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Minnesota State Rehabilitation
Council for the Blind



Annual Report

October 1, 2006 - September 30, 2007

Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

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Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

Annual Report

Introduction

Long before it was required by federal law, blind consumers and Minnesota State Services for the Blind (SSB) recognized the wisdom of developing a partnership. In 1985, the Advisory Council for the Blind was formed. Prior to its existence in federal law, the majority of the membership of the Advisory Council for the Blind was composed of blind consumers with some representation from the business community. The Federal Government mandated the existence of a State Rehabilitation Advisory Council for the Blind in 1992 and the existing Minnesota Advisory Council for the Blind was expanded to comply with federal requirements.

In August, 1998, the Rehabilitation Act was again changed to rename this federally mandated council by deleting the word “advisory” and expanding its duties. The renamed State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B) is now asked to carry out its responsibilities after consultation with the Governor’s Workforce Development Council and in partnership with SSB. The SRC-B’s role is still advisory in relation to SSB; however, SSB’s relationship with the SRC-B is no longer discretionary. The implications of these changes indicate a stronger directive for the SRC-B and SSB to work in a more equal relationship.

The SRC-B has increased responsibilities to work in partnership with SSB to develop, agree to and review state goals and priorities. This is accomplished by evaluating programs for rehabilitation and submitting progress reports to the commissioner and in an annual report to the Governor. The SRC-B still has responsibility for overseeing services provided by public and private agencies, and now must review employment outcomes as well as service outcomes for blind people.

The SRC-B now has a stronger role in coordinating efforts with other state and federally mandated councils. Minnesota has made an effort to avoid duplication of these councils since the early days of our Advisory Council for the Blind. The Minnesota SRC-B has always had members that represented the Statewide Independent Living Council, advocacy organizations for the blind, advocacy organizations for children with disabilities, and representatives of business, industry, and labor. Another responsibility of the SRC-B is to enhance its current organizational contacts to incorporate a system of working with the Governor’s Workforce Development Council.

This report is produced pursuant to federal law, Section 105(c) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, which calls for each state rehabilitation council to prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor or appropriate state entity and the Commissioner of the Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration.

Mission and Vision

Mission Statement for Rehabilitation for the Blind

The Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind, working on behalf of Minnesotans who are blind, visually impaired, or DeafBlind is charged with insuring that State Services for the Blind is in compliance with mandates under Title IV of the Workforce Investment Act. The Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind strives to insure that Minnesotans who are blind, visually impaired, or DeafBlind receive the best possible services under the law.

Vision Statement for Rehabilitation for the Blind

The State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B) will be a catalyst for the emergence of State Services for the Blind (SSB) as a national leader in the development, implementation and continuous improvement of the quality of service programs and education for persons of all ages who are blind, visually impaired or DeafBlind throughout our state.

The SRC-B, in conjunction with SSB, will strive to insure people who are blind, visually impaired or DeafBlind are made aware of the full array of services available to them whether aimed at adjustment to blindness training, independent living, employment or education.

The SRC-B will work to make employers aware that people who are blind, visually impaired or DeafBlind have tremendous abilities for employment today and must be included in planning for the workforce of the future.

It is our vision that persons who are blind, visually impaired or DeafBlind will enjoy full equality of opportunity, education, complete integration in the life of our communities and appropriate employment which fulfills each individual's needs and aspirations.

Message from the Chair

Federal Fiscal Year 2007 has been a productive year for the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B) and State Services for the Blind (SSB). The majority of the activities took place within committees and task forces. The reports of committees and task forces are found later in this report. In this message I will first thank people who have helped me in my new role as chair. I'll also outline activities of the Council from a broader perspective.

I can't take full credit for overseeing the Council in FFY 2007, because my term as chair began in February. It was former chair, Jennifer Dunnam, who appointed members of committees and task forces and laid a good foundation for our year. Jennifer has made herself available to me for consulting as I take on the challenges of being chair. I thank her very much for her previous work and continued guidance.

I also want to thank my vice chair, Jean Martin, for her gentle direction and listening ears. From previously holding her position, I know the value of having a good vice chair. Jean has sat beside me during meetings and reminded me of details at critical moments. She has also been there outside of meetings as a sounding board and advisor. I also thank committee chairs and all of the SRC-B members for consulting with me and providing me with good information.

The SRC-B would not function without the assistance of SSB's staff. Specifically, I'd like to thank those who worked directly with me—Chuk Hamilton, Sharon Killa, Cathy Carlson, Dick Strong, Pam Brown, Linda Lingen, Ellie Sevdy, and the Braille Section of the Communication Center. Thanks also to Craig Amundsen for recording our meetings with audio equipment and court reporter Kim Evavold for recording our meetings in written form. At this point, I'd also like to say a special thank you and farewell to Mike Young who recently passed away. Mike was invaluable in preparing SRC-B budgets, member orientation packets, and past annual reports.

The SRC-B listened and advised SSB staff as they were looking at the pros and cons of moving to a new location. I personally sighed in relief when it was decided to stay at the current facilities at 2200 University Avenue West in St. Paul. In September a lease was signed for the next ten years. Soon after being elected chair, I wrote letters on behalf of the SRC-B to strongly support allocation of an additional one million dollars for SSB's budget. Consumer organizations of the blind joined the effort, and I am pleased and thankful to report that our request was granted.

The SRC-B added a Technology Task Force this year which will serve two purposes. First, it will assist SSB in their legislative obligation to report on the impact on blind employees and citizens regarding the possible adoption of Open Document Formatting by state government. The Technology Task Force's second purpose is to gain an understanding of access technology and training services available to SSB's customers. This task force will present a report to the SRC-B. The report will contain the essence of what was learned and any resulting recommendations to the Council.

The SRC-B also had a task force to examine and comment on the draft document called "Strategic Performance Planning" published by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The Council is expected to receive and adopt a final report in early FFY2008.

Very preliminary conversations occurred about SSB, the SRC-B, and consumer organizations of the blind joining forces to eliminate the sunset and raise the cap for TAM funding of NFB-NEWSLINE® and Dial-in News.

In late July, I attended meetings of the Great Lakes Region of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation held in St. Paul. The meetings were co-hosted by SSB and Rehabilitation Services. Administrators from other states came to learn about the agencies and functioning in a one-stop system.

I have been participating in teleconferences of two groups related to Vocational Rehabilitation. The National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils consists of representatives from all state rehabilitation councils (SRC). A new group of representatives of SRCs, boards and Commissions for the Blind was also formed this year. The formation of this new group is being supported by the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind.

It is worth noting that -- thanks to funding from the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) -- FFY 2007 was SSB's comeback year at the Minnesota State Fair. Council members, staff, and other volunteers worked in the SSB booth every day at the fair. Brochures about SSB were distributed. A free souvenir fan appropriately called "Braille on a Stick" was also offered. FFY2007 was a productive year, and FFY2008 holds the promise to be just as busy for the SRC-B. I look forward to committees and task forces continuing their great work throughout FFY2008.

