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Mentoring and Self-Employment: Potential Strategies to Promote Labor Force Participation

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Abstract

Background: A large portion of the population of people with visual impairments are neither working nor looking for work. Mentoring and self-employment are two strategies to encourage workforce participation, but little is known about whether people with visual impairments who are out of the labor force were offered or were interested in these options.

Objective: We explored whether participants were interested in or had been offered mentoring or self-employment assistance to encourage their participation in the workforce.

Methods: Thirty participants with visual impairments and out of the labor force were interviewed about their thoughts and experiences regarding mentoring and self-employment. A qualitative software program assisted in coding responses, identifying themes, and organizing demographics.

Results: Participants tended to be interested in but did not have access to mentors. Some participants explored self-employment opportunities and even more were interested in it, but few were offered it as an employment option by a vocational rehabilitation provider. Most participants were interested in learning more about self-employment job opportunities and how income earned through self-employment might influence other benefits.

Conclusions: Opportunities to support people with visual impairments in locating mentors or engaging in self-employment appear under-utilized. Participants in this study appeared interested in receiving support from a mentor and learning more about self-employment options. Efforts to improve the labor force participation rate among people with visual impairments should include assistance in finding mentors to promote adjustment to blindness and becoming employed and exploring opportunities for self-employment. Vocational rehabilitation agencies should consider examining their policies and practices to promote greater access and use of these strategies to bring people with visual impairments into the labor market.

Keywords: mentoring, self-employment, blind, visual impairment, vocational rehabilitation

Mentoring and Self-Employment: Potential Strategies to Promote Labor Force Participation

People with visual impairments, i.e., people with blindness or low vision, continue to experience multiple barriers to employment (Coffey et al., 2014; McDonnall et al., 2013; O'Day, 1999) and have lower rates of workforce participation than people without disabilities (McDonnall & Sui, 2019). People with disabilities who stop working at an earlier age tend to be financially insecure (Wu et al., 2016); consequently, nonparticipation in the workforce deprives people with visual impairments of employment's economic benefits. People who leave the workforce early are at increased risk of not returning to work, with even greater risk for women and people with less education or racial minorities (Shierholz, 2020). Participation in the workforce also has social and emotional benefits; people with visual impairments who are employed tend to report a higher quality of life and are less lonely than those who are not employed (Bonsaksen et al., 2023).

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) providers have used various strategies (Crudden et al., 2005), including mentoring and self-employment, to promote employment among people with visual impairments (Moore & Cavenaugh, 2003; O'Mally & Antonelli, 2016). This study explored whether mentoring or self-employment were offered to people with visual impairments who were out of the labor force and their thoughts about these strategies. If effective in increasing interest in employment, these interventions may increase workforce participation and enhance the quality of the lives of people with visual impairments.

Labor Force Participation

Labor force participation gives a more nuanced view of employment status than unemployment/employment as it indicates the rate of the population working, seeking employment, or out of the workforce. People who are not in the labor force are those who are not

working or have not looked for work for the last four weeks because (a) they do not want a job, (b) they want a job but believe no jobs are available, or (c) they are marginally attached to the labor force, meaning that they are not looking for work because of issues such as health or disability, school or training, or family responsibilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Approximately 37.5% of the general working-age population is out of the labor force; of those, only about 5.7% say they want a job (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). Approximately 50% of people with visual impairments are not in the labor force (Crudden et al., 2023; Crudden & McKnight, 2022; McDonnall & Sui, 2019).

People with visual impairments likely experience many of the same barriers to workforce participation as the population without disabilities. However, additional employment barriers associated with visual impairment, such as negative employer attitudes and lack of access to workplace accommodations (Crudden & McBroom, 1999), likely contribute to their higher rate of labor force nonparticipation. An older study (Kirchner et al., 1997) found that individuals with visual impairments not working or looking for work tended to be a more advanced age at the onset of their visual impairment, had lower education levels, had "retirement income," lived in less populated areas, and attributed their lack of participation in the labor force to employment barriers. More recent research found that people with visual impairments who were not working or looking for work tended to have additional disabilities or chronic health conditions, lower educational levels, and were more financially insecure (Crudden et al., 2023; Crudden & McKnight, 2022).

