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— M I N N E S O T A —

State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

2015 ANNUAL REPORT



State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

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Michael O'Day, Council Chair
State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind
2200 University Avenue West, Suite 240
St. Paul, MN 55114
November 2015

The Honorable Mark Dayton
Office of the Governor
130 State Capitol, 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Governor Dayton,

One evening in October of 2015, I had the pleasure of welcoming a diverse group of about 125 Minnesotans who came to State Services for the Blind (SSB) for an Open House that our State Rehabilitation for the Blind (SRC-B) co-sponsored. Some who came were SSB volunteers – individuals who transcribe books into braille, digital audio, or e-text, or who repair equipment. Some who came were customers, or former customers in SSB's Workforce Development section. Some who came were young adults and their families, who were there to participate in a special forum on transitioning from High School to college and careers. Others who attended were part of Minnesota's rich DeafBlind community, who came to have time to spend together and to learn about how to connect with the work of our council and SSB. Others who came were seniors interested in how SSB is tackling the issue of meeting the needs of a rapidly increasing number of seniors with vision loss.

As I greeted our guests, I reflected on the breadth of services offered through SSB, and the ways in which our council has worked to shape and strengthen those services. As expressed in our Vision Statement, one of the key responsibilities of the SRC-B is to: "... ensure 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 overview below provides a snapshot of some of the achievements of SSB in the past year. The reports that follow encapsulate the work of the SRC-B in 2015 and the ways in which each committee of the council has contributed to expanding opportunity and equal access to Minnesotans who are blind, DeafBlind, or visually impaired.

The year in Review

Each year that I have served on the SRC-B I have been impressed by the scope and variety of positions that the customers of SSB's Workforce Development Section have obtained. This year is no exception. In 2015, blind, DeafBlind and visually impaired Minnesotans found jobs as mechanics, librarians, physical therapists, business analysts, fitness trainers, and educators, to name but a few. All told, there are some

73 different occupations listed, demonstrating once again, that working blind, DeafBlind and visually impaired Minnesotans contribute to all sectors of our economy.

In addition, the numbers below represent just some of the progress made by blind, DeafBlind, and visually impaired Minnesotans in the last year. Behind each of these numbers might be a fourth-grader in Crookston reading a geography book in braille, a senior in Red Wing, learning how to use the accessibility features on an iPad to send a text to a grandchild, or a young woman in Cloquet, heading off to her first job. The council is proud to have provided support and guidance to the staff of SSB in making each story behind each number a story of success and empowerment.

143 successful closures (representing 143 more blind, DeafBlind and visually impaired Minnesotans working across the state.

\$20.90 Average hourly wage for full and part time work.

\$22.26 Average hourly wage for fulltime work.

\$16.87 Average hourly wage for part time work.

4,036 seniors served (some of these were visited more than once by a Senior Services staff member)

1,335,328 Print pages transcribed in to human-voiced audio

1,019,870 braille pages sent out to seniors

13,801 Customers served by the Communication Center.

On behalf of the Council, I wish to thank the staff of SSB, and especially, the dedicated volunteers, who helped make 2015 such a successful year at SSB. It is a privilege to be a part of making Minnesota a great state for everyone, including people who are blind, DeafBlind, and visually impaired.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael O'Day



Back row: Carol Pankow, Rochelle Chen, Steve Jacobson, Steve Eggen, Rob Hobson, Pat McGee, Michael O'Day

Middle Row: Angela Christle, Marlene Moulton Janssen, Emily Zitek, Jennifer Dunnam, Ken Rodgers

Front Row: Michelle Dornan-Vickery, Kristin Oien, RoseAnn Faber, Betty Jean Kauffman

Mission Statement for the State

Rehabilitation Council 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 ensuring 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 ensure that Minnesotans, who are blind, visually impaired, or DeafBlind receive the best possible services under the law.

Vision Statement for the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B)

The 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 quality 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 ensure 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 that fulfills each individual's needs and aspirations.

A Whole New World: A Profile of Amy Ward

When telling her story of adjusting to vision loss, Amy Ward begins this way, "September 16 2012 was the last day that I drove a car." For Amy, that day not only marked the divide between an old life and a new one, but it also marked the beginning of a path that started in fear and brought her to hope.

"I was living in Hutchinson Minnesota," Amy reflects, "I had never met anyone who was blind. I lived in a town where everyone drove – you had to."

Optic neuritis from Multiple Sclerosis meant that Amy no longer had any depth perception. "I was paralyzed with fear," Amy recalls of that time, "I was scared to death."

A search for help brought her to John Hamilton, SSB's Workforce Development Counselor in Hutchinson.

"John is awesome," Amy says, "Through him and SSB I learned that I could adjust. I had never even met a blind person before then."

In 2014, Amy moved to the Twin Cities and enrolled in Adjustment to Blindness training at Vision Loss Resources (VLR). Having never lived in a city, or ridden on a city bus, the whole experience was new for Amy.

"The staff at VLR were amazing. In addition to the skills they taught, they listened to me and gave me tremendous emotional support." Being at VLR also gave Amy the experience of meeting blind people who were capable and confident.

With her own confidence in herself restored, in 2015, Amy found an apartment in St. Paul, and got a job as a Receptionist and Concierge at Walker Methodist Health Center. With her strong people skills, and warm outgoing personality, it's a job that draws on her many evident strengths.

What's more, her experience in facing down fear and re-building her life gives Amy empathy for the families and the health center patients there, making her a clear asset to the staff.

Given all that Amy has accomplished in a short amount of time, it might be surprising to learn that the new skill Amy is most proud of is --- knitting.

"It's a skill I learned completely as a person who is visually impaired. Like a lot of things, it's something I never thought I could do."

That each of us has the capacity to do things we never thought we could do is one of the lessons that Amy would pass on to anyone else who is struggling with vision loss. "It's a whole new world," she says, "and you need to be your own advocate, ask for what you need, be willing to learn, and know that you can do it."



