the lead on services related to consumers who are Deaf-Blind. The agency also revised its cooperative agreement with the Division

of Vocational Rehabilitation in August of 2016. The agency also works with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to coordinate provision of services to persons who are Deaf-Blind. The agency works with a variety of other partners, including the Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Community Outreach Program for the Deaf, the Helen Keller National Center, and the Deaf-Blind Task Force. The agency also participates in the annual Deaf-Blind Awareness Day at the Roundhouse.

k. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes through the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) by shortening the time required for vendors to complete the required training, including by using Randolph-Sheppard Act training offered by the Hadley School for the Blind.

**Agency Response:** The agency has adopted the Hadley class as the training method for BEP vendors, and is working with New Mexico programs to create a local provider so that food preparation and cooking methods can be taught locally. It is anticipated that we will have this in place early in 2017.

l. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by strengthening administrative services so as to timely and accurately submit federal reports, to assure compliance with all applicable fiscal

regulations, and to comply with all applicable accounting standards.

**Agency Response:** The agency recognizes the need to have strong fiscal programs so as to maximize the receipt of federal funds, and to otherwise provide appropriate vocational rehabilitation services to our consumers. To do this, the agency must have in place a sufficient number of qualified fiscal staff to comply with federal fiscal rules, and to appropriately respond to changing fiscal requirements and staffing levels. The agency has submitted its “Single Audit” on time, and has only had two minor fiscal finding in the last five years.

m. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes by enhancing overall performance and productivity by engaging in activities designed to mitigate and ameliorate the impacts of blindness and visual impairment, and by engaging in outreach and other activities designed to identify additional potential consumers, and by making the public and medical community more aware of Commission services.

**Agency Response:** The agency is engaging in new and innovative approaches to provide services and engage in outreach. The agency has developed the iFidget app for the iPhone to help consumers correct inappropriate

rocking motions that a small portion of blind individuals develop. The agency also developed a typing program called Keystroke that helps blind persons learn how to type more efficiently, including persons who are Deaf-Blind. The agency has developed an entirely new web page that has a more modern appearance, and that will allow for referrals to be made by health care professionals. The web page also has a feature that allows members of the public to sign up to automatically be emailed meeting notices, agendas, and minutes.

n. Enhance the number and quality of employment outcomes for consumers by providing enhanced benefits counseling and guidance to reduce concerns related to the loss or reduction of benefits.

**Agency Response:** The agency continues to provide benefits counseling and guidance through a contract with the New Mexico Legal Aid Society. The agency also had staff from Legal Aid provide training on benefits to the vocational rehabilitation counselors. The agency has also provided seminars on benefits to consumers.

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# Accomplishments

*State fiscal year 2016*

## Services Delivered

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Vocational Rehabilitation Program.....             | 342 |
| Students in Transition to Employment Program ..... | 37  |
| Orientation Center.....                            | 37  |
| Business Enterprise Program.....                   | 20  |
| Persons who took the NCUEB exam .....              | 8   |
| Independent Living / Older Blind Program .....     | 533 |
| Emergency Eye Care Program .....                   | 14  |

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# New Mexico

## Commission for the Blind

### Programs and Services

### Vocational Rehabilitation





# Vocational Rehabilitation Program

*T*he Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program serves persons who are legally blind and individuals with qualifying visual impairments. The program helps persons to become employed in ways that are appropriate to each individual's strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. Despite the lingering impact of the Great Recession, the Commission placed 19 consumers in employment during the federal fiscal year that ended on September 30, 2016. The Commission also served 342 VR consumers during the year. Because the VR program serves consumers starting at age 14, it is common for consumers to receive services for many years, especially when the employment goals require college or graduate educations.

The 19 consumers that the Commission placed in employment earned an average starting hourly wage of \$22.07. Had the Rehabilitation Services Administration

continued to evaluate performance using the prior Standards and Indicators, the Commission would have improved significantly from the 8th place it last earned on Primary Indicator 1.5 when the Commission had an average starting wage of \$14.18.