Rebecca Kragnes, Chair

Director's Comments

This has been a very eventful and productive year. It has been a year filled with many changes. The chairperson's gavel was passed from Jennifer Dunnam to Rebecca Kragnes who has ably led the Council since her election to that post in February. Five members completed their terms and left the Council: Sam Jasmine; Jim Collins; Carol Leaders; Liz McDevitt; and Jennifer Dunnam. The contribution each of them made to the Council's work during their terms was greatly appreciated. New members were appointed by the Governor: Tom Scanlan; Jane Toleno; and Jeffrey West. SSB looks forward to a productive working relationship.

During this year, we lost a colleague and friend, Michael Young, who passed away at too young an age. Mike was the budget director for SSB for twelve years. He worked with the Council on a number of projects and reports. Mike is greatly missed and we are grateful for the opportunity we had to get to know him and to work with him.

This has been a most productive year for SSB and the SRC-B as we worked towards realizing our mission. The following are some important highlights:

- Achieved significant success at the Minnesota State Legislature: received a \$900,000 appropriation to the Communication Center replacing VR dollars which are needed to provide services to people preparing for employment; a \$100,000 increase to match future VR federal funds; and assured SSB's participation in the study of Open Document Format.
- Reinstated a major marketing effort by once again having a booth in the Education Building of the Minnesota State Fair where SSB distributed 10,000 handheld fans with a message in braille and SSB contact information, braille alphabet cards to 120 teachers, 145 volunteer application packets, and thousands of other pieces of information regarding blindness.
- Negotiated a new 10-year lease at SSB's present location after evaluating the possibility of relocating to another site in the Midway Area of St. Paul.
- Continued to monitor the Minnesota State Capitol restoration project to ensure continued and appropriate space for the Blind Enterprises Program vendor—a site SSB has had since the 1940s.
- Welcomed a new Commissioner, Dan McElroy, to the Department and provided education and information on SSB services.
- Secured an outside entity to complete the Adjustment to Blindness Vendor customer satisfaction survey assuring a higher survey completion rate.
- Piloted a survey of Radio Talking Book users.
- The Workforce Development Unit served 1,054 customers and assisted 81 customers to secure employment at an average hourly wage of \$13.38.
- The Senior Services Unit served over 3,432 customers.

- Donors contributed \$210,554 in support of the Communication Center, including in-kind donations valued at \$21,571 and a bequest for \$5,181. The Communication Center would find it difficult to maintain, let alone expand services, without the support of these 1,806 donors.

All of these accomplishments were possible because of the input and commitment of the SRC-B, the quality and dedication of SSB staff, the hard work of SSB customers, and the contributions of other partners—truly a “Formula for Success”.

Charles Hamilton, Director

Committee Reports

Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee

Bonita Kallestad--Chair, Jennifer Dunnam, Steve Jacobson, Sam Jasmine, Mike Malver. SSB staff— Pam Brown, Cathy Carlson, Sharon Ostrom.

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee is to review the effectiveness of and customer satisfaction with State Services for the Blind's Vocational Rehabilitation program and employment outcomes of persons served by SSB. The Committee is also to evaluate the extent to which SSB achieved its goals and priorities and met the standards and indicators set by the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

Customer Satisfaction Survey

The Committee reviewed the Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) results through March 31, 2007. Five survey items were analyzed to compare the results for years ending 3/31/04, 3/31/05, 3/31/06, and 3/31/07. While there has been some fluctuation in results, no significant changes have taken place from year to year.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY REVIEW for Customer Satisfaction & Outcomes and Measures Committee, Minnesota Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

Summary	YE 3/31/04	YE 3/31/05	YE 3/31/06	YE 3/31/07
Q1: Overall satisfaction with services provided	78%	82%	81%	82%
Q2: Extent to which services have met expectations	70%	74%	71%	77%
Q3: Comparison with "ideal" set of services	69%	72%	73%	72%
Q5 (now Q4): Satisfied that counselor (staff) understood customer's needs	81%	80%	85%	79%
Q10 (now Q5): How satisfied are you with the time it usually took to get your answer	76%	84%	83%	80%

The year ending 3/31/07 has approval ratings ranging from a high of 82% and a low of 72%. The 82% approval rating was for question 1, "What is your overall satisfaction with the services provided?" The 72% approval rating was the result for question 3, "How well do you think the services you received compare with the ideal set of services?" For the complete Customer Satisfaction Survey results see: www.deed.state.mn.us/customersurvey/ssb/index.htm

Goals and Priorities

Goal and Priority #1: Employment Outcomes

Although the Workforce Development Unit assisted 81 customers to become successfully employed, RSA Indicator 1.1 was not met. All strategies to assist the Workforce Development Unit to meet this goal were successfully met and/or implemented.

Goal and Priority #2: Minority Service Rate

By the end of FFY07, 98 persons from minority backgrounds exited services, just two short of the goal. SSB did not meet RSA indicator 2.1. All strategies to assist the Workforce Development Unit to meet this goal were successfully met and/or implemented.

Goal and Priority #3: DeafBlind Outreach and Service

During FFY07, nine individuals with a dual sensory loss secured employment as a result of services from SSB. This goal was met. Additionally, all strategies to assist the Workforce Development Unit to meet this goal were successfully met and/or implemented.

Goal and Priority #4: Increased customers satisfaction with services

By the end of March 2007, the annual overall satisfaction with services provided by SSB was 82% in response to question 1 on the Customer Satisfaction Survey. This goal was not met. However, all strategies to assist the Workforce Development Unit to meet this goal were successfully met and/or implemented.

Goal and Priority #5: Insure every SSB customer has the information needed to make an informed choice in selecting providers for adjustment to blindness training.

During FFY07, 94% of SSB customers attending ATB half time or more indicated that they were given the opportunity to choose their provider. One individual indicated their legal guardian made the decision for them; for two others an old form was used which did not include the additional question regarding choice. This goal was not met.

During FFY07 the results of the customer satisfaction surveys for customers completing ATB will be posted externally for customer review. During this year SRG, who conducts the Customer Satisfaction Survey for DEED, began conducting this survey for SSB. Data was not ready for posting in FFY07 but will be in early FFY08.

All strategies to assist the Workforce Development Unit to meet this goal were successfully met and/or implemented.

Goal and Priority #6: All VR staff members new to SSB will receive Introduction to Blindness – Phase 1 and Phase 2 training on the essential aspects of blindness and visual impairments.

This goal was met. All strategies to assist the Workforce Development Unit to meet this goal were successfully met and/or implemented

Goals and priorities for FFY07 are in Appendix IV.

RSA Standards and Indicators

The performance of the WorkForce Development Unit of State Services for the Blind on the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Standards and Indicators for FY2007 follows.