Mentoring

Encouragement and support were associated with employment among people with visual impairments (Cimarolli & Wang, 2006; Crudden, 2002; McKnight et al., 2021), and support

from multiple sources increased the likelihood of employment (McKnight et al., 2021). Personal and rehabilitation contacts should be support systems for people with visual impairments; however, a lack of support from these contacts (O'Day, 1999; Silverman et al., 2019) has been identified as an employment barrier. Organizations of people with visual impairments are another potential vocational and social support source. As early as 1997, rehabilitation providers were advised to link people with visual impairments to organizations (Kirchner et al., 1997), such as the American Council of the Blind (ACB) and the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), for mentoring and support. More recently, service providers have been advised to assist people with disabilities in connecting with other individuals or groups of people with disabilities to reduce feelings of isolation and build supportive networks (Zapata, 2022). Isolation and loneliness appear common among people with visual impairments, particularly those not working (Bonsaksen et al., 2023; Brunes et al., 2019).

Kirchner et al. (1997) recommended networking and mentoring as strategies to share employment information. Mentoring relationships can be formal, where the mentor has specific skills or characteristics and operates through an organized program, or informal, where family, friends, colleagues, or others emerge as mentors. VR counselors reported that mentoring and support from informal and formal networks were important in promoting success among people with disabilities pursuing self-employment (Taylor et al., 2023). However, the low incidence of visual impairment in the working-age population limits the potential for adults with visual impairments to have informal mentors who also have visual impairments.

Among employed people with visual impairments, almost half (46.2%) of those with mentors said their mentors helped them get a job (Crudden & Steverson, 2021), making mentoring a potentially important facilitator to employment. Yet, mentoring people with visual

impairments has not received enough research attention (Cain et al., 2023), and this lack is particularly acute for the adult population with visual impairments. Formal mentoring programs for people with visual impairments are typically limited to transition-aged youth and young adults (Florida Department of Education, 2022; Heppe et al., 2015; O'Mally & Antonelli, 2016), though people older than 35 years of age have expressed an interest in having a mentor (O'Mally & Steverson, 2017). Youth valued having mentors who also had visual impairments, with transition-aged youth and young adults preferring mentors who could provide employment advice (Cain et al., 2023). Transition-aged youth with mentors had increased self-esteem and improved employment outcomes (O'Mally & Antonelli, 2016), but we do not know if adults would have similar benefits.

Self-employment

Benefits of self-employment among people with disabilities include the potential for flexible work hours, remote work or alternative worksites, and remaining close to established support systems (Ipsen, 2021), and workers with disabilities were more likely to prefer self-employment than those without disabilities (Schur et al., 2017). The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2014) identifies self-employment as an option for individuals with disabilities seeking assistance from state rehabilitation providers to achieve competitive, integrated employment. Despite the statuary mandate to provide specified services associated with self-employment (State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program, 2016), self-employment is underutilized by VR providers (Revell et al., 2023) and VR agencies do not appear to have policies that articulate the technical assistance, resources, interventions, and services needed, or sufficiently trained staff or vendors to support people with disabilities in successful self-employment efforts (Riesen et al., 2023).

Self-employment is among the strategies suggested to improve employment rates of people with visual impairments, particularly those with transportation issues (Silverman et al., 2019) or those who experience negative employer attitudes when job-seeking. In addition to traditional self-employment options, people with visual impairments served by the federal-state VR programs may become self-employed through the Randoph-Sheppard program, otherwise known as the Business Enterprise or BEP program (Moore & Cavenaugh, 2003). BEP vendors work through their state VR agencies to operate various food service facilities on government properties (Rehabilitation Services Administration, n.d.). McDonnall et al. (2022) found people with visual impairments were more likely to be self-employed than persons without visual impairments (9.7% vs. 8.9%). The availability of BEP employment may partially explain why self-employment rates are slightly higher in the employed population of people with visual impairments.

