



# IMPACT

SUMMER 2024

Life-changing opportunities for people who are blind.



## UNLEASHING OPPORTUNITY

**As the largest employer of people who are blind in the United States, IFB Solutions has spent the last 88 years creating hundreds of jobs, most of which are in manufacturing. These jobs, by nature, are limited by proximity, available only to those who live near existing facilities – or to those who can relocate. To solve this problem and diversify employment opportunities, IFB began testing new and innovative technologies through its Workforce Services division, offering work-at-home careers to people who are blind.**

Since its launch in 2012, Workforce Services has hired individuals from the Carolinas to California and everywhere in between. The division currently **employs nearly 50 people in 17 states** in fields like customer service, data collection, analysis, sales and more. But in 2024, IFB launched an ambitious campaign to broaden the division's impact – and to make a difference in as many lives as possible.

### **Workforce Services Expansion Campaign**

This three-year, \$3 million plan to grow the division to **support 300 jobs** for people who are blind has the potential to uplift, empower and change more lives than ever before. For decades, IFB has worked tirelessly to create careers for those in this country who are blind. Now, through advancements in

*continued on inside*

# Challenge Accepted

## THE GUND FOUNDATION

IFB Solutions' Workforce Services Expansion Campaign began with a generous promise from the Gordon and Llura Gund Foundation, led by investor and philanthropist Gordon Gund. As a person who is visually impaired himself, Gund has been instrumental in advocacy and financial support for improving the lives of people who are blind.

**In December 2023, Gund personally contributed an unconditional gift of \$400,000 to IFB Solutions** to help expand its Workforce Services division, allowing the nonprofit to hire and train dozens of new, remote employees all around the country.

In addition to this initial donation — and to raise both awareness and funding for IFB's ambitious goals — Gund and his foundation subsequently invited the public to a three-year gift-giving challenge, with annual milestones along the way. If IFB Solutions successfully raises \$3,000,000 in gifts and pledges between now and the end of 2026, the Gund Foundation will donate another \$600,000 to the Workforce Services campaign.

**Three years. Three million dollars. Three-hundred sustainable and accessible jobs** all over the United States. Three-hundred opportunities for people who are blind to build their own path to independence and economic self-sufficiency.



## Letter from the Editor

**You may not think twice about jumping in your car and heading off to work, but for a person who is blind, reliable access to transportation can make or break your career — as well as your ability to live independently. In fact, getting to and from the workplace is one of the leading challenges this community faces when looking for employment.**

Do you live within walking distance of potential employers? Are there public transit options nearby that you can count on? Does your town have taxi services that offer dependable, affordable rides twice a day? Or could you move somewhere that does — even if it means leaving your support network behind? If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” it leaves few options for a person with low vision to succeed.

In this issue, you'll learn more about **IFB Solutions' campaign to create hundreds of new work-from-home opportunities** through an expansion of its Workforce Services division, removing this major barrier to employment for people all over the United States. You'll hear from the individuals whose lives have been forever changed for the better, who are newly empowered by a team that values their skills, by their own ambition — and by their ability to provide for themselves and their families.

These positions have the potential to make a difference for so many across the country, but we need your help to broaden our reach. So, learn more about our Workforce Services campaign, meet our inspirational team, and consider helping us reach our goal to end unemployment for people who are blind. Help us show the world what people with different abilities can do!

# YES, SHE CAN!

**When Shante Reed assists customers over the phone, no one knows she is blind. In 11 years' worth of calls, it's simply never come up. She can do this job just like anyone else, regardless of her ability to see. In fact, she can do it better – with more empathy, patience and understanding than most.**

“The thing is: A lot of people tend to have preconceived notions when they meet somebody who has a disability – whether it's blindness or anything else,” Shante said. “But when you give that person the opportunity, you see all that they *are* capable of. You see that **every person has things that they're good at.**”

When you stop focusing on a person's *disability*, “you find out what their abilities are,” she continued. “But if you don't give them an opportunity, how would you ever know?”

In 2013, IFB Solutions gave Shante that opportunity: a full-time position as a customer service agent on the company's Workforce Services team.

“I was born visually impaired, and growing up in a rural Georgia town, I was pretty much one of one,” she explained. “I didn't have a lot of resources, so I just learned to make do. I was always told I would be dependent upon somebody else: ‘You can't live on your own.’ ‘You can't go to college.’ **But just because they tell you that you can't, doesn't mean you actually can't.**”

And Shante has spent her life proving that she can: She's earned a master's degree in business administration and operations management. She owns her own home. She's a published author and poet. Now, after more than a decade with IFB, she supervises a team of seven remote agents for a government call center contract in North Carolina – supporting her team, training new hires and taking customer calls from her home in Houston, Texas.

For someone who is blind or visually impaired, the opportunity to work from home is life-changing: “I didn't realize how much I was spending on transportation until I was working remotely full-time,” Shante explained. “Public transit, Uber, taxis – it can be very costly, and it's not always reliable. There have been days where I stood outside for two hours waiting to be picked up in the dark. It's been such a blessing to start my day and not have to worry about scheduling a ride.”

**In 2024, IFB announced its fundraising campaign to expand to its Workforce Services division, creating hundreds of new opportunities** like these for people who are blind or visually impaired all over the country – and



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Shante said she is thrilled that so many others may soon be offered the same chance she was given.