The numbers reported for FFY2007 are unofficial because the information is still being validated. The RSA requires that at least four of the six indicators of Standard 1 must be met. The RSA requires that the State agency meet or exceed at least 2 of the 3 primary indicators. An explanation about what the standards and indicators cover is in Appendix III.

**State Services for the Blind
Performance on Standards 1 and 2**

Must pass at least 4 of 6 Indicators and 2 of 3 Primary Indicators for Standard 1

Federal Fiscal Year

	<i>2007*</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2004</i>
Ind 1.1: Change in employment outcomes(>=0)	-47	-5	1	-74
Ind 1.2: Percent of employment outcomes (>=68.9%)	46.6%	48.74%	43.97%	40.91%
Ind 1.3: Competitive employment (>=35.4%)	94.05%	93.54%	94.09%	93.22%
Ind 1.4: Significant Disability (>=89.0%)	98.85%	97.70%	98.65%	99.55%
Ind 1.5: Earnings ratio (>=.59)	.69	.717	.650	.645
Ind 1.6: Self support (>=30.4)	43.68	30.87	35.43	36.82
Number of indicators in standard 1 that were passed	4	4	5	4
Number of primary indicators (1.3 to 1.5) in Standard 1 that were passed	3	3	3	3
Ind 2.1 Ratio of Minority to Non-Minority Service Rate (>=.80)**	**	**	.72	**

***Not official until approved by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Approval pending at time of publication.**

****The ratio of minority to non-minority service rate is not calculated if fewer than 100 persons from minority backgrounds exit the program during the fiscal year.**

Minority Outreach Committee

Rebecca Kragnes--Chair, Connie Lee Berg, Vince Llanas, Carol Leaders, Fannie Primm, Ken Rodgers, Joyce Scanlan. SSB staff—Pam Brown, Linda Lingen.

The Minority Outreach Committee had three focuses this year:

- Diversity education for staff,
- Continued outreach to minority populations and
- English Language Learners simultaneously learning braille.

During the final compilation of the comparison and contrast chart of the top five minority populations in Minnesota, committee members highlighted additional, helpful resources. In FFY2008, it is expected that the committee will approve an addendum to this chart regarding African-Americans.

Several committee members expressed interest in being part of any cultural diversity training State Services for the Blind (SSB) offers to its staff. SSB has been working with Century College to provide training in two areas:

- working effectively with foreign language interpreters
- minority cultures and their view of disability - with a focus on blindness and visual impairments

The SSB diversity grant is now called the RAMP (Respectful and Aware of Multicultural Perspectives) Project. Under the RAMP Project, information is shared with staff regarding training events and diversity activities.

SSB staff held their yearly dialog with rehabilitation staff from the Red Lake and White Earth Indian Reservations. Outreach to African-Americans included hanging posters and talks about SSB in places where the community gathers.

SSB returned to the Minnesota State Fair, and for the first time, brochures were available in languages in addition to English. Among other outreach endeavors, SSB had a booth at the Hmong Resource Fair on September 29.

A final topic of discussion at each meeting was English Language Learning (ELL) in conjunction with learning braille. Staff member Sharon Monthei devoted thirty percent of her time to studying this phenomenon. Sharon interacted with people at three ELL centers which had students simultaneously learning both English and braille. She also attended a program in Washington State called KAISEN which teaches blind and visually impaired people both English and braille. The committee expects to hear a report about these activities in early FFY2008.

Vendor Outcomes and Measures Committee

Tom Scanlan--Chair, Rebecca Kragnes, Jim Collins. SSB staff—Chuk Hamilton, Joe Pattison, Cathy Carlson.

Last year the committee developed a new survey of 20 items to be given to each SSB customer after completing specific training with a vendor. The new training survey was administered by a DEED employee with no direct involvement in the training. This removed the staff resistance experienced in the previous method. The reduction to a single survey improved customer response as well as making the gathering of the data more workable for DEED staff.

SSB management continued to provide full support for the revised survey.

Since the population base is relatively small in statistical terms, especially for a single vendor, the committee was concerned that the highest return possible was needed. The DEED employee doing the survey called during the day, and thus missed many people who were probably out and about using the training they had received. The solution to this problem was to have the employee call the missed people at night. However, the employee retired before the change could be implemented. The data collected showed good customer satisfaction, but some possible areas of training may need improvement. The areas that were weakest in the results were for challenging the student and increasing self confidence.

The company doing the surveying for the Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee (Strategic Research Group) will also survey for this committee. That should improve the response rate by contacting people at night as well as during the day.

DeafBlind Committee

Lynette Boyer--Chair, George Failes, Bonita Kallestad, Liz McDevitt, Craig Roisum. SSB staff—Lindsey Baker, Pam Brown, Linda Lingen, Roselee Siegler, Sharon Ostrom.

Thank you to Liz McDevitt for chairing the committee for the first half of the year. I was asked to chair the DeafBlind Committee and in April of 2007 I accepted the role of chair. This has been an exciting year for the DeafBlind Committee the work we have accomplished.

DeafBlind Needs Assessment and Customer Satisfaction Survey

One of the primary strategies under the goal and priority of the DeafBlind Committee was to look at the results of the needs assessment and customer satisfaction survey administered to SSB customers with a dual sensory loss in June of 2006 by SSB staff. By looking at these results, the committee would come up with some strategies to work on in 2008. The committee came up with these strategies which were submitted and approved by the full Council in April 2007. Having this document has set a great foundation for the committee's work in the future. In addition, this document lays out the expectations for anyone who is considering becoming a member of this committee in 2008.

Step by Step Guide to Getting and Keeping a Job

The Step by Step Guide to Getting and Keeping a Job is the next project the committee began working on in May of 2007. As the committee got into this project, we began to realize the different needs, styles, temperaments and personalities of people with dual sensory loss, and the hard job the staff at SSB has in working with and trying to meet each person's needs individually. We really had to ask ourselves what information does SSB need to give consumers so they will truly understand the process a potential consumer goes through in vocational rehabilitation. Then exactly how would one communicate that process effectively to assist a potential SSB consumer to navigate through the system from application to getting a job. The committee decided to come up with a written document for ASL users and English users that would be understandable, simple and help potential SSB consumers navigate through the system in order to get and keep a job.

I personally want to thank the members of the DeafBlind Committee and the staff at SSB who take time out of their busy schedules to meet once a month and help consumers with a dual sensory loss learn what SSB is all about. The vision is clear and the committee has a tangible document that has laid the ground work for our continued success.

This committee is not about our own agendas; it is about putting our differences aside and looking at how we can help all DeafBlind consumers to know more about the vocational rehabilitation process.

In conclusion, I want to personally thank the Council, our committee members and staff at SSB for their support. I am thrilled to represent the DeafBlind community in this capacity knowing that I am helping better the lives of the DeafBlind community for years to come.

Senior Services Committee

Judy Sanders--Chair, Roberta Cich, RoseAnn Faber, Frank Johnson, Larry Lura, Coralmae (Coke) Stenstrom, Frances Whetstone. SSB staff—Lyle Lundquist, Richard Strong, Sue Crancer.