Amy Ward



Letter from Director Pankow

Dear Governor Dayton and the Members of the SRC-B,

In 2015 the close partnership between SSB and the SRC-B has been more critical than ever. Input from the council and from consumers has been invaluable as we launched new initiatives to provide more robust services to students, and to better serve the growing population of seniors with vision loss. The council has informed the decisions made in our Communication Center as we've continued to expand options and streamline services to better meet changing consumer needs. Most of all, the council's guidance has been essential as we worked to implement an order of selection process in such a way as to minimize as much as possible the impact on blind, DeafBlind, and visually impaired job seekers.

Order of Selection

In 2016, SSB is facing the hard reality of a budget shortfall. Several factors have converged including payment for replacing a defunct case management system, lower returns of program income from Social Security for successfully placing individuals into employment and spending restrictions from a new federal law redirecting funds to be spent on students with disabilities. Under such circumstances, federal rules require us to restrict the number of customers we can serve through our workforce team. This means that some job seekers will be put on a waiting list until we can free up monies to serve them. Customers who are already in our workforce system are not affected. Communication Center and senior services also continue as normal. We have implemented cost-cutting measures and are looking at all options to turn this around. Input from the council has been integral to all the decisions we've made to work through the Order of Selection process in a way that keeps the needs of our consumers at the forefront.

Serving Minnesota Seniors

In 2015, with support from the Hamm Family Advisory Fund and the Centers for Independent Living, SSB launched the Aging Eyes Initiative, which has the potential to dramatically increase the number of seniors we can serve. The idea is simple: we provide professionals who are already out in the community working with seniors, with training and tools to address the early stages of vision loss. This frees our Senior Services counselors to assist consumers with greater need. The project was one result of an extensive review of options, including a commissioned study from the Humphrey School of Public policy, to address the rapid increase in the number of seniors we serve. The Council has provided invaluable feedback throughout the review process and in the development of this initiative. So far, the response from those we've trained has been enthusiastic – our new community partners appreciate having the tools and the skills to offer solutions to their clients who are beginning to lose vision.

Serving the Next Generation of Minnesotans

With federal funding under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) SSB has significantly expanded both the quality and quantity of services for students (14 – 21) and their families.

- An RFP expanded the number and variety of community programs that offer blind, DeafBlind, and visually impaired young adults the chance to develop job, study, and living skills.
- No longer do students have to wait until the summer to gain these skills, as these programs are now offered throughout the year, giving students and their families greater flexibility, and consistency.
- A targeted outreach effort yielded a 40% increase in the number of young adults we're now directly serving.
- We brought on Sheila Koenig, herself an educator, to coordinate our services and outreach to Minnesota's young adults who are blind, DeafBlind, and visually impaired.

I am especially grateful to the Council for its support and guidance as we have implemented this strategic investment in young adults who will soon be transitioning to college, careers, and community. I know that the members of the Council share my belief that providing this generation with a strong foundation will yield dividends down the road, for SSB, and for our state.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carol Pankow', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Carol Pankow

COMMITTEE REPORTS

COMMUNICATION CENTER COMMITTEE REPORT

The product of this committee consists of reports to the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind containing specific strategies for increasing and improving Communication Center services as well as a summary of the accomplishments of the past year. During FFY 2015 the Communication Center Committee met four times to receive updates and offer input on the projects, staffing changes, and other ongoing work of the Communication Center.

The effectiveness of this committee is greatly enhanced by extremely active participation of Communication Center section supervisors and managers. To increase opportunity for exchange of information and ideas, the head of each section makes available a written report several days before each meeting, allowing for concentration on discussion during the meetings.

Listed below are highlights and accomplishments of the Communication Center and this committee in FFY 2015:

- **SUPPORT THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN IN MINNESOTA SCHOOLS** — The Communication Center continues to provide braille and audio textbooks to blind students through a contract with the Minnesota Department of Education. This reduces the need for school districts to provide this kind of support for their blind students directly and increases the efficiency of service by creating one-time materials common to multiple school districts.
- **EVOLUTION OF TEXTBOOK PRODUCTION** — During this past year there has been an increase in the production of books in electronic format which can be delivered sooner and accessed on different types of devices. In some cases, the same book can be read in braille or read with high-quality synthesized speech. DAISY markup allows direct access to chapters and pages much as one can do with a printed text. This process has moved from the experimental

phase to become a standard product of the communication Center.

- **SUPPORT OF NATIONAL LIBRARY SERVICE FUNCTIONS** — The Communication Center is the agency in Minnesota that distributes and repairs the equipment used to read books from the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, a division of the Library of Congress. In addition, the two entities have many common customers. For some time, an effort has been underway to allow more efficient service delivery by using common software for tracking of customer and equipment information and by allowing the staff from either to handle incoming inquiries. During this past fiscal year, work as completed to use a single database to store customer information, and a common telephone number is now in place. This allows the staff of either agency to handle customer requests, increasing efficiency and eliminating redundancy.
- **MODERNIZATION OF THE RADIO TALKING BOOK Service** In addition to making the operation of this service more efficient, new methods to get programs to customers have been developed and expanded. Programs are archived on a secure web site and can be accessed by customer at times that fit their schedules. Also, programs can now be delivered on NLS digital cartridges playable on the new National Library Service digital machines which, as noted above, the Communication Center distributes. The process that makes books recorded for the Radio Talking Book broadcasts available through the Minnesota Braille and Talking Book Library on cartridge is now in full operation. This makes the efforts of the Communication Center available to more customers.
- **BRAILLE PRODUCTION** — Huge numbers of print pages were converted to braille and audio to support Minnesota students in K-12 and in post-secondary institutions. Approximately one million braille pages were produced directly or distributed from other sources during this year. This effort has a direct impact on the quality of education of blind Minnesotans and ultimately their potential for employment.