Gouskova (2020) found higher rates of self-employment among people with health-related work limitations, particularly among those who were white, older, male, and better educated. Similarly, Avellone et al. (2023) found that in federal-state VR programs, self-employed participants tended to be white, male, with more education, in rural communities with "industry-specific skills," and receiving support from their family and social networks. Further, McDonnall et al. (2022) found self-employed people with visual impairments were predominantly male (61.1%) and white (73.9%).

This data indicates interest among people with disabilities, particularly people with visual impairments, in self-employment and its potential as an effective strategy for facilitating labor force participation. Despite the potential for moving more people with visual impairments into the workforce through self-employment, researchers (McDonnall et al., 2022) noted there is

limited research about it. We do not know if people with visual impairments are typically interested in self-employment options or if those options are generally explored with rehabilitation providers.

Purpose and Research Questions

Both mentoring and self-employment appear to be under-used strategies that could positively influence workforce participation among adults with visual impairments. Limited research has been conducted about mentoring adults with visual impairments (Cain et al., 2023), or self-employment among people with visual impairments (McDonnall et al., 2022). This study addresses the research question: Have self-employment or mentoring been offered to, and considered by, people with visual impairments who are out of the labor force? We attempted to discern what people with visual impairment who are not working or looking for work thought about having a mentor or possibly being self-employed and their experiences with mentoring or exploring self-employment.

Method

Procedure

In-depth interviews with people with visual impairments were conducted in the spring of 2022 to investigate mentorship and self-employment as potential employment strategies. The topic was a component of a larger qualitative study regarding the supports and barriers faced by people with visual impairments when they are not in the workforce (for more information, see Crudden et al., 2024). A national advisory board's suggestions and the findings from three pilot interviews improved the flow, content, and duration of the interviews. Additional items were added to the interview protocol after conducting three interviews and analyzing the

corresponding transcripts. An abbreviated version of the protocol with this study's questions is in Table 1.

Study participants completed an interview via phone or online videoconference (audio only) with the primary author. Participants were offered a $35 gift card to thank them for participating in this project. Interviews were recorded for transcription and analyses.

Recruitment

The authors' university Institutional Review Board reviewed this study (Protocol ID: IRB-22-105) and designated it exempt from oversight based on the Protection of Human Subjects (2009). However, when gathering and evaluating data, the study team followed ethical standards, obtained voluntary informed consent, and maintained confidentiality by removing identifiable information when reporting results.

Purposeful recruitment allowed us to target people with visual impairment from a past study where participants expressed an interest in continued research about employment. Additional recruitment efforts included seeking referrals from our national participant registry, posting social media announcements, and networking with organizations of people with visual impairments (Crudden et al., 2024). Recruitment efforts generated 98 volunteers. A screening survey, along with follow-up emails and telephone contacts, helped us determine eligibility for visual impairment (blind or low vision), age (between 25 and 65 years), and status of work (not currently employed or actively seeking employment). Finally, 30 people with visual impairments met all criteria, reviewed informed consent information, and agreed to participate in the study.

Participants

Study participants' ages ranged from 28 to 64 years (M = 50.5, SD = 11.4). Nearly half of the sample (50.1%) reported being legally blind with some or minimal functional vision,

followed by those who were totally blind (43.3%) or with low vision (6.7%). The majority were White (83.3%), female (83.3%), and had a higher education degree (40.0% with a Bachelor's and 20.0% Master's). Tables 2 and 3 provide additional participant demographic information.

Data Analysis

The authors utilized Microsoft Office 365 and Canvas Studio to generate transcripts of the recorded interviews and then reviewed each transcript for accuracy. Quirkos, a qualitative software program, was utilized to organize and analyze the data. We generated "quirks," or code classifications for each data source (Quirkos, 2022) and then independently coded each transcript. The team then jointly reviewed each transcript, reviewed codes, resolved discrepancies, and identified themes. Additional measures to ensure rigor and trustworthiness included triangulation of coding and reflections (see Crudden et al., 2024).