Despite budget pressures caused by reduced state funds and the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the Commission for the Blind is serving all eligible vocational rehabilitation consumers, and does not anticipate having to put in place a waiting list for services.



Jim Salas, Deputy Director  
Vocational Rehabilitation Program

*“Feel free to come to us and we can develop a plan of services: We can provide the technology, we can provide training, we can pay for tuition – whatever is necessary for you to achieve that career, we can work with you.”*

# Technology for Children

*T*he Commission's Technology for Children program provided assistive technology to eight blind and visually impaired children who were under 18 and could not obtain the technology from other sources. The technology provided ranged from digital book players to more advanced items such as video magnifiers and computerized Braille note takers.

The program is designed to help blind and visually impaired children achieve the Commission's ultimate goal of becoming successfully employed. The program does this by providing these children with needed assistive technology, by helping the Commission build and strengthen relationships with local school districts, by identifying eligible students, and by providing information about transition and other vocational rehabilitation services. The Technology for Children program is administered in close partnership with the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The program receives its funding from the New Mexico Department of Health.



Kelly Burma, Coordinator  
Technology for Children and STEP

# Transition Services

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act made significant changes in the area of transition services, most especially the requirement that 15 percent of the Commission's vocational rehabilitation funds be spent for provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) on students age 14 to 21. The Rehabilitation Services Administration issued regulations on June 30, 2016, allowing both high school and college students to be served under Pre-ETS. However, the regulations also prohibited using Pre-ETS funds for tuition and most technology purchases. These items will need to be paid for with regular vocational rehabilitation funds.

The Commission implemented a new computerized tracking system to document and track Pre-ETS activities. This system enables counselors, technology specialists, and teachers to track the time they spend providing Pre-ETS services. By carefully tracking this time, the Commission can comply with federal cost-tracking rules and help maximize the amount of federal revenue available to serve New Mexicans who are blind or visually impaired.

The Commission provided a wide range of transition services to blind and visually impaired youth during the year. The goal was to enhance the quantity

and quality of employment outcomes achieved by consumers aged 14 to 21. The Commission's VR Counselors, VR Deputy Director, VR Program Manager, and Technology for Children Coordinator all routinely attended Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. This practice helps provide valuable perspectives, resources, and information to the IEP Team. The Commission's goal is to attend IEP meetings by age 14, and in some cases even earlier.

One of the most significant challenges the Commission faces in the area of transition is a decreasing rate of Braille proficiency in students who are blind or visually impaired. Complicating the challenge is the transition to Unified English Braille, which is a revised Braille code that took effect in 2016. The Commission sponsored a National Certification in Unified English Braille exam on July 31, 2015, and a second exam on December 2, 2015. On September 17, the Commission sponsored a workshop on Unified English Braille presented by the Institute on Blindness. The workshop and exams were attended by teachers from throughout New Mexico. The purpose was to increase the Braille capacity of Commission staff, to build relationships with school districts, and to improve Braille literacy.

# Students in Transition to Employment Program - (STEP)

The Students in Transition to Employment Program (STEP) is a summer training program that provides Commission consumers with a variety of skills instruction and a paid workplace learning experience. Young persons who are blind or visually impaired have traditionally been limited in their ability to engage in such work experiences, depriving them of the important benefits of student employment. STEP served 37 blind students ranging in age from 14 to 21. Some of these students participated in STEP at the Albuquerque Skills Center, while others participated in the residential STEP at the Orientation Center in Alamogordo, and others participated in STEP in their home communities.



Favian Calderon  
Kayaking on Cochiti Lake



Lupita Lopez  
and  
Adaptive Adventures  
Tandem Biking



Evelin Munoz  
Explora

*F*or a blind person to become successfully employed, he or she must acquire a positive attitude about blindness and learn essential blindness skills. The skills learned included Braille, orientation and mobility, cooking, and computer technology. The STEP participants engaged in activities designed to reinforce the skills they have learned and to instill positive attitudes about blindness. The activities included tandem cycling, water sports at Elephant Butte and Cochiti Lakes, hiking, and excursions to shopping malls. The students also participated in seminars and presentations from successful blind adult role models.