■ **SPECIAL PROJECTS** — An effort was begun during this past year to have the committee work with the Communication Center on special projects that could benefit from the involvement of its customers. Examples of projects that were discussed include the development of an alternative radio talking book service in languages other than English, further expansion of the delivery of Radio Talking Book programming through streaming technologies, and discussion of strategies to implement the new Unified English Braille standard which becomes effective in 2016. During one meeting, the role of 3-D printing in creating tactile graphics and models for blind students was discussed, including an opportunity to examine examples of this technology.

■ **INCREASING THE COMMUNICATION CENTER'S CATALOG PRESENCE** — During 2013, work was begun to make the content of the Communication Center's library visible in a standard library cataloging system. This effort was completed during this past year. While these books are only available to those with a visual or reading disability, it allows searches to be executed from standard library interfaces.

■ **NFB-NEWSLINE® AND DIAL-IN NEWS SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS** — The Communication Center continues to administer NFB Newsline service in Minnesota. This service, supported by the Telecommunication Access Minnesota fund, now has added the ability to distribute newspapers to digital devices in addition to the telephone. For the first time ever, a blind person with an electronic braille display can read daily newspapers in braille, and the number of publications continues to increase. Dial-in News provides access to some Minnesota newspapers not available elsewhere.

■ **FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES** — The communication Center has an active fundraising program to augment other funding sources for many services which do not receive direct funding. This past year, over \$115,000 was raised, and significant additional funds were raised for the Senior Services Unit.

■ **ANNUAL VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION EVENTS** — The Communication Center conducted volunteer recognition events to applaud the work of nearly 700 volunteers that make possible much of the work of the Communication Center. This year, an effort was made to reward volunteers throughout Minnesota by holding several events around the state. These events are sponsored by the Hamm Family Fund of the Saint Paul Foundation, to recognize the importance of volunteers to the success of this program.

■ **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, National Braille Association, and the Braille Authority of North America. The supervisor of the Communication Center's Radio Talking Book section, Stuart Holland, has been serving as the president of the International Association of Audio Information Services, IAAIS.

■ **REVISION OF BRAILLE** — A revision of braille, called Unified English Braille (UEB), will go into effect on January 4, 2016. The Communication Center has been working to insure that volunteers are trained to use this revision when brailleing books. Textbooks made available in braille in the fall of 2016 will use this new code, and some materials will be brailled using UEB before that time.

Respectfully Submitted,

Steve Jacobson, Chair

Members: Elizabeth Bruber, Mark Dahlberg, Catherine Durivage, Ezra Kesler, Kristin Oien, Carla Steinbring, Ryan Strunk

Staff: Dave Andrews, Gwen Bighley, Angela Bodensteiner, Brianna Holeman, Stuart Holland, Donna Marhoun, Hal Schardin, Annette Toews

DEAFBLIND COMMITTEE REPORT

Overview

This committee exists to support and advise SSB regarding its services to individuals who are deaf/hard of hearing and blind/visually impaired. This committee provides input to the Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee of the full Council for consideration in the development of annual goals and priorities in conjunction with SSB.

The Deafblind Committee has been meeting monthly since last fall. The committee spent some time catching up on what's new in the community as well as changes at SSB. Below is a list of items the DeafBlind Committee worked on.

- Due to low response rate, the survey result for the DeafBlind Survey 2014 was unreliable. The committee proposed that the DeafBlind Committee will relook at the survey to reflect the actual services DeafBlind customers receive instead of focusing on counselor-client issues.

- The committee began work on a policy statement re-emphasizing and reminding SSB staff about SSB's mandate for accessibility of podcasts, videos, and other audio-visual content which SSB produces, and how it could be achieved for DeafBlind individuals.

■ WE HEARD PRESENTATIONS FROM:

1. John Filek from DBSM's Children, Youth and Family Program.

2. Wendy Harris from Metro Deaf School

- The committee reviewed SSB's Transition Timeline and realized there was a lack of DeafBlind specific skills [that DeafBlind transition-aged youth should know] such as how to work with SSPs. A subcommittee of the DeafBlind Committee began to look at a few other state's transition-age plans for DeafBlind students such as Georgia, but noticed a need for non-college bound students.

■ DEAFBLIND COMMUNITY & SRC-B OPEN HOUSE

The DeafBlind Committee felt that many DeafBlind people and the public did not know about the new changes in the building, what the SRC-B was about, and the full array of services SSB offers. There was a need to fill a nearly one-year vacancy of the SRC-B DeafBlind representative position due to new federal rules limiting maximum lengths of continuous terms on the SRC-B. We carefully planned and coordinated with the SRC-B, SSB, and the Transition Team a joint Open House with a particular focus from the DeafBlind committee to inform Minnesota's DeafBlind community about SSB and the SRC-B. Representatives from Helen Keller National Center also accepted invitations to attend the October 12 event to let the DeafBlind community know about the services available through HKNC. As of the September meeting at least 14 DeafBlind people registered.

I want to say thank you to the council for allowing us to keep with the charge of its priorities. As you can see we have done a lot of work this past year and I would not have been able to do this on my own. Thanks to all the committee members, guest speakers and SSB staff.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Taylor

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Jamie Taylor – Chair, Debbie Lentz, Cathy Lyle, Chris Marble, Michael O'Reilly (left Aug. 2015) and Marlene Moulton Janssen (new 2015)

SSB STAFF: Lindsey Hanson, Natasha Jerde, Linda Lingen and Katy Thorpe

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

Committee Charge

This committee exists to provide advice and propose strategies to increase the quantity and quality of employment outcomes for individuals served through the state vocational rehabilitation services for the blind system.

2015 Report

The Employment Committee met on the following dates during FY 2015: 11/13/14, 1/22/15, 3/18/15 and 5/26/15.