Results

Mentoring and self-employment, both strategies used to promote employment among people with visual impairments, were investigated. We asked participants about engagement with an employment mentor or other support systems. Almost 27% of our participants reported having a mentor. We also asked participants if they had considered self-employment and whether it had been discussed with their VR counselors. Although most participants (66%) considered self-employment, only seven discussed it with their VR counselors.

Mentors

Six of the 30 participants said they had employment mentors, and two had mentors, though not addressing employment. Of the six with employment mentors, two found mentors through a formal or structured mentoring program, three developed informal or unstructured mentoring relationships, and one had formal and informal mentors. Two participants thought

their mentors were helpful, providing accountability and encouragement; one mentor helped a participant find a job. The three with unsuccessful mentor relationships believed their mentors did not understand the challenges of visual impairment or other health concerns in addition to visual impairment, as the following two people explained:

> Somebody was assigned to me is more of what it was. It was actually a case management program, and this person's job was to help people become more independent. And though his mind was in the right field, I don't think that he really, truly thought through my needs. (18)

And

> You know, as far as a mentor, I could, I mean, when I first started working that first job, I've always had older women – I've always found them to be very good, you know, sort of like mentors in some ways. But nevertheless, they were never blind. (24)

Another participant discussed the difficulty of finding a mentor who matched her needs. She stated,

> I've had such an unusual career compared to most blind people. I really don't have any mentors who have made the kinds of radical career changes, both that I have made and that I would like to make now. … It's so hard to get the first job. … I know a lot of blind people … and they're not going anywhere in their job. They're just going to keep doing the same thing. And I'm not real good with that. (74)

Of the 22 participants without a mentor, five attempted to find one, and 15 thought a mentor would have been helpful to provide advice and guidance, give a "little push," build confidence, or help problem-solve. Yet, some who thought an employment mentor would be

helpful were unclear about what the mentor could do. Seven participants were unsure or thought an employment mentor would not be helpful.

When participants sought assistance from VR in networking with others with visual impairments, that assistance was typically not forthcoming. Three participants (one who had a mentor, and two who did not) mentored others. One participant who had an employment mentor established a mentoring group with friends with visual impairments to work through a self-help book on improving their lives.

More than half (53.3%) of the participants had contact with an organization of people with visual impairments. A few participants believed that members of these groups failed to recognize or support issues associated with later onset visual impairment and thus were not a good source for finding a mentor. Some participants expressed a lack of awareness of organizations of people with visual impairments, such as the ACB or the NFB, as a possible source for finding a mentor or other support.

Self-employment

Of the 30 participants, 20 reported considering self-employment. Eighteen participants said they were interested or somewhat interested in self-employment, ten were not interested or were no longer interested, one was unsure, and one was considering it for the future. When participants discussed self-employment, major benefits appeared to be having control over one's schedule and workplace, with the potential of avoiding transportation barriers and overcoming difficulties getting necessary accommodations from employers. For example, Participant 99 stated, "If I do work again, that probably will be my path because I have more control over what my hours are and how much I do." However, some people were concerned that self-employment

options would be limited by lack of transportation. For example, a participant who is 62 years of age and interested in self-employment stated:

> I absolutely loved working … because I was able to contribute. I was able to share my skills. And I miss the relationships that I had. … I really wish I could have stayed. … I'm a real helper. That's where my heart is and I want to continue helping people, but I would try to remove the transportation piece from it. (26)

Another participant with a professional certification stated:

> How would I get to these people? … That's a lot of going to people's homes and stuff. … Do I have the ability to bring supplies with me and do I have the ability to get there? … There's a lot of places that you can't get to. And you know, in theory, paratransit will go there, but that's only if they have the rides available. And I feel like the transportation thing is a big barrier. (43)

Of the seven (23.5%) participants who explored self-employment with their VR counselors, three discussed but did not pursue the BEP. Of these three, one did not participate because no stand was available. The remaining two participants had other self-employment interests; one requested and was denied assistance starting a laundromat, and the other wanted to pursue construction work, which VR also denied. Another participant explored self-employment extensively with a rehabilitation provider but did not pursue it for economic reasons. Three participants continued discussions with rehabilitation providers about self-employment; one was concerned that her rehabilitation counselor limited self-employment to call center work.