While the primary concern of the SRC-B is vocational rehabilitation, there is an acknowledgement of the importance of independent living services through the establishment of this committee. Its charge reads:

The Senior Services Committee exists to help State Services for the Blind improve and expand services to older blind, visually impaired, or DeafBlind Minnesotans. Activities include identifying unmet needs, recommending services necessary to meet these needs and identifying strategies to remove or reduce barriers.

The product of this group must include an annual report to the full Council detailing their recommendations on improving and expanding services to older blind, visually impaired, or DeafBlind Minnesotans.

We meet every other month with staff from the Senior Services Unit (SSU) who discuss the unit's activities and news from our federal partners at the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Thanks go to SSB staff Dick Strong, Lyle Lundquist and Sue Crancer for their support.

The unit is justifiably proud of its outreach efforts to seniors who are newly blind and needing to know how they can retain their independence. SSU has developed a tiered service model which operates at three levels:

Tier 1: Simple questions are answered through one phone call. They are usually involving referrals for aids and appliances, suggestions on meeting transportation needs or describing a simple technique that solves a particular problem.

Tier 2: The person meets with a counselor and can be given simple tools that keep a person in their own home. It is accomplished in one visit. These might include a check writing guide, a small magnifying glass or a deck of large print playing cards.

Tier 3: This group of people receives more intense service. They receive instruction in techniques that allow a person to accomplish daily tasks without relying on family and friends unnecessarily. These might include use of the long white cane, cooking and other tasks in the home or introduction to using a computer with assistive technology.

One of the dilemmas involved in successful outreach is that requests for information and training become too numerous to handle in a reasonable time by the small staff available. Over three thousand four hundred people were served in this past year.

The committee reviewed a consumer survey being administered by staff. This survey was given to several customers to determine if they felt the services received were helpful. Staff tried hard to get beyond the polite answers that people tend to give. Some of the questions were open-ended urging the customers to give more information. There were eight questions. They were:

1. If you knew when you were referred do you feel your counselor met with you in a reasonable amount of time?
2. Were you satisfied in your counselor's ability to answer your questions about your vision problem?
3. SSU provides a variety of services, do you remember if your counselor discussed with you

Low vision aids (magnifiers, sunglasses, 20/20 pens etc.)

Other adaptive devices (talking clocks, playing cards, writing guides)

Use of a white cane

Instruction to effectively prepare meals and perform other daily living tasks

Talking Book or other Communication Center services

Special benefits (Homestead, 411 exemption, handicapped parking)

4. Did the services you received make a positive difference in your life?
If yes, are you able to recall the one service you received from SSB that helped you the most?
5. Did your counselor meet with you in person on more than one occasion?
6. Were you informed that you could receive additional services in the future if needed?
7. Did you and your counselor discuss which one of you would be responsible for initiating any future contact?
8. SSB is always looking to improve ways that we deliver services to our customers; do you have any suggestions to help us improve?

It was the opinion of the committee that further work needs to be done on this survey—both in the number of people surveyed and further exploration as to how to provide services with more long-term effect.

Many of our committee meetings are taken up with brainstorming. For instance, we explored how assistive technology services are provided for seniors who do not have a vocational goal. Our discussions involved learning about the problems of providing ideal services (mostly because of financial restrictions) and trying to find a way to reach more people.

In the coming year, the committee will explore the provision of other services and continue to find a way to use limited funding to provide quality service.

The Child Committee

Elizabeth Bruber--Chair, Robin Exsted, Carrie Gilmer, Bill Heintz, Jean Martin, Liz McDevitt, Stacy Shablott. SSB staff—Pam Brown, Sharon Ostrom.

The Child Committee continued to function this past year without a Child Specialist at State Services for the Blind. The current Child Specialist is on a leave of absence, and has just renewed her leave of absence through June, 2008. A search for a temporary replacement has been posted by SSB, but no candidates meeting the requirement guidelines set by the Child Committee have come forth.

A needs assessment survey of blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind children on record at SSB in the State of Minnesota was mailed to parents and also distributed by Teachers of the Blind/Visually Impaired. Sixty-three completed surveys were returned to SSB.

Ms. Bruber, Chair, attended the November, 2006 State Vision Network meetings in Plymouth, MN, to discuss survey distribution and the opening at SSB for the Child Specialist.

Dr. Penny Hatcher of the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and Julie Homan of the Anoka Interagency Early Intervention Committee (IEIC) were invited to present to the Child Committee the

current vision screening guidelines for babies and children in the State of Minnesota and also on the county level.

The following are goals and priorities set by the committee as ongoing:

- 1) To expand the parent survey through the Teachers of the Blind and Visually Impaired and to statistically analyze the information currently received by the child's age, disability and area of the state.
- 2) To collaborate with other Minnesota state agencies (i.e. MDH and county IEIC's) as to the information being disseminated to doctors, school districts, and county interagencies as to identifying and directing parents of children who are blind, visually-impaired or DeafBlind and getting the necessary information to them.
- 3) Continue to work on developing an informational placard similar to the model of the Senior Services' placard. These will be distributed to pediatrician offices, OB-GYN offices, social workers, hospital pediatric units, licensed day care facilities and pre-schools to provide vital contact information for patients and their parents.
- 4) Continue the search for a Child Specialist for SSB.

Communication Center Committee

Steve Jacobson--Chair, Jennifer Dunnam, Catherine Durivage, Carol Earle, Wally Hinz, Jean Martin, Malcolm McLean, Ken Rogers, Susan Stevens-Barton, Andy Virden. SSB staff—Dick Strong, David Andrews, Mary Archer, Angela Bodensteiner, Gwen Bighley, Stuart Holland, Hal Schardin, Ellie Sevdý.

The Communication Center Committee exists to help State Services for the Blind (SSB) improve and expand the services of the Communication Center for blind and visually impaired persons. Committee membership includes representatives of the following: Braille and Talking Book Library; Resource Center for the Blind/Visually Impaired (Department of Education); teachers of the blind and visually impaired; representatives from colleges/universities; and consumers at-large.

The product of this committee is a report to the SRC-B containing specific strategies for increasing and improving Communication Center services. During FFY2007 the Communication Center Committee met every two months to receive updates and offer input on the projects, staffing changes, and other on-going work of the Communication Center.

Listed below are highlights and accomplishments of the Communication Center in FFY2007:

- Dial-in News and NFB-NEWSLINE® Improvements - In response to requests of consumers, the Communication Center added procedures to more quickly identify interruption of NFB-NEWSLINE® or Dial-in News. A change in procedure also reduced the interval of time before grocery ads were available on Dial-in News. Work continues on the implementation of another newspaper on NFB-NEWSLINE® and Dial-in News.