At the November 2014 meeting, there was continued discussion of the survey results from the previous January, where WDU staff were asked about the barriers they faced in placing blind clients. One of the barriers reported on the survey was a perception by counselors that there was too much paperwork, which kept them from interfacing with clients as much as they would like. A cursory review by WDU staff of the forms library showed that most of the forms are required by the State of Minnesota or RSA. Many forms are used only in specialized situations. The amount of paperwork counselors are required to complete will be evaluated on an ongoing basis as part of the WDU redesign process.

There was continued discussion on client education on such topics as labor force trends, completing online application forms, disclosing disability to an employer, etc., that blind clients must deal with when searching for employment. Discussions included what had been done in the past regarding client education and how future educational opportunities might be structured.

At the January 2015 meeting, there was a discussion about matching transition age blind clients with successfully employed blind people in careers of interest. In that way, transition age youth would know that their career goals are attainable since they would have the opportunity

to meet with blind role models with similar career interests. Transition age clients would have the opportunity to ask questions of blind role models about how the individual performs his or her job and the steps it took to attain that job. The hope is that this would help motivate transition age clients to pursue career goals with confidence because they have met successfully employed blind people in their field of interest.

SSB could draw on a variety of sources for potential role models including lists maintained by blind consumer groups, such as the NFB or ACB. Other sources such as the AFB also maintains a list of blind people employed in different occupations.

The committee discussed certain controls that would need to be in place in order to make the program a success. One suggestion was to have a pilot program that could be developed for transition age youth going through SSB's summer work program. This program typically has an enrollment of about 15 to 20 transition-age youth, making it a manageable size. Students in the program are already asked for the career areas they might be interested in pursuing after high school. This would allow students to be matched with successfully employed blind individuals for a one-time meeting.

At the March meeting it was reported that SSB would be hiring a counselor that would work specifically with transition age youth on vocational goals. This person would work closely with the Employment Committee and Transition Committee. The person in this role will assume responsibility for the transition program, including the summer program and any mentoring program. This person will also interact with the Deaf/Blind committee on transition-related issues. It was later reported at the July meeting that SSB hired Sheila Koenig as Transition Specialist.

SSB reported at the March meeting that they are taking steps to address the high non-closure rate. There are many clients that report that they are no longer interested in services, which has the effect of increasing the non-closure rate. In some cases, SSB is unable to maintain contact with the client, which also contributes to a high non-closure rate. SSB reports that they would like to have a non-closure rate of 32 percent. They currently (as of July) have a non-closure rate of 45 percent.

To address this issue, SSB is working on an orientation to provide information to customers so that SSB customers have a better understanding of the services SSB provides and what services lie outside SSB's purview. Potential clients would have options to learn about the services that most interest them. People would not be required to attend these information sessions in order to receive services, but would be encouraged to do so. It is believed that by providing potential clients with more information, clients will make better decisions about the services they need and this will ultimately reduce the non-closure rate.

SSB also reported that they continue to pursue more of a team approach between counselors, technology staff and placement staff in order to create more of a holistic experience for clients in obtaining employment. This should also help to break down individual "silos" within the agency.

The discussion of the redesign of the intake process continued at the July meeting. SSB reported that currently many people are involved in the intake process. Potential clients receive information on all services provided by SSB. The redesign is supposed to streamline the information provided and tailor it to the needs of the individual. This redesign should also reduce the amount of inconsistent information provided to clients during intake. The new process would encourage the client to attend a group meeting where services would be explained. The potential

client would then have clear choices regarding the services offered by SSB and could choose accordingly.

The group meeting concept is not appropriate for all potential SSB clients. Some clients such as those in the Deaf/Blind community, those with English as a second language and those with cognitive disabilities would need individualized attention. Other states use this model with some success. Again, attending the meeting is not a requirement to receive services.

At the end of the fiscal year, SSB reported 147 closures, up from 116 the year before. This is the third consecutive year that closures have increased dramatically from the previous year. The WDU should be commended for the dramatic increase in successful closures.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael O'Day, Chair

MEMBERS: Angela Christle, Ken Rogers, Chris Marble, Dick Davis, Steve Ditschler, and Lisa Vala.

SSB STAFF MEMBERS: Natasha Jerde, Andy Olson and Pam Gowan.

MINORITY OUTREACH COMMITTEE REPORT

This committee had two areas of focus during the past year.

We continued our examination of how best to serve customers whose first language is not English. To that end, we finalized a document to aid counselors and those mainstream instructors who have blind students with information in techniques to teach nonvisual solutions to their usual methods. For instance, when should language interpreters be utilized in the classroom? What takes the place of pictures as a tool for learning new words? That document is now available to SSB staff to use as they see fit.

During our meetings we heard from two speakers: the first is the English Language Learner instructor from BLIND, Incorporated who talked about her curriculum. Along with learning English, their classes teach braille and cane travel. When it seems appropriate, students are encouraged to investigate other opportunities to learn additional skills.

Another speaker acquainted us with a program at the Minneapolis Public Libraries call Conversation Circles, where new English speakers can come and practice their English in a nonthreatening environment. This particular group leader happens to be blind and was eager to welcome blind participants.

Our other area of interest was to brainstorm ideas of reaching out to minority communities and ask them for assistance in recruiting customers who would benefit from receiving SSB's services. We worked in cooperation with SSB's marketing and outreach staff member who has already contacted several other councils representing various minorities. We are discovering that many people are not aware of what SSB has to offer. It is time to go ahead with a public education campaign to bring awareness of SSB's in depth services to all communities.

In August, a new chair was named to this committee. She is Kotumu Kamara, who is the English language instructor mentioned earlier. She is a graduate of the full-time program at BLIND, Inc. and will serve as an excellent example of how good services can make a real difference in the lives of all blind people.