Jazmin Castillo,  
Antonio Martinez  
and  
Arturo Cortez  
at the BioPark  
BUGarium

# Orientation Center

*T*he Orientation Center is a residential program that serves the Commission's vocational rehabilitation consumers. The Center helps blind or visually impaired persons acquire the skills needed to become successfully employed. The Center is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), and is certified by the National Blindness Professionals Certification Board (NBPCB). The Commission's Orientation Center is the only blindness training center in the nation that has both CARF accreditation and NBPCB certification. The Center provided intensive training to 37 consumers in the skills of blindness during the year, often operating at full capacity. Nineteen of those served were adults and there were 18 participants in the summer Students Transition to Employment Program. The Center is located in Alamogordo and serves consumers from across the state. The training typically lasts six to nine months, during which time students usually live in the Center's dormitory.

To expand capacity and make training more realistic, the Center is planning on building an apartment facility on land donated to the Commission. The State Rehabilitation Council has actively participated in the planning for these apartments, making specific recommendations regarding their configuration and design. It is hoped that construction can start in 2018.



Lucy Alexander, Deputy Director  
Orientation Center

Consumers attending the Center receive intensive training in cane travel, Braille, assistive technology, home management, personal management, physical education, and industrial arts. Most of these students are newly blinded, and require intensive training to successfully participate in the Commission's vocational rehabilitation program. The Center has a computer lab, a class with two complete kitchens, a fully-equipped industrial arts shop, and a large conference room where seminars are held. The Center also has an exercise gym that is equipped with state-of-the-art exercise equipment that helps students improve their fitness level and increase their stamina.



The training is built around the use of "learning shades" to eliminate the student's desire to rely on inadequate or failing vision. By learning effective non-visual techniques, students gain self-confidence and learn how to function as successful blind persons.



Orientation Center  
Alamogordo, NM

# Assistive Technology

*T*he use of assistive technology is a crucial factor in the successful employment of persons who are blind. However, studies consistently show that persons with disabilities are significantly less likely to access the Internet, including one study that showed that only 54 percent of persons with disabilities access the Internet, compared to 81 percent for persons who do not have disabilities. This gap is called the “digital divide.” The Commission’s assistive technology program seeks to close this gap. One of the challenges to doing this is that a blind or visually impaired person must learn the application, as well as the assistive technology that allows access to the application.

The Commission’s technology specialists provided consumers with assistive technology such as screen readers, Braille displays, screen magnification programs, video magnifiers, and Braille note takers. The assistive technology program conducted technology evaluations; delivered computers, scanners, printers, and video magnifiers; performed hardware or software upgrades; and provided software or hardware repairs. Technical assistance was also provided.



Curtis Chong, Manager  
Assistive Technology

*“Mastery of technology is essential for competing in the digital age. It’s great when it works--frustrating and debilitating when it doesn’t. With appropriate training, motivation, and opportunity, assistive technology can be empowering, exciting, and life-changing. We can help to maximize the gain and minimize the pain.”*



---

# Keystroke



The Commission has also developed a typing application called Keystroke that works on both PC and Mac computers. Keystroke uses advanced metrics to measure typing ability and progress. Keystroke enables the Commission to better meet the needs of consumers, as well as to build relationships with school districts.

One barrier that a small portion of persons who are blind or visually impaired experience is the tendency to engage in “rocking” behavior. This stigmatizing behavior can prevent these persons from becoming employed in positions consistent with their true abilities. The Commission has developed an iPhone app that is designed to address this behavior. The app uses the iPhone’s gyroscope to detect the rocking and discretely alert the user. The app, which is available as a free download, is also intended to help the Commission to engage in outreach activities, and to build relationships with school districts.