- Client Survey Undertaken - An initiative was undertaken to survey listeners of the Radio Talking Book in an effort to better understand the needs and preferences of those using that service. Almost 150 persons were surveyed as part of Phase I.
- High-speed scanner acquired - This scanner increases the throughput of conversion of textbooks to braille and accessible electronic media.
- Annual Volunteer Recognition Events - The Communication Center conducted the annual volunteer recognition events to applaud the work of over 700 volunteers that make possible much of the work of the Communication Center. This year the major event honoring current volunteers was held at The Depot in Minneapolis and was preceded by a tour of the Mill Museum with over 300 volunteers and their guests in attendance, making the event an outstanding success. The Volunteer Emeritus Recognition Event was held at SSB and was attended by nearly a dozen of the 52 members of this elite group: persons who have retired after giving over fifteen years of volunteer service to the Center.
- Continued Marketing and Outreach Efforts - The Senior Services Outreach Project, led by Ed Lecher, continued in SSB's effort to reach more seniors in need of Communication Center services. That project, along with the hard work of Wally Hinz and Charlie Boone and their speaking engagements, has resulted in a continuing increase of new customers of the Center and the Senior Services Unit during this past year.
- National and International Involvement - During the year staff and committee members were involved in a number of national and international activities including: the DAISY consortium, testing of new NLS format, National Braille Association, Braille Authority of North America, and the International Association of Audio Information Services. These efforts reflect continued leadership by staff members and Communication Center Committee members.
- Evolution of Textbook Production - Communication Center staff and a committee member attended an institute on digital production at the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) conference in July of 2007 to better understand e-text production as options are considered for the future activities and efforts of the Center in meeting the needs of students with disabilities in post-secondary educational programs.
- Braille Transcription of Tests - The braille transcription of Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment Tests continues to be a critical role fulfilled by the Center.
- Conversion to Digital Radio Talking Book Receivers - Ongoing efforts to secure a new radio receiver are nearing fruition. During this year, an acceptable prototype was received in addition to an "assembly line" receiver insuring that mass-production will not significantly affect quality. Pending the signing of agreements with Minnesota Public Radio, the order for the first group of radios is ready to be placed.

- Modernization of the Radio Talking Book Service – This project permits greater automation of the broadcasts, reduces long-term costs and adds flexibility. Additional projects put on the drawing board include approaches for more flexible listening options including archiving programs to the Dial-in News telephone service and the Internet.
- Activities to Support Education of Blind Youth - Huge numbers of print pages were converted to braille and audio to support Minnesota students in k-12 and in post-secondary institutions. This effort directly affects the quality of education of blind Minnesotans and thereby their potential employment. The Center provided nearly 900,000 pages of braille during the year.
- Audio Textbook Production Modernized - Efforts to modernize the format of converted texts are proceeding well. Software development and initial training of volunteers on DAISY audio recordings will be available before the end of calendar year 2007, and work is being done to support other electronic and braille formats. DAISY formatted recordings offer flexibility in navigating audio recordings that approaches that offered by printed texts.

Task Forces

A variety of SRC-B task forces met and completed their assigned activities during the year. The Needs Assessment Task Force and the Rehabilitation Services Administration Draft Vocational Rehabilitation Strategic Performance Plan Task Force reports are included below. Other task forces were convened to work on items such as putting together the FFY07 annual report, revising the Council work plan, revising the committee structure charters, and revising the Council resource plan.

Needs Assessment Task Force

Jean Martin--Chair, Jan Bailey, Elizabeth Bruber, Jennifer Dunnam, Steve Jacobson, Bonita Kallestad. SSB Staff—Cathy Carlson.

The task force adopted a 3-year cycle of needs assessment activities:

- | | |
|--------|---|
| Year 1 | Conduct a comprehensive statewide assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities
Establish fiscal year goals, priorities and strategies |
| Year 2 | Review needs assessment findings
Review goals, priorities and strategies
Identify what's missing |
| Year 3 | Review and evaluate needs assessment process
Recommend changes to the process for conducting the next needs assessment |

The following information was reviewed:

1. Information for years 2002 - 2007:

Referral sources: number by referral category for each year

Transition age customers: number of successful closures, number of unsuccessful closures; for those closed unsuccessful a list of the reasons and number for each

All customers: number of successful closures, number of unsuccessful closures; for those closed unsuccessful a list of the reasons and number for each

2. Maryland Vocational Rehabilitation program's 2004 needs assessment
3. SSB's 2006 needs assessment attachment to the state plan

The task force members discussed how to incorporate the verbatim comments from the ongoing customer satisfaction survey and the DeafBlind needs assessment survey results. Other SRC-B committees will be asked to assist and provide information on the results of gap analysis they conduct.

Rehabilitation Services Administration Draft Vocational Rehabilitation Strategic Performance Plan Task Force

Judy Sanders--Chair, Bonita Kallestad, Rebecca Kragnes. SSB Staff—Cathy Carlson, Chuk Hamilton.

This task force was established to review the RSA Draft Vocational Rehabilitation Strategic Performance Plan and to develop comments for both the SRC-B and SSB. The following joint questions and comments for the Rehabilitation Services Administration were developed for Council approval.

While this performance plan is still in the draft stages, it is important for the following questions to be answered:

- Is it the intent of RSA to supplement the Standards and Indicators, or to ultimately replace them, with these goals?
- What relationship is there, if any, between order of selection and the application of these goals and objectives? Is it RSA's intent to emphasize one goal over another?
- Is the use of the term "significant disability" such that goals 1 and 2 do not apply to all agency customers?

Goal 1

The Task Force had a number of questions regarding goal one.

- What will the target measures be?
- There is a substantial difference between the average weekly wage of all employed individuals in a state (Minnesota is \$20/hour) and the average weekly wage of all job openings in a state (Minnesota is \$13/hour). Which measure will be used? Would not the fairer comparison be with the average weekly wage of all job openings since those are the jobs for which everyone, including VR customers, competes?
- Through this goal and its objectives, how will RSA balance choice versus urging people to work full time and go off benefits? There are potential downsides to this goal; such as, establishing a system of tiered services—a different set for those who want to work full-time and go off benefits from those who do not; or discouraging people who want to work only part-time from applying for and receiving VR services; or excluding people who can only work part-time. As experience has shown, many people who start work on a part-time basis, are able to increase to full-time work; however, they cannot start at full-time.
- Objective 1.3 does not seem to be appropriate since job retention is a service provided for under the Rehabilitation Act. This objective has the potential of negatively impacting services intended to help an individual keep their job. Worse yet, it could result in people having to suffer job failure before VR services would be available.

Goal 2

It is unclear how RSA would calculate this measure. Would the mean hours worked for rehabilitants in a given year be tracked in future years to see how they are doing? Or would the mean hours worked by rehabilitants in one year be compared to the mean hours worked by rehabilitants the next year? If the latter measure, then individuals may increase their hours over time but that is not what would not be measured. Further, it would lead to the same concerns expressed about choice and full-time versus part-time work options and services.