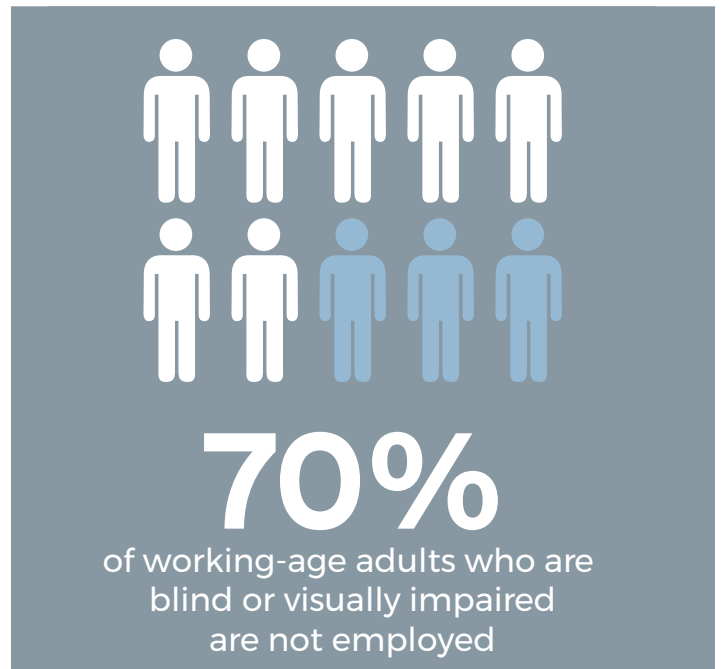
“We want to work. We want to find fulfillment,” she said. “For me and for so many other people, sitting at home and being told ‘you can't’ just doesn't work. Your donation can put people to work. It can uplift them and give them purpose. It can make a difference.”

## Creating Opportunity *continued from front page*

technology, the nonprofit's reach holds unprecedented promise. IFB is ready to take on this challenge.

Each new employee hired requires considerable investment, from recruitment and training to assistive technology and equipment. For IFB, this cost is about \$13,000 per individual – but for someone who has hoped their whole life for a chance, **the possibility of a job is priceless.**

For the next three years, every dollar donated to this campaign is another opportunity to say: **“You’re hired.”** With your support, we can eliminate barriers to employment for hundreds of people who are blind or visually impaired all over the U.S. In this edition of our newsletter, learn more about the life-changing impact Workforce Services jobs have on this critically under-employed group.



## IFB's Workforce Services Expansion **HOW IT WORKS**

### 3 Year Plan



By December 1, 2026, IFB Solutions will expand jobs for people who are blind in work-at-home call center operations through business development, recruitment and training programs.

### 300 Employees



Over 3 years, IFB Solutions will grow its headcount to 300 employees who are blind (up from nearly 50 as of December 2023) in work at home call center jobs. These jobs empower people who are blind to work from home anywhere across the U.S., eliminating geographical and transportation barriers to employment.

### \$3,000,000 Goal



This is the cost to grow headcount to 300 that cannot be billed back to a call center client. This includes job readiness and computer skills training, system accessibility setup, job accommodations and onboarding for employees who are blind.

### \$13,000/Employee



Cost per person who is blind to successfully move them from unemployment onto a career path. This is a one-time investment in an individual to give them skills needed to immediately work an at-home call center job, and set them up for a lifetime of job success.

# Listen Up

Many employees in IFB's Workforce Services division use assistive technology like Job Access With Speech (JAWS). In addition to reading text aloud, JAWS replaces the mouse and cursor with a series of keyboard commands, allowing the user to choose from and interact with applications on their screen — making this highly visual media platform accessible to people who are blind or visually impaired.

In October 2023, IFB Manager of Accessibility and Workforce Development Mike Mote and Manager of Programs Kim Shoffner created an organized curriculum to train individuals in JAWS, with assessments at designated intervals throughout the course.

Five have since graduated from the Basic JAWS training course, with more soon to follow. "I have learned so much, and I know that practicing these skills is key to becoming a more efficient computer user,"



said Jackie Perrea, one of the training program's most recent graduates. She added that the training program is just the beginning of something much larger for her professional development: The more she uses basic JAWS skills, the quicker she is able to perform tasks on the computer — and the more confident she becomes as a person and a prospective employee.



## Workforce Services: PERSONAL GROWTH

**"Being blind, I find working from home takes the biggest pressure and stress factor off the table: the commute. No more waiting for a rideshare to show up, wondering what time you may get dropped off, or public transit issues. Being able to earn a living and contribute to society provides a sense of purpose and accomplishment, fostering personal growth and independence. I can't thank [this team] enough for the dedication, care and kindness they put into doing their jobs."**

— Joseph Shanley, New York,  
Workforce Services employee for 9 years

**"Many companies are very reluctant about hiring a person with a visual impairment — or a disability, in general. They do not understand our capabilities and are not willing to give us an opportunity to prove ourselves. Working for IFB reinforced what I already knew: For the first time in my life, I learned to see myself as competent."**

— Lizeth Soriano, California,  
Workforce Services employee for 11 years



7730 North Point Drive  
Winston-Salem, NC 27106



IFB employees, Winston-Salem, NC

## Workforce Services: **A SENSE OF PURPOSE**

**“I am grateful that there is an organization to help support the blind community and give us a chance to regain our independence in the workforce. The opportunities I have received through this division gave me a new sense of purpose and fulfillment.”**

— *Laura Revan, Georgia,*  
*Workforce Services employee for 4 years*

**“Working for IFB has been an answer to my prayers. I am thankful each morning to have the opportunity to work full time and contribute to society in a meaningful way.”**

— *Osmond Kwan, Nevada,*  
*Workforce Services employee for 6 years*

**“These opportunities provide us with sense of a purpose. Some of us have been passed over for positions due to our vision – or due to a company not understanding accessibility. Finding [an employer] that understands inclusion and gives us that chance is amazing.”**

— *Sheniqua Campbell, Florida,*  
*Workforce Services employee for 4 years*