Respectfully Submitted,

Judy Sanders, Chair (Through 07/15)

MEMBERS: Scott Eggen, Kotumu Kamara (Current Chair) Gloria LaFriniere, Meredith Larson, Judy Sanders, Alana Strickler

STAFF: Jon Benson, Linda Lingen

SENIOR SERVICES COMMITTEE REPORT

The Senior Services committee serves as an additional voice and ear for Low Vision Seniors within the State of Minnesota.

For the 2015 Fiscal year, we learned about the Aging eyes initiative from Ed Letcher and Jean Johnson. We were able to provide input to the Aging Eyes committee about the scope of the Aging eyes initiative.

We also received information from Ed Letcher on budget, personnel and initiatives within State Services for the Blind.

Our initiative for Fiscal 2016 will be to concentrate our considerable wealth of expertise on making recommendations to the Senior Low Vision Population and State Services for the Blind on technologies that might be of particular interest to our client base.

As technology changes quite rapidly, we decided that we would establish criteria that would help our constituency evaluate the usefulness of a particular technology in addition to evaluating a particular brand of technology. In addition, we will evaluate particular brands/apps/etc. as we are able.

To aid us in our endeavor, we invited guests, with expertise in technology, to present to us.

Jonathon Campbell, technology guru at SSB, presented information on Smart Phones and Smart Phone Apps.

Michael O'Day presented personal observations about the need for technology that was easily accessible to our seniors.

Jamie Taylor presented information on criteria we may want to consider using for phone evaluation for deaf/blind needs.

We selected corded phones and non-smart phones for our first evaluation attempt. We are in the midst of that evaluation. We hope to report on additional information soon.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jean Johnson, Chair

MEMBERS: Pat Barrett, RoseAnn Faber, Bob Raisbeck, Judy Sanders, Frances Whetstone, Emily Zitek

STAFF: Sue Crancer, Ed Lecher

TRANSITION COMMITTEE REPORT

CHARGE: This committee provides specific advice and counsel regarding services to transition-age youth (ages 14-21). This committee will provide input to the Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee and the full Council for consideration in the development of annual goals and priorities in conjunction with SSB, and will monitor those goals and priorities throughout the year.

Dates the Committee Met

The Transition Committee met on the following dates during FY 2015:

11-07-14 / 1-09-15 / 2-12-15 / 3-13-15 / 5-22-15 / 6-26-15 / 7-15-15 / 9-11-15

The following is a report on the 2 Priorities and Strategies that Transition Committee identified as relevant to their committee and the actions taken to support these goals.

Review of the Federal Fiscal Year 2015 (FFY15)

Goals & Priorities

SECTION #1: Jobs, More Jobs, Better Jobs

PRIORITY #1.3: Implement the workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS). (This new priority is a result of WIOA becoming law this past July and the emphasis on youth with disabilities who are transition students to better prepare for the world of work through a variety of activities.)

Strategies:

1. PROPOSED: Identify and communicate with all transition aged students who are blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind who are not currently engaged with SSB so they are informed of services available.

Transition Committee actions and activities that took place for FFY15:

- a. TRANSITION NEWSLETTER** – Continuation of newsletter on a quarterly basis. The newsletter is made available online via the SSB Website as well as the teacher list-serve. Efforts will be made to continue to send out hard copies and alternative formats to students and parents.
- b. STP PROGRAM (JUNE 2015) & SUMMER PAID WORK EXPERIENCE**
 - i. STP was held for 12 days in June, 2015. The students spent a full day at SSB on Friday 19th. They met with SSB staff and placement team members. The students participated in mock interviews with SSB staff.
 - ii. There were a total of 15 students that started and completed the program.

- iii. Several students had a paid work experience supported by SSB after the program. (July – August, 2015)

c. TRANSITION SERVICES STATE GRANT

FUNDING (JULY 2015) - Blind, Inc. located in Minneapolis, and the Duluth Lighthouse for the Blind, located in Duluth, were awarded a two year state grant to fund the following:

- i. Year-round Transition Services for Blind, Low Vision and DeafBlind students.
- ii. Statewide outreach efforts in providing informational seminars to professionals, teachers, parents and students.
- iii. Summer Transition & Employment Program Services.
- iv. Peer Mentoring Program.

d. SSB TRANSITION COORDINATOR POSITION

(SUMMER OF 2015) - SSB created a new Transition Coordinator position and hired Sheila Koenig for this role. Immediately upon hire, Sheila focused on the areas listed below:

- i. Getting to know all the students.
- ii. Attending IEP meetings, building relationships with all the team players, meeting with all SSB Counselors.
- iii. Attending various conferences throughout the State (BVI, Council Meetings, etc.)
- iv. Sheila has several outreach activities underway and planned for FFY16 that also include a variety of media formats and outlets.

SECTION #2: SSB-Your Resource Within Reach

PRIORITY #2: All Blind, Visually Impaired, and DeafBlind Minnesotans are aware of and have access to information about SSB.

Strategies:

- 3. Develop and implement marketing and outreach plan targeting Regional Low Incidence Facilitators and Special Education Directors.

Transition Committee actions and activities that took place for FFY15:

a. STATEWIDE TEACHERS & MOBILITY INSTRUCTORS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY (SEPTEMBER 24, 2015).

– (Held at MDE building in Roseville, MN.) Mike Newman from SSB, as well as other SSB staff members, along with representatives from the U of M Disability Student Services attended this event and provided information about WIOA and the Olmsted Act. Information was also shared on how SSB can serve as a partner in fulfilling these new mandates. Additionally the U of M Representatives shared with educational professionals the key skills that students who are blind, low vision or DeafBlind need to be successful in a POST SECONDARY setting. The following are some stats from that meeting:

- i. 21 TBVI teachers on-site
- ii. 25 remote locations were logged into the Mediasite broadcast

- b. Sheila Koenig, the SSB Transition Coordinator has several outreach activities underway and planned for FFY16 that also include a variety of media formats and outlets.