Job Retention

As noted earlier, job retention is a significant VR service and its omission is an issue. It needs to be included either as a separate goal or by adding it as a measure within goals 1 and 2.

Other Suggestions:

- Move quickly to new standards and not have too long a period of doing both
- Provide timelines with more concrete phasing in of goals and objectives
- Clarify the process for implementation
- Consider the time and resources needed for states to reprogram their management information systems
- RSA specifically mentions the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities as a group from whom to solicit feedback. RSA must seek input from more consumer groups rather than just this one group.

Appendices

Appendix I Council Members

Member

Representing

Jan Bailey

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

Connie Lee Berg

American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Project

Lynette Boyer

DeafBlind Community

Elizabeth Bruber

Parent of Blind Child

Jim Collins

Community Rehabilitation Program

Jennifer Dunnam

Disability Advocacy Group

Chuk Hamilton

Director, State Services for the Blind

Steve Jacobson

Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Sam Jasmine

Business, Industry, and Labor

Bonita Kallestad

Client Assistance Project

Rebecca Kragnes, Chair

Disability Advocacy Group

Carol Leaders

Business, Industry, and Labor

Michael Malver

Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Jean Martin

MN Department of Education, Special Education

Liz McDevitt

Parent Training and Information Center

Fannie Primm

Business, Industry, and Labor

Judy Sanders

Statewide Independent Living Council

Coralmae Stenstrom

Disability Advocacy Group

**STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL
FOR THE BLIND
MEMBERS
FFY 2007**



Back row: Chuk Hamilton, Jennifer Dunnam, Jan Bailey, Jane Toleno, Elizabeth Bruber, Coralmae Stenstrom, Tom Scanlan, Judy Sanders, Fannie Primm, Michael Malver. Seated in front: Lynnette Boyer, Steve Jacobson, Jean Martin and Rebecca Kragnes.

Appendix II Council Work Plan FFY2007

October-2006

The Chair reports on current member terms and upcoming vacancies.

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee reports progress to the Council on achievement of goals and priorities.

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee review results of the Statewide Customer Satisfaction Survey and reports to the Council.

As necessary, the Chair appoints a Needs Assessment Task Force to comply with federal requirements and determines a reporting schedule for the rest of the year. This needs to occur every three years.

November-2006

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee, after receiving data around November 1, reviews preliminary VR effectiveness data and sends a draft report to the Council by 11/6.

The Annual Report Task Force delivers draft Annual Report to SSB by 11/6.

Council members meet and review draft Annual Report on 11/14.

SSB sends revised draft of Annual Report to Council members by 11/22 to ensure action at December meeting.

Council members must comment on VR Effectiveness Report by 11/14.

SSB sends comments on VR effectiveness to Council members by 11/22 to ensure action at December meeting.

December-2006

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee reports progress to Council on achievement of goals and priorities.

The Council approves Annual Report and VR Effectiveness Report.

Annual Report and VR Effectiveness Report are produced for distribution by December 31.

The Chair appoints a task force to review the Council's annual work plan.

January-2007

All committees assess progress on goals and priorities relevant to their committee and submit recommendations to the Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee.

The Coordinating Councils Task Force provides feedback on their activities to the Goals and Priorities Committee.

February-2007

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee reports progress to the Council on achievement of goals and priorities.

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee reviews Statewide Customer Satisfaction Survey and reports to the Council.

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee and SSB begin drafting goals and priorities for next fiscal year.

The Council elects Chair and Vice Chair.

The Chair appoints a Budget Task Force to get update on current status of expenditures and to propose any necessary refinements in the Resource Plan for the current fiscal year at the April SRC-B meeting. This group will also meet in the summer and make recommendations for the Resource Plan for the next fiscal year at the August SRC-B meeting.

The Chair appoints a Task Force to review the SRC-B New Member Orientation Packet and make updates as needed.

The Work Plan Task Force reports on revisions to the annual work plan for Council approval.

March-2007

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee and SSB provide joint draft of the goals and priorities update to SSB by March 9.

Council members must provide comments on the goals and priorities update to SSB by March 16.

SSB will summarize and distribute comments on the update no later than March 24 to ensure Council action at the April meeting.

April-2007

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee and SSB present goals and priorities for next fiscal year for approval. The fiscal year begins October 1.

The Budget Task Force makes recommendations for any necessary changes to the Resource Plan for the current fiscal year.

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee reviews Statewide Customer Satisfaction Survey and reports to the Council.

The Chair appoints a Task Force on Council Committees to review committee structure and report recommendations on changes necessary at the June SRC-B meeting.

In even numbered years, the Council, in partnership with SSB, agrees on a pool of impartial hearing officers.

May-2007

June-2007

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee reports progress to the Council on achievement of goals and priorities.

Review and act on report of the Task Force on Council Committees. The Chair sets date for applications for committees.

Client Assistance Project annual report.

July-2007

The Budget Task Force meets and makes recommendations at the August meeting for the resource plan for next fiscal year.

August-2007

The Budget Task Force makes recommendations for the resource plan for next fiscal year. The Council acts on the recommended resource plan.

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee review results of the Statewide Customer Satisfaction Survey and report to the Council.

The Chair, with Council approval, appoints Council committee members and chairs.

The Chair appoints a task force to create an annual report.

The Chair appoints a Coordinating Councils Task Force to address the federal requirement of collaboration. The Task Force will determine the councils appropriate for collaboration during the current year. The members will communicate with and/or coordinate their attendance with the chair of each council to ensure that their participation at the meeting would be noted on the other council's agenda and that a dialogue about the SRC-B and collaboration occurs.

September-2007

Annual Report Task Force members submit their section of the annual report to SSB by 10/15.

Appendix III Federal Standards and Indicators

Standard 1:

For any given year, calculations for indicators 1.1 through 1.6 for Designated State Units that exclusively serve individuals with visual impairments or blindness are based on aggregated data for the current year and the prior year, i.e., two years of data (34 CFR §361.81(4)). The Designated State Unit must pass four of the six indicators in Standard 1 and must pass two of the three primary indicators (1.3 to 1.5).

Indicator 1.1

The number of individuals exiting the VR program who achieved an employment outcome during the current performance period compared to the number of individuals who exit the VR program after achieving an employment outcome during the previous performance period.

Required Performance Level: DSUs performance in current period must equal or exceed performance in previous period.

Indicator 1.2

Of all individuals who exit the VR program after receiving services, the percentage who are determined to have achieved an employment outcome.

Required Performance Level: For the general and combined DSUs, the level is 55.8%; for agencies serving individuals who are blind, the level is 68.9%.

Indicator 1.3

Of all individuals determined to have achieved an employment outcome, the percentage who exit the VR program in competitive, self-, or business enterprise program (BEP) employment with earnings equivalent to at least the minimum wage.

Required Performance Level: For the general and combined DSUs, the level is 72.6%; for agencies serving individuals who are blind, the level is 35.4%.