# iFidget



# Business Enterprise Program

*T*he Business Enterprise Program (BEP) provides employment opportunities for legally blind individuals who wish to operate food service facilities. The BEP has food establishments from small stands, to vending routes, to a full military cafeteria at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque. The BEP provides public and government employees with quality food service that is conveniently located within government buildings. This last year, 20 blind persons participated in the BEP program, and vendor earnings were \$3,173,763.00 with \$200,350.00 paid in gross receipt taxes.



Diana Martinez, Manager  
Business Enterprise Program

*“What makes the Business Enterprise Program unique and different from other programs is that we give blind individuals an opportunity to work for themselves, to be entrepreneurs, own their own business, manage their employees, and fully execute their passion for food service as a business owner.”*

# Commission Supports National Defense



A BEP vendor operates the Thunderbird Inn and Dining Facility at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque. The operator of this facility has distinguished himself in prior year's competitions for national and international Air Force dining operations, including repeatedly winning the "Gold Plate," a nationwide competition, and also winning the even more prestigious worldwide "John L. Hennessy" award. Both awards are competitions among food service establishments located on military installations.

A BEP vendor also serves the food and dining needs at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Artesia. The Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) provides training to 91 federal agencies, as well as to local, state, and tribal law enforcement agencies.



John Blake  
Business Enterprise Program

# Newsline for the Blind

**N**ewsline is a telephone-based system that allows persons who are blind or visually impaired to access a variety of newspapers and publications. The offerings include the Albuquerque Journal, the New Mexico Magazine, Consumer Reports, and the Santa Fe New Mexican. Newsline also includes the newsletter of the National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico and the State Library Talking Book Newsletter. Blind or visually impaired readers can use Newsline to access important information such as grocery ads, drug store ads, and legal notices. The service is now in its 26th year of operation. The Commission has installed a new Newsline software program



Krista Mireles, Coordinator  
Newsline

that is more robust and stable. This will enable Newsline to grow even more in the coming years.

The Newsline reader uses the buttons of a telephone to select the desired newspaper, to read a story, to skip to the next story, or to exit the category and choose another publication. The reading is done by approximately 80 trained volunteers. The service is available statewide free of charge, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The Commission also sponsors National Federation of the Blind-NEWSLINE, an audio information service that provides access to over 400 publications. NFB-NEWSLINE users can access state newspapers such as the *Farmington Daily Times* and *Las Cruces Sun News*, national newspapers such as *USA Today*, international newspapers such as *The Jerusalem Post*, and magazines such as *Smithsonian Magazine*. NFB-NEWSLINE also provides access to job listings, television schedules, and weather alerts.

# Skills Center



German Benitez  
Braille Instructor

The Skills Center is a state-of-the-art facility that helps meet the needs of the Commission's vocational rehabilitation and independent living consumers. Located in the Albuquerque office, the Skills Center has classrooms for specific subject areas such as Braille, technology, cooking, and personal management. It also has a large lecture room that is ideal for group meetings. The Skills Center was used to teach young students participating in the STEP program, to provide a venue for the Unified English Braille trainings and certification exams, a college prep workshop, and to instruct many other persons who were attending different events and seminars.



Skills Center  
Albuquerque, NM

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# New Mexico

## Commission for the Blind

### Programs and Services

#### Independent Living and Older Blind

*“Blindness Skills Instructors go to consumers’ homes to provide instruction in independent living skills. As the consumer’s confidence increases, these skills serve the consumer both in the home and in the community.”*

# Independent Living and Older Blind Program

*T*he purpose of the Independent Living (IL) program is to enable persons who are blind or visually impaired to live independently in their own homes and communities. The IL program provided intensive training to 533 consumers, and basic services to several hundred more. Most of these consumers were 55 and older, or “Older Blind.”

Independent Living services are provided to blind and visually impaired consumers throughout the state, with most persons being served in their own homes. The instruction includes training in Braille, how to travel using a white cane, how to use public transportation, and instruction in personal and home management skills. The training also includes provision of basic assistive technology devices such as white canes, magnification devices, Braille writing equipment, talking calculators, and Braille or talking watches.