Only one participant reported a history of self-employment and believed returning to it was a possibility; though she also expressed concern that a history of self-employment might make employers reluctant to hire her. Another participant was very involved in family farming

but did not characterize that as self-employment, stating she did not get paid. Nine additional participants had dabbled in self-employment, doing things like writing, selling products, public speaking, caregiving, or tutoring. Five participants engaged in some exploratory work about self-employment, and five had no or vague ideas of how they might become self-employed. Participants without a history of self-employment expressed interest in activities such as operating a laundromat, making and selling crafts, creating and running a nonprofit, being a voiceover artist, and engaging in advocacy activities.

Participants not interested in self-employment appeared concerned about how a fluctuating income might impact disability benefits, were unclear about what type of self-employment might be appropriate for them, or feared the complications of managing the financial aspects of self-employment. Participant 74 stated, "It's so complicated to get off and on [SSDI] that it is a disincentive to self-employment." Another participant stated,

> It doesn't sound very appealing to me at all. I know some people prefer not to work for anybody and just to be their own boss. That sounds extremely overwhelming to me. I feel like I would maybe do better, at least at first, with some instruction, some guidance, some protocol to follow. The business aspect and making my own rules … may be perfect and I may love it. But right now, the idea of it to me just doesn't sound very appealing. It sounds more overwhelming and stressful. (20)

Discussion

We investigated people with visual impairments who were out of the workforce to gain an understanding of their thoughts about and experiences with two employment strategies: mentoring and self-employment. We found participants expressed interest in having employment

mentors and obtaining self-employment, yet few had either of these strategies offered to them by a VR counselor.

While some participants had successful career mentor relationships in the past, most participants had unsuccessful relationships or no mentors. Several study participants expressed difficulty finding a mentor who understood the challenges presented by visual impairment. Many participants expressed feelings of isolation and loneliness, and we concur with Zapata (2022) that service providers should discuss these feelings with people with visual impairments and assist them in linking with others with visual impairments. VR agencies could offer peer support groups that may reduce feelings of isolation and promote the sharing of employment information. VR providers can also ensure that people with visual impairments know about blindness organizations, such as ACB, NFB, or other local blindness communities. Although several participants in this study reported that these organizations were not helpful to them, others were not aware of these organizations, and others were active in these groups, although not for employment-related support or mentoring.

Although most participants in this study believed a mentor would be helpful, some were unclear about what a mentor might do to help them. It might be beneficial to provide people with visual impairments with a list of questions or topics they could use to begin discussions with potential or existing employment mentors. For example, people with visual impairments could ask mentors how they obtained and used assistive technology for their jobs, what strategies mentors used to find a job, the aspects of the job the mentor likes and does not like, etc.

VR agencies may explore developing employment mentoring or other support programs for adults with visual impairments to promote adjustment and employment. VR counselors should also be mindful that their comments and behaviors can make a difference in encouraging

employment among people with visual impairments (Cimarolli & Wang, 2006; Crudden & McKnight, 2022; McKnight et al., 2021) and that VR staff with visual impairments are potential role models. Potentially, adult employment mentoring programs could use information from existing programs for transition-aged youth with visual impairments, including the *Employment Mentoring Manual* developed by the National Research & Training Center on Blindness & Low Vision (n.d.).

Many participants were interested in self-employment, and several discussed it with VR providers but felt limited in their choices. Others were interested but uninformed about potential self-employment options. Our findings are consistent with Revell and colleagues (2023) who found self-employment an underutilized employment strategy among VR providers. Vocational counseling and guidance to identify self-employment opportunities that match their skills, interests, and resources might motivate some people out of the workforce to become employed. People interested in self-employment also need education about the time, dedication, and financial expectations associated with self-employment so each can determine if they are prepared to undertake such an endeavor.