Indicator 1.4

Of all individuals who exit the VR program in competitive, self-, or BEP employment with earnings equivalent to at least the minimum wage, the percentage who are individuals with significant disabilities.

Required Performance Level: For the general and combined DSUs, the level is 62.4%; for agencies serving individuals who are blind, the level is 89.0%.

Indicator 1.5

The average hourly earnings of all individuals who exit the VR program in competitive, self-, or BEP employment with earnings equivalent to at least the minimum wage as a ratio to the State's average hourly earnings for all individuals in the State who are employed (as derived from the Bureau of Labor Statistics report "State Average Annual Pay" for the most recent available year).

Required Performance Level: For the general and combined DSUs, the level is a ratio of .52; for agencies serving individuals who are blind, the ratio is .59.

Indicator 1.6

Of all individuals who exit the VR program in competitive, self-, or BEP employment with earnings equivalent to at least the minimum wage, the difference between the percentage who report their own income as the largest single source of economic support at the time they exit the VR program and the percentage who report their own income as the largest single source of support at the time they apply for VR services.

Required Performance Level: For the general and combined DSUs, the level is an arithmetic difference of 53.0; for agencies serving individuals who are blind, the level is a difference of 30.4.

Standard 2:

If a DSU had fewer than 100 individuals from a minority background exit the VR program during the reporting period, the DSU must describe the policies it has adopted or will adopt and the steps it has taken or will take to ensure that individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds have equal access to VR services, in lieu of calculating the ratio described below (34 CFR §361.86(b)(2)(iii)).

Indicator 2.1

The service rate for all individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds as a ratio to the service rate for all individuals with disabilities from non-minority backgrounds.

Required Performance Level: All agencies must attain a ratio level of .80.

Appendix IV 2007 Goals and Priorities for State Services for the Blind

The following goals and priorities for FFY2007 were jointly developed by SRC-B and SSB and were approved by the Council at their meeting on October 7, 2006.

GOAL AND PRIORITY #1: Employment Outcomes—SSB will meet RSA Indicator 1.1.

Every customer who comes to SSB is in need of obtaining, maintaining or regaining employment. In that this is the primary purpose of the VR program, employment outcomes is chosen as a goal and priority.

This indicator measures the number of individuals exiting the VR program who achieved an employment outcome during the current performance period compared to the number of individuals who exited the VR program after achieving an employment outcome during the previous performance period. To achieve this indicator, SSB's performance in the current period must equal or exceed performance in the previous period. This goal is measured by the SSB MIS system and subsequent federal reports. This goal and priority is driven by the evaluation of SSB performance on the Standards and Indicators.

SSB is utilizing a number of strategies to achieve this goal and move customers to high growth, high wage jobs and industries, to jobs in demand, and to jobs with career ladders.

SSB has identified a number of strategies for meeting this goal.

1. Each Counseling Supervisor will ensure staff of the Workforce Development Unit (WFD):
 - agree to specific paid closure goals by September 30 of each year for the following year;
 - actively participate on local and regional teams facilitated by the DEED Business Services Specialists;
 - coordinate with DEED Business Services Specialists prior to making employer contacts to ensure current and accurate knowledge of employer needs;
 - attend DEED training on use of Labor Market Information in the career development process every two years to maintain skills in utilizing the information when assisting customers to choose a career goal; and
 - attend training on occupations in demand for use with customers as part of the informed choice process.
2. The Director of the WFD will support attendance and participation of counselors and other staff in the Chamber of Commerce or similar organization as part of targeted job development efforts.
3. In-service training will be utilized to improve counselor placement skills and their work with employers. The current in-service training plan includes two days of training in November of 2006 on the Comprehensive Assessment of VR Needs so that counselors improve their skills when working with the individual to develop an employment plan. Additional training planned in FFY07 on Serving the DeafBlind Customer, Improving Cultural Competencies, and Low Vision will include components on effective job development and placement skills.
4. Targeted outreach activities are essential to maintain the market penetration noted in the findings in the state plan needs assessment that "SSB believes that the numbers of individuals that have traditionally come to SSB for vocational rehabilitation services represents...a realistic picture of the

need for services” (page 21). Outreach activities, such as presenting information on SSB services at various professional conferences, will continue. The effectiveness of these outreach activities will be measured through documentation of referrals over the three year period of FY07 through FY09 as documented in the RSA 113. Strategies for improving SSB’s performance on RSA Indicator 1.1 will also assist in meeting RSA Indicator 2.1—the service rate for all individuals from minority backgrounds.

GOAL AND PRIORITY #2: Minority Service Rate—By the end of FFY07 at least 100 persons from minority backgrounds will exit services annually and SSB will meet RSA Indicator 2.1.

This goal and priority is consistent with the finding in the needs assessment that SSB did not meet federal Standard 2.1 for FFY05 dealing with equal access to services. While the number of individuals from minority backgrounds exiting services in FFY 2005 was 102, meeting the SRC-B and SSB goal of 100, it was not enough to meet the required service ratio level of at least .80. The measure for this goal and priority is defined in regulation and comes from the RSA 911 report finalized each November 30th.

SSB has identified a number of strategies for meeting this goal.

1. In-Service Staff Training: SSB’s in-service training grant focuses on developing and improving agency-wide cultural competency. The following activities have been identified:
 - *An organizational assessment*—conducted by staff from Century College, a school within the Minnesota State College and University System, will be completed by the end of July of 2006. This will be accomplished through staff participation in focus groups (all Workforce Development staff and all SSB management) at which time each staff person will complete a cultural diversity self-assessment instrument. During FFY07, this assessment will guide training curriculum development, and will be used with the SRC-B Minority Outreach Committee to identify other needs and strategies to meet those needs.
 - *Training plan*—specific staff training will be conducted in FFY07 in accordance with the organizational assessment and the training plan as outlined in SSB’s in-service quality grant.
2. Review other states’ best practices and identify other strategies and activities appropriate for application in Minnesota.
3. Review and apply literature and research findings that may enhance staff and organizational competency in serving SSB customers from minority backgrounds.
4. Continue working with SSB VR staff in outreach activities to Minnesota’s community-based organizations representing minority groups, with emphasis on community-based organizations serving African-Americans.
5. SSB will attempt to develop relationships with generic English as a Second Language programs to co-train blind individuals from minority backgrounds in braille while also learning English.
6. Develop a best practices manual providing ongoing guidance to staff by September 30, 2007.

GOAL AND PRIORITY #3: DeafBlind Outreach and Service—Enhance services for persons who have a dual sensory loss, including persons who are DeafBlind. During FFY07 at least eight individuals with a dual sensory loss will secure employment as a result of SSB services.