Respectfully Submitted,

Wendy DeVore

MEMBERS: Elizabeth Bruber, Kristin Oien, Diane Dohnalik, Rebecca Kragness, Dan Wenzel

STAFF: Natasha Lemler, Mike Newman, Chad Bowe, Linda Lingen

VENDOR OUTCOMES COMMITTEE REPORT

The Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) entered into a new contract with Issues and Answers to administer the State Services for the Blind (SSB) Adjustment to Blindness (ATB) Customer Satisfaction Survey in March, 2015. The last few surveys were a few months behind as the previous contractor submitted survey results late, and Issues and Answers is still working out the bugs. This is normal. The goal is to have the survey results published every quarter by the middle of FY2016.

The survey is designed to reflect the very different training programs provided for Senior Services and Workforce Development customers. The survey results are published in quarterly reports covering 12 months of activity. These four separate reports better reflect the needs of each unit and provide more accurate information to the users of the reports. The reports contain extensive tables for each vendor meeting the minimum statistical requirements for meaningful results. Both of these reports are available in print, braille, audio, and on the SSB website so all customers, SSB staff, vendors, and the general public have access to the results.

The data collected shows overall good customer satisfaction. There are still improvements to be made with the survey including working out some data collection bugs and posting the results of the survey.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert P. Hobson

MEMBERS: Jan Bailey, Michelle Dornan, Cori Giles, Mary Junnila

STAFF: Jennifer Beilke

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND GOALS AND PRIORITIES COMMITTEE

Part 1 — Overview

This committee exists to carry out specific duties contained in federal regulation for the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. These include:

1. Conduct a review and an analysis of the effectiveness of and consumer satisfaction with the functions of the Department of Employment and Economic Development; Vocational Rehabilitation services provided within the state (except adjustment to blindness and technology services), and the employment outcomes of persons served.
2. In collaboration with SSB, evaluate the extent to which SSB achieved its goals and priorities, strategies used, and factors that impeded success and performance on the federal standards and indicators.
3. Jointly with other committees of the Council, and in partnership with SSB, develop and, as necessary, revise an annual statement of goals and priorities.

Part II — Customer Satisfaction Survey Review

The Committee reviewed the Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) results through March 31, 2015. Five survey items were analyzed to compare the results for years ending 3/31/12, 3/31/13, 3/31/14, and 3/31/15. While there has been some fluctuation in results, no significant changes have taken place from year to year.

Summary	YE 3/31/12	YE 3/31/2013	YE 3/31/2014	YE 3/31/2015
Q1 (was Q5): How satisfied are you with the time it usually took to get your answer	79%	79%	79%	88%
Q2 (was Q4): Satisfied that counselor (staff) understood customer's needs	88%	83%	85%	88%
Q11 (was Q1): Overall satisfaction with services provided	87%	84%	82%	88%
Q12 (was Q2): Extent to which services have met expectations	76%	77%	73%	83%
Q13 (was Q3): Comparison with "ideal" set of services	80%	80%	77%	85%

SSB's results on the Customer Satisfaction Survey are also computed by the Minnesota Department of Economic Development utilizing the Minnesota Customer Satisfaction Index (MnCSI). Simply put, this index summarizes overall satisfaction with services by applying a formula to the responses for Questions 11, 12, and 13 on the survey. Using the MnCSI makes it possible to compare the customer satisfaction ratings of SSB with those of other agencies in Minnesota and with industry in general.

Customers Served	Apr 13 – Mar 14	Jul 13 – Jun 14	Oct 13 – Sept 14	Jan 14 – Dec 14	Apr 14 – Mar 15
Average MnCSI Scores	72.4	72.7	73.0	75.8	75.8
N size	243	234	228	217	221

The committee continued to track the VR-specific questions which were added to the survey in 2010. The data for the year ending March 2015 were as follows:

	YE2014	YE2015
Q3 (was QVR1): Satisfied that customer given enough info to make good choices on employment plan	83%	85%
Q4 (was QVR2): Satisfied that customer had an active role in decisions about services	89%	94%

Four questions that had been added to the survey in 2010 were dropped from use during this survey year. These questions were intended primarily for individuals who had achieved employment and therefore did not yield useful data regarding those SSB serves, who are generally at an earlier stage in the process.

A total of six new questions were added to the customer satisfaction survey during this survey year. One of these is intended as a more precise distillation of the four dropped questions:

Q5 How satisfied are you that the services are helping/have helped you plan for or maintain your employment?

The satisfaction rate for this question over the last four quarters was 80%.

Three of the new questions related to technology:

Q6 Have you received any Assistive Technology from State Services for the Blind? This could be hardware or software.

Q7 Think about when you first received your Assistive Technology. How prepared did you feel to use the technology?

Q8 How useful do you think the Assistive Technology equipment that you received will be/was in helping you meet your vocational plan goals? Do you think it will be very useful, somewhat useful, not very useful, or not at all useful?

Of the 72% who indicated during the four quarters that they had received assistive technology, 46% felt very prepared to use it when they first got it, and 38% indicated feeling somewhat prepared. 75% indicated feeling the technology would be very useful, and 22% indicated somewhat useful.

The three previously-used open-ended questions were replaced with two new open-ended questions during this survey year:

Q9 In your opinion, what is/was the most important part of the services you received from SSB?

Q10 If you could change one thing about the services you received, what would you change?

The members of the committee read the verbatim comments to determine if trends or issues specific to SSB were apparent. No significant trends were identified from this data.

*For the complete Customer Satisfaction Survey results see:

http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/About_Us/Customer_Satisfaction/Job_Seeker_Satisfaction/Results_by_Program_5.aspx

Part III — Progress on FFY15 Goals and Priorities

Some of the strategies jointly developed and worked on by the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B) and SSB over the past several years have become integral pieces of the SSB culture. The activities listed below will continue to be monitored by SSB and reported to the SRC-B on a regular basis, but will not be part of the Goals, Priorities and Activities listed in the State Plan.