It was not uncommon for participants to tell us that they either wanted to work now or did previously but did not know what types of jobs would accommodate their vision loss, other health issues, and transportation challenges. Participants appeared eager to get assistance learning what types of jobs might be suitable and attainable. Career counseling to help people with visual impairments learn how their skills could be transferred to other jobs appears indicated. Benefits counseling to assess how self-employment will impact their financial situation would allow people to determine if self-employment is a viable economic option. Exploring self-employment that allows remote, part-time, or flexible hours might incentivize

employment for participants who believed employment was unrealistic due to additional health or disability issues. We did not define self-employment and left the interpretation of what it meant to the participants. Potentially, some participants are more interested in the flexibility of remote work, regardless of whether such work is self-employment.

VR providers may be hesitant to pursue self-employment because their knowledge about implementing such a plan is limited (Inge & Keeton, 2023). The BEP has established training protocols that might be amended to benefit both VR providers and people with visual impairments as they explore self-employment options. The U.S. Small Business Association (SBA) offers numerous resources that may be valuable to VR providers and program participants to learn more about planning and establishing a business or working as a contractor (U.S. Small Business Administration, n.d.), including resources to support minority-owned businesses (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2023). The Research & Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities (2021) offers a web-based resource, *Vocational Rehabilitation Self-Employment Guide*, to assist people with disabilities in evaluating their suitability for self-employment.

Our sample tended to be older people and was primarily female. Service providers should consider exploring other programs and resources that might assist women and older people in employment. For example, some older people with visual impairments may qualify for services from the Senior Community Service Employment Program, though this program is designed for workers with low incomes (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.). As employment options are explored, VR providers should remember their encouragement can promote employment (McKnight et al., 2021), and linking consumers to employed mentors who offer support may further encourage workforce participation. Learning about and exploring self-employment options may be time-consuming for both the person with a visual impairment and the VR

provider. Policymakers must ensure that service providers have the necessary training and resources, guided by agency policies, to implement self-employment plans.

Limitations

This study used qualitative research methods, and consequently, the results cannot be generalized to the larger population of people with visual impairments. We relied on volunteers, and volunteers may be motivated to participate based on traits that distinguish them from those who do not volunteer. Additionally, the sample was small, predominately white females, and older, so it is not representative of the larger population of people with visual impairments.

We asked our participants about employment mentors and self-employment; there are likely other strategies that promote workforce participation that we did not investigate. The terms in the questions were not operationalized for participants, thus each may have had differing interpretations of some items, i.e. employment mentor, and self-employment. While we asked specifically about employment mentoring, some participants discussed having had or wanting mentors to facilitate their adjustment to visual impairment.

Another limitation of our study concerns the ever-evolving nature of service delivery to people with visual impairments. Many of our participants were recent or current VR program participants, while a few others have not interacted with VR programs in years. VR agencies and other state and community programs may operate differently now than when some participants initially received VR services. If our participants with more dated contacts with VR applied for services today, their experiences might be different. We conducted our interviews when most people were sequestered due to COVID-19. Our questions about employment mentoring were about past events and thus were not influenced by experience with COVID-19. However,

because COVID-19 impacted so many jobs and work environments, participants potentially gave increased thought to potential self-employment.

Conclusion

Most participants have not considered or been offered opportunities for mentoring or self-employment, though the majority were interested in both. VR providers might consider referring people with visual impairments to organizations or peer support programs and exploring opportunities for adults to receive employment mentoring. Policymakers should consider developing adult mentoring programs for people with visual impairments. VR providers could capitalize on the interest in self-employment by assisting people with visual impairments in identifying potential career paths in addition to BEP employment. Counseling to assess the impact of self-employment on other benefits may increase interest in engagement in the workforce. Self-employment may be an opportunity for people with visual impairments to assess their ability to succeed at work and could be an avenue leading to increased economic security.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethics

This study was reviewed by our University Institutional Review Board and declared exempt from oversight (Protocol ID: IRB-22-105) per the Protection of Human Subjects (2009). The research team adhered to ethical guidelines and ensured voluntary participation and

confidentiality when collecting and analyzing data. Personal information was masked in reporting results to promote the anonymity of the participants.