The Independent Living and Older Blind (IL) program serves a rapidly growing population of persons who are blind or visually impaired. The independent living

teachers serve the entire state, frequently traveling over long distances to reach consumer homes in rural areas. The teachers engage in frequent outreach to senior centers, and work with many blind seniors who are living in assisted living facilities and nursing homes. The teachers also serve younger consumers who are often newly blinded and participating in the Commission’s vocational rehabilitation program. Approximately 3.5 percent of the population over 65 is legally blind, and the aging of the population is resulting in a dramatic increase of seniors who are blind or visually impaired.

The senior population is rapidly becoming more technologically literate, and the IL program is seeing more consumers who have needs related to computers and other technologies.



Virginia Murphy, Deputy Director  
Independent Living and  
Older Blind Programs

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# Emergency Eye Care

*T*he Emergency Eye Care Program seeks to prevent blindness and restore vision through medical intervention. The program provided emergency eye surgery to qualifying New Mexico residents who lack the resources to cover the cost of medical eye emergencies. Covered procedures include emergency eye care problems that, if not expeditiously attended to, could result in irreversible vision loss or structural damage to the eye. The majority of procedures are laser treatments, retinal re-attachments, and treatments for acute eye trauma. The program enabled 14 patients to receive a continuity of care with an ophthalmologist of his or her own choosing. This program is the only means by which many persons can avoid permanent blindness. The goal is to return those served to their previous activities and prevent the need for expensive medical and rehabilitative services.



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# Expenditures on Consumer Services State Fiscal Year 2016

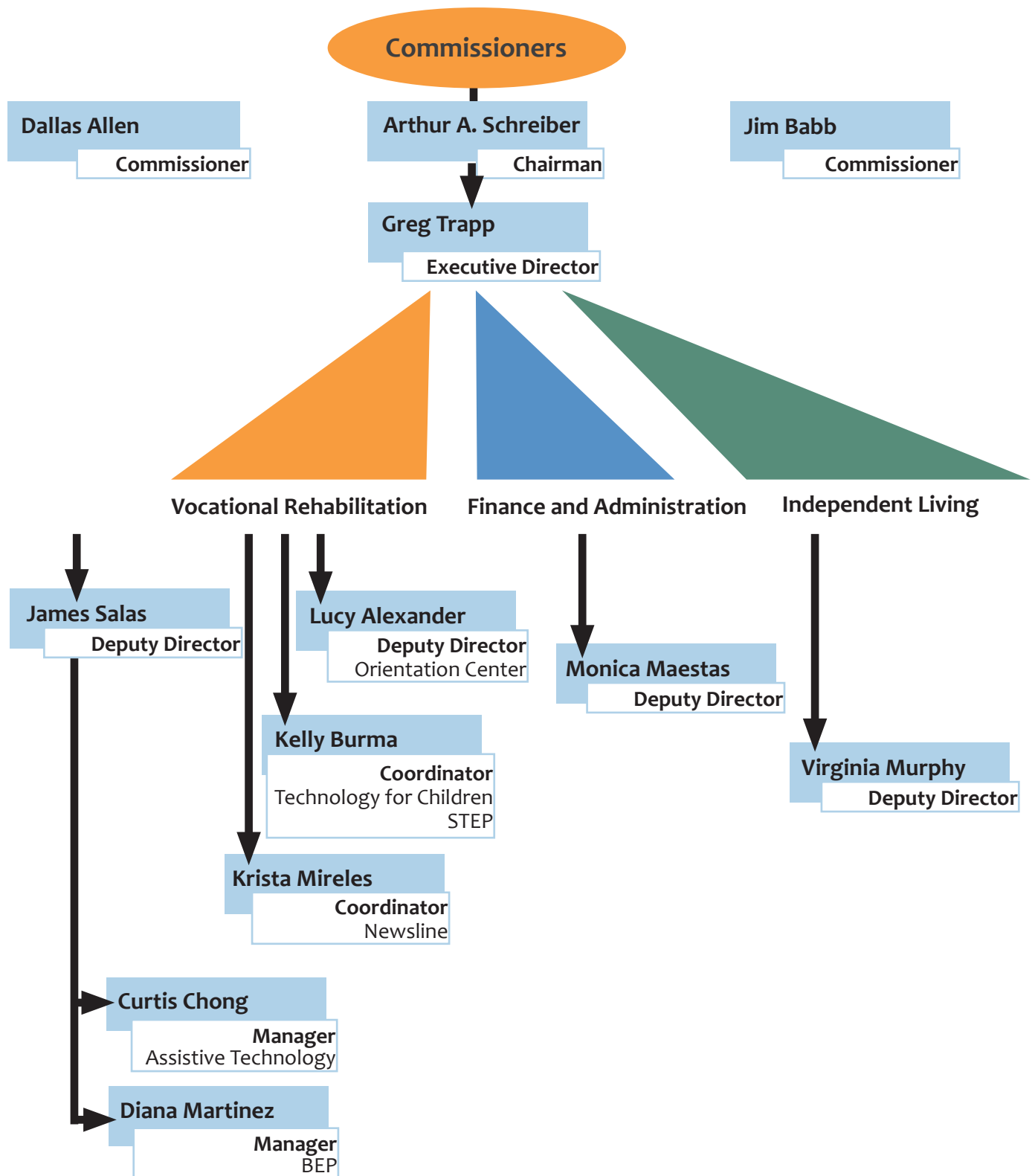
Vocational Rehabilitation Consumers \$1,175,521