- All new Workforce Development Unit (WDU) staff will successfully complete Introduction to Blindness Phase 1. In addition to vocational rehabilitation counselors, select WDU staff who regularly interact directly with customers will successfully complete Phase 2 training on the essential aspects of blindness and visual impairment. For counselors, this training will occur within three months of hire and before any caseload activity is assigned.
- Customer satisfaction surveys will be administered on a quarterly basis by an external organization to approximately 70 SSB WDU customers as part of the Department of Employment and Economic Development customer satisfaction initiative. The analysis of the results of the survey will be reviewed and shared with the SRC-B and the Customer Satisfaction & Goals & Priorities Committee on a regular basis to determine if the results provide information to make positive programmatic changes.
- The Adjustment to Blindness (ATB) Customer Satisfaction survey was recently redesigned. Results of the newly designed survey will be reviewed and shared with the Vendor Outcomes Committee of the SRC-B to determine if the survey provides more accurate and thorough information for customers to choose an ATB vendor. In addition results will be shared with vendors to assist them in improving the services they provide to SSB customers.
- SSB will continue to communicate with transition-age students and their families through the Transition Newsletter. The effectiveness of this Newsletter will continue to be monitored by the results of surveys and customer comments, and the Newsletter will continue to evolve based on the survey results.
- All new WDU staff will receive one-on-one training on the DeafBlind Procedures Manual to include communication styles and communication issues as part of the orientation that occurs within the first three months of hire. All WDU staff will receive an annual review of the communication methods at their October staff meeting.

SECTION #1: Jobs, More Jobs, Better Jobs.

PRIORITY #1.1: Employment Outcomes—Increase employment outcomes by 5% (5 people) from the previous year.

143 successful employment outcomes were achieved for FFY15, exceeding the 121 outcomes needed to meet this priority. Of these closures, 13 were homemakers. WIOA's proposed federal regulations eliminate homemakers as competitive integrated employment. It is anticipated that after the federal regulations are put into effect, SSB's Workforce Development Unit (WDU) will no longer be claiming homemakers as a successful employment outcome.

Strategies:

1. The WDU will develop an annual employment outcome goal for each federal fiscal year. The goal will be reviewed mid-year and revised as appropriate.

WDU has projected to achieve over 140 successful competitive, integrated employment outcomes for FFY16.

PRIORITY #1.2: Success Rate—Increase the percentage of eligible individuals achieving employment outcomes from 55% to 70%.

The percentage has increased from 61.10% in FFY2014 to 69.41% in FFY2015.

Strategies:

1. By April 1, 2015, SSB will research, develop, and implement a process to better understand why eligible individuals do not complete the vocational rehabilitation program.

The WDU has assigned a staff person to coordinate incoming referrals. This person is responsible for providing information specific to the programs available within SSB. The intent is to ensure all new referrals have a complete and accurate understanding of the purpose

of the vocational rehabilitation program, as well as the responsibilities and expectations of participants. This allows individuals the opportunity to make an informed choice regarding their application.

WDU also established an intake workgroup, designed to evaluate and implement a new and improved intake system. This involved a group orientation and clear, consistent messaging. This workgroup is still in the process of implementation.

2. By September 30, 2015, SSB will research, develop, and implement a process to assess incoming minority and nonminority referrals to determine if a person intends to achieve an employment outcome.

In FFY15, SSB's Minority and Outreach Sub-Committee proposed collecting information at time of referral regarding the demographic information of the individual. Collecting this information at that time in the VR process appeared discriminatory and akin to profiling. Instead, the referral system was improved to provide more information, better information in a way that the person can access it. This could include language interpreters, translated documents, and other methods to be serve all referrals.

SSB as a whole will also be piloting a group orientation for any new referrals to enhance the effort for individuals to make an informed choice regarding their intent to achieve an employment outcome. This orientation will be designed to meet the needs of ALL incoming referrals, regardless of culture or disability.

PRIORITY #1.3: Develop at least two strategic partnerships that benefit customers and results in five or more successful employment outcomes for blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind customers by the end of FFY2015.

Strategies:

1. Partner with Vocational Rehabilitation Services' (VRS) placement team through participation in employment collaboratives to increase employment outcomes for blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind people within the State of Minnesota.

WDU has developed relationships with Gillette Hospital and Ecolab to increase the likelihood of employment outcomes. We have achieved three successful employment outcomes from these employer relationships.

WDU's employment team is actively involved in Statewide Placement Partnerships that has resulted in approximately seven successful employment outcomes. The Statewide Placement Partnerships include VRS and other employment agencies throughout the state.

WDU is working collaboratively with VRS on a model Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Administration, and the Department of Corrections. The MOU indicates that if a vocational rehabilitation applicant meets the minimum qualifications, they are guaranteed an interview with the department.

WDU and VRS are working together on the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP), which is managed by the National Employment Team.

2. WDU will work with the Department of Education (MDE) and VRS to ensure blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind transition students are included in work based learning initiatives.

WDU hired a transition coordinator, who has continued to develop relationships with the Department of Education and other transition-related agencies. The goal of the transition coordinator is to ensure all SSB transition students receive Pre-Employment Transition Services, including work-based learning

opportunities. In the summer of 2015, 80 out of 100 transition age students were involved in summertime activities at State Services for the Blind's (SSB) transition program at the Duluth Lighthouse and BLIND, Inc. There were also other programs offered through various school districts. In addition to summertime programs, some of the students were able to hold part-time jobs and gain work experience.

WDU participated in the Summer Opportunities Fair this past spring in collaboration with MDE and VRS

SECTION #2: SSB-Your Resource Within Reach.

PRIORITY #2: All Blind, Visually Impaired, and DeafBlind Minnesotans are aware of and have access to information about SSB.