Previous needs assessment activities, including the findings of a 2002 Minnesota Legislature directed study, identified individuals who are DeafBlind as underserved by the VR program. Resulting activities were the creation of a SRC-B DeafBlind Committee, focused outreach to the DeafBlind community, staff in-service training, and the development of a “best practices” guide for counselors. SSB is now assessing the impact of these activities through a targeted needs assessment and customer satisfaction survey. The survey, developed in May of 2006, is being administered to each SSB customer with a dual sensory loss or who is DeafBlind. All surveys will be completed by July 31, 2006. The survey results will be compiled and analyzed with the SRC-B DeafBlind Committee to identify service needs and strategies to meet those needs.

This action item was originally recommended by the DeafBlind Committee of the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind.

SSB has identified a number of strategies for meeting this goal.

1. Analyze survey results—

The results of the needs assessment and customer satisfaction survey administered to each SSB customer with a dual sensory loss or who is DeafBlind will be analyzed by SSB staff and SRC-B members. Recommendations on goals and strategies will be brought to SSB management and the SRC-B to be incorporated into current and future goals and priorities.

2. Continue outreach activities—

During FFY07 increase usage of the SSB brochure developed specifically for individuals who are DeafBlind; mail it to appropriate groups; provide or post the information on the DeafBlind listserve; and identify other outreach strategies based on the results of the needs assessment and customer satisfaction survey.

3. Review SSB data collection—

Assure accurate and consistent coding of DeafBlindness in the management information system by all counselors.

4. Enhance staff competency—

Implement SSB’s in-service training plan and provide comprehensive staff training on understanding DeafBlindness and competency in serving SSB customers who are DeafBlind. The training will assist vocational rehabilitation counselors, placement and assistive technology staff to improve their knowledge and understanding of deafness and DeafBlindness. This training will focus on: understanding deafness and deaf culture; deaf vs. hard of hearing; assistive devices and equipment; communication methods; defining DeafBlindness; DeafBlind vs. hard of hearing/visually impaired; communication styles used by DeafBlind individuals; Support Service Providers and ASL interpreters; adjustment to DeafBlindness; rehabilitation training for DeafBlind vs. hard of hearing people; mobility training; and adaptive technology.

5. Promote collaborative efforts with other state agencies, which provide services to individuals who are DeafBlind, so that specific vocational needs, like the need for supported employment, can be met. Results of SSB's needs assessment and customer satisfaction survey will be shared with those agencies.

GOAL AND PRIORITY #4: Increase customer satisfaction with services provided—by the end of March 2007 the annual overall satisfaction with services provided by SSB will be at or above 85%. (Q1 on the Customer Satisfaction Survey, “What is your overall satisfaction with the services provided?” The scale is from 1 to 10 where “1” means “very dissatisfied” and “10” means “very satisfied”.)

The Rehabilitation Act requires the SRC-B and SSB to monitor customer satisfaction with services. Both the SRC-B and SSB have established this as a goal and priority to ensure customer satisfaction with services continues to improve.

This item was originally recommended by the SRC-B.

SSB has identified a number of strategies for meeting this goal.

1. Conduct quarterly customer satisfaction surveys—
Customer satisfaction surveys will be administered quarterly to approximately 50 SSB customers as part of the DEED customer satisfaction initiative. The surveys are conducted by the Strategic Research Group of Columbus, Ohio.
2. Analyze customer satisfaction survey results—
SSB and the SRC-B Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee will continue to review and analyze the data on a quarterly basis. During FFY07, in addition to the quantitative results for each survey question, specific customer comments will be reviewed.
3. Identify customer service needs—
Based on the analysis of the customer satisfaction survey results, recommendations for program improvements will be brought to SSB and the SRC-B to assure that services are available that meet customer needs.

GOAL AND PRIORITY #5: Insure every SSB customer has the information needed to make an informed choice in selecting providers for adjustment to blindness training.

During FFY07 100% of SSB customers attending ATB half time or more will indicate that they were given the opportunity to choose their provider.

During FFY07 the results of the customer satisfaction surveys for customers completing ATB will be posted externally for customer review.

The state plan needs assessment identifies adjustment to blindness training services as the number one expenditure for all customer groups. SSB needs to ensure that customers have the information they need to make an informed choice when selecting providers for adjustment to blindness training.

This goal was recommended by the SRC-B.

SSB has identified a number of strategies for meeting this goal.

1. Informed choice—

During FFY07 SSB counselors will complete the “Choosing ATB Training” form for each customer who is considering ATB training. Counselors will ensure that all customers are provided information, in an accessible format, about options for receiving adjustment to blindness services, and strongly encourage each customer to tour each community rehabilitation program. Counselor reports will be sent to SSB’s State Director, and the information will be compiled and reported semi-annually to the SRC-B.

2. Customer satisfaction with vendor services—

In FFY06, SSB and the Vendor Outcomes and Measures Committee of the SRC-B developed and implemented a customer satisfaction survey for customers who completed adjustment to blindness training. During FFY07, each SSB customer will be surveyed six months after completion of adjustment to blindness training or at time of case file closure, whichever comes first. Each month an estimated ten to fifteen customers will be contacted to complete the telephone survey of eighteen questions.

When sufficient data is gathered, it will be linked back to service providers for continuous improvement purposes. The data will be formatted and posted externally for customer review when selecting a service provider to meet their rehabilitation needs. The results will be reported to the SRC-B and will be used to identify customer needs and areas for service improvements.

3. Improving vendor skills and quality services—

SSB will continue to require individual vendors who provide training to SSB customers on access and assistive technology to pass a test, developed by SSB staff, on the software programs they wish to teach in order to be on the list of approved vendors. In addition, each individual vendor and CRP trainer must take and pass an adult learning course which was developed for SSB by Century College, a school within the Minnesota State College and University System. That course provides training on learning styles, teaching methods, multiple intelligences, and how to write individualized training plans and learning objectives.

GOAL AND PRIORITY #6: All VR staff members new to SSB will receive Introduction to Blindness—Phase 1 and/or Phase 2 training on the essential aspects of blindness and visual impairment.

The Rehabilitation Act requires that only qualified personnel provide VR services to individuals with disabilities. In-service training is provided to VR counselors as one method to develop and maintain the various skills needed to provide quality services to individuals who are blind, visually impaired or DeafBlind. SSB counselors need specialized, intensive training on the essential aspects of blindness and visual impairment. Learning the alternative blindness techniques that SSB customers need to be successful in their homes, communities and at work, improves a counselor’s ability to provide appropriate and responsive services.

This goal was originally recommended by the SRC-B.

SSB has identified a number of strategies for meeting this goal.

1. Supervisory staff will ensure all new VR staff will complete **Introduction to Blindness —Phase 1** training within three months of hire.
2. Supervisory staff will ensure all new Rehabilitation Counseling staff will complete **Introduction to Blindness—Phase 2** training within three months of hire.
3. Current employees of SSB who have not been exposed to all or part of the material in the **Introduction to Blindness – Phase 1** course will be invited and encouraged to receive that training in a timely manner.
4. **Phase 2** training will be discussed with and encouraged for other current staff that would otherwise not be required to attend.