Independent Living Consumers. . . . \$117,739

Note: The foregoing figures reflect the cost of items and services that are actually purchased for vocational rehabilitation and independent living consumers of the New Mexico Commission for the Blind. They do not reflect the costs associated with attendance at the Orientation Center; training provided directly by Independent Living teachers or Technology specialists; counseling and guidance provided by Vocational Rehabilitation counselors; participation in the Business Enterprise Program; use of Newsline for the Blind; services through Technology for Children; or services through Emergency Eye Care. They also reflect the much higher portion of federal funds that are mandated for use only on behalf of vocational rehabilitation consumers, and the very small amount of federal funds that the commission receives for independent living services.

# Organizational Chart

## Commission for the Blind



# Statewide Office Locations

## New Mexico Commission for the Blind

### Administrative Office

2905 Rodeo Park Drive East  
Building 4, Suite 100  
Santa Fe, NM 87505  
505-476-4479  
toll free 888-513-7968

### Albuquerque Office

2200 Yale Blvd. SE  
Albuquerque, NM 87106  
505-841-8844  
toll free 888-513-7958

### Alamogordo Orientation Center

408 North White Sands Blvd.  
Alamogordo, NM 88310  
575-437-0401  
toll free 888-513-7967

### Farmington Office

3400 Messina Dr.  
Suite 5000  
Farmington, NM 87402  
505-327-3031  
toll free 888-513-7964

### Las Cruces Office

277 E. Amador  
Suite 101  
Las Cruces, NM 88001  
575-524-6450  
toll free 888-513-7960

### Las Vegas Office

2522-B Ridge Runner Road  
Las Vegas, NM 87701  
505-425-3546  
toll free 888-513-7963

### Roswell Office

400 North Pennsylvania  
Suite 900  
Roswell, NM 88201  
575-624-6140  
toll free 888-513-7961



The logo is oval with NM Commission for the Blind around the rim. The center is in shades of blue with a red Zia symbol in the sky above mountain peaks and a yucca with green leaves, a tan stalk and gold flower in the foreground.

[www.cfb.state.nm.us](http://www.cfb.state.nm.us)



Copies of this annual report are available in Braille, large print and electronic format by contacting:

**New Mexico Commission for the Blind**  
2905 Rodeo Park Drive East  
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Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505  
505-476-4479