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Informed Consent

All participants were emailed the statement of informed consent with the request to participate in the research interviews. Informed consent was verbally reviewed with each person before the interview began.

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Table 1

Abbreviated Interview Protocol and Corresponding Research Questions

Interview Protocol
1. Tell me what you think about self-employment and whether that might be an option for you. a. *If interested*: What would you be doing? b. *If no*: Did VR ever talk to you about self-employment?
2. Have you ever had a mentor who encouraged your employment? a. *If no mentor*: Tell me how a mentor may or may not make a difference to you. b. *If yes*: How did your mentor support or not support your decision to stop working or looking for work?
3. Do you have contact with any groups like NFB or ACB?

Note: NFB = National Federation of the Blind; ACB = American Council of the Blind.

Table 2

Aggregate Participants' Demographics

Characteristic	*n*	%
Gender		
Female	25	83.3
Male	5	16.7
Age (years)		
28-39	6	20.0
40-49	6	20.0
50-59	10	33.3
60-64	8	26.7
Race		
Black	4	13.3
Latinx	1	3.3
White	25	83.3
Marital Status		
Not Married	22	73.3
Married	8	26.7
*Additional Health Condition or Disability Reported**		
Yes	18	60.0
Region		
Northeast	4	13.3
Midwest	7	23.3
West	7	23.3
South	12	40.0
Location		
Rural	13	43.3
Urban	13	43.3
Suburban	4	13.3

Note: *Additional health conditions/disabilities included physical health, mental health, and other disabilities.

Table 3

Selected Individual Participant Demographics

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Level of Education	Marital Status	Level of Vision	Self-employment			Employment Mentor
						Considered	Interested	Discussed with VR	
01	51	Male	GED	Not married	Totally blind	Yes	Somewhat	No	No
02	53	Female	Bachelor's	Married	Legally blind	No	Unsure	No	No
03	64	Female	Bachelor's	Not married	Legally blind	No	No	No	No
04	63	Female	Some College	Not married	Low vision	No	Somewhat	No	No
05	62	Female	Bachelor's	Not married	Legally blind	Yes	No	Yes	No
06	58	Female	Master's	Not married	Totally blind	Yes	Yes	No	No
07	63	Male	Some College	Married	Totally blind	Yes	No	No	No
08	62	Female	High School	Not married	Legally blind	No	No	No	No
09	43	Female	Bachelor's	Not married	Legally blind	No	No	No	No
10	47	Male	High School	Not married	Legally blind	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
11	56	Male	Bachelor's	Married	Legally blind	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
12	38	Female	Some College	Not married	Totally blind	No	No	No	Yes
13	58	Male	Bachelor's	Not married	Legally blind	Yes	No	Yes	No

14	44	Female	High School	Not married	Legally blind	Yes	No	No	No
15	49	Female	Bachelor's	Not married	Legally blind	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
16	59	Female	Bachelor's	Married	Legally blind	Yes	Yes	No	No
17	30	Female	Some College	Not married	Totally blind	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
18	29	Female	Some College	Not married	Totally blind	Yes	In future	No	No
19	55	Female	Master's	Not married	Totally blind	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
20	28	Female	Associate's	Not married	Totally blind	No	No	No	No
21	61	Female	Master's	Not married	Legally blind	Yes	Somewhat	No	Yes
22	62	Female	Bachelor's	Married	Low vision	No	Yes	No	No
23	35	Female	High School Certificate	Not married	Legally blind	No	Yes	No	No
24	59	Female	Master's	Married	Totally blind	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
25	33	Female	Bachelor's	Not married	Totally blind	Yes	Yes	No	No
26	62	Female	Master's	Married	Totally blind	No	Yes	No	No
27	49	Female	Associate's	Married	Totally blind	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
28	50	Female	Master's	Not married	Legally blind	Yes	Yes	No	No
29	51	Female	Bachelor's	Not married	Totally blind	Yes	Yes	No	No
30	40	Female	Bachelor's	Not married	Legally blind	Yes	Somewhat	Yes	No

Note. GED = General Educational Diploma