Strategies:

1. Develop and implement an outreach and marketing strategy targeted towards eye care professionals so they meet their legal obligations to refer individuals to SSB.

An outreach and marketing strategy has been developed and implemented. The strategy included messaging targeted to eye care professionals, using a positive tone to remind them of their obligation, and let them know about the extensive services available through SSB's Workforce Development Unit, Senior Services Unit, and the Communication Center. SSB obtained a list of 16,000 eye care professionals within the state. Extensive culling was required to remove invalid entries. SSB is also working with the Communications, Analysis, Research and Design Agency in the Department of Employment, and Economic Development, to use their database of email contacts for state business to target Ophthalmologists, Optometrists, and Eye Clinics. An emailing and postcard campaign to the contacts will be begin in 2016.

2. Network with leaders of five minority communities (Russian, Hmong, Native Americans, Hispanic and East African) in Minnesota to jointly develop marketing and outreach plans.

SSB has worked extensively with the Hmong Community in terms of outreach through the Hmong Resource Fair. Several SSB staff volunteered to work at the booth at the Resource Fair to talk with Hmong community members about SSB and the services it provides. The FFY2015 fair was held on October 4, 2014.

SSB continues to provide technical assistance to the American Indian communities-particularly to those on the Red Lake and White Earth reservations. The yearly meeting was held to talk about any needs these programs may have and technical assistance from SSB.

A member of the Minority Outreach Committee has maintained contact with the VRS New Americans Project which works with many minority groups (especially East African communities) and staff from the New Americans Project have willingly linked SSB staff to community programs.

Planning was done at one of the SRC-B Outreach committee meetings to reach out to the Hispanic and Russian communities. Several agencies serving these populations were assigned to members for contracting which will begin during FFY2016.

3. Develop and implement a marketing and outreach plan targeting Regional Low Incidence Facilitators and Special Education directors.

SSB and VRS directors spoke at a training targeting Special Education Directors at the Department of Education on September 11, 2015.

4. In June 2014, the DeafBlind needs assessment will be re-administered. The 2013 assessment was not valid due to low response rate.

The results of the needs assessment will be reviewed by the DeafBlind Committee in FFY2015 to determine if the 2011 Communication Plan to increase effective communication has met its goals as measured by the needs assessment. In addition, results of this needs assessment will be utilized to develop collaborative opportunities for SSB, VRS, Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Services of the Department of Human Services and teachers of the blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind to market and provide information to people throughout Minnesota.

The DeafBlind Sub-Committee received a very low response rate (almost 0%) on the needs assessment for the past two years. The committee has chosen not to continue conducting the needs assessment. Instead, the DeafBlind committee is focusing on three areas: partnering with the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) on training orientation and mobility vendors on DeafBlindness, partnering with HKNC on best practices for DeafBlind placement, and finally increasing DeafBlind membership and representation on the SRC-B and DeafBlind Sub-Committee.

SECTION #3-SSB- A Great Place to Work.

PRIORITY #3: Develop and maintain a positive work environment.

Strategies:

1. Research, develop and implement a more team oriented model of customer service delivery.

SSB formed a workgroup to research, develop, and implement a team approach to service delivery. The purpose of the team approach is to increase the probability of success for customers by offering a structure to provide the maximum support to a counselor and their caseload. This approach was piloted to WDU

staff, and there is now an approximately 85% participation rate. The goal is to have 100% of staff involved in the team approach for FFY16.

2. Research, develop and implement a plan for the assistive technology team to provide ongoing customer support and training.

Recommendations from the SSB Assistive Technology Workgroup have identified strategies for realizing this strategy which were recently approved by SSB senior management. Strategies focus on 3 areas including: SSB making the commitment to be “The Model” for accessibility standards; adopting and implementing the CETT framework of how we approach customers at the beginning of their vocational rehabilitation process; and providing customers with multiple training options. The WDU Assistive Technology staff are now working to implement them. The CETT or Customer Environment Task Tool is based on the SETT Framework by Joy Zabala (<http://www.joyzabala.com/>).

3. Research, develop and implement a plan so that hiring practices reflect the customer base served.

SSB has been working with Department of Employment and Economic Development human resources to ensure that position postings include appropriate preferred qualifications that support SSB’s customer base. SSB management is now adding to preferred qualifications a second language proficiency to encourage minority candidates to apply. SSB management is also taking a more active approach in screening potential candidates for job postings.

Part IV

Standards and Indicators

Vocational Rehabilitation Program

Federal Program Evaluation Standards

The federal government measures vocational rehabilitation agency performance in part by using six “Standard 1” performance indicators. SSB’s performance on each indicator is illustrated on the corresponding chart. SSB has met or exceeded five of six of the Standard 1 indicators since FFY 2011. Since FFY2014 SSB has met the performance indicator under standard 2 which measures the ratio of the service rate for minority individuals to non-minority individuals.

Standard 1: Employment Outcomes

- Ind 1.1 The number of successful case closures compared to the preceding two years’ number of successful closures.
- Ind 1.2 The percentage of individuals exiting the program during the performance period who have achieved an employment outcome after receiving services.
- Ind 1.3 The percentage of customers who exit the SSB VR Program in competitive employment at or above the state minimum wage.
- Ind 1.4 The percentage of individuals who have significant disabilities who obtain competitive employment at or above the state minimum wage.
- Ind 1.5 The ratio of average hourly earnings of all individuals successfully closed to the average hourly earnings of all employed individuals in the state.
- Ind 1.6 The difference in the percentage of individuals at application versus closure who reported their income as the largest single source of support.

Standard 2: Minority Background Service Rate

Ind 2.1: Ratio of Minority to Non-Minority Service Rate

	Indicator	Minimum Requirement	SSB Performance
Standard 1: Employment Outcomes		Meet 4 of the 6 Indicators	
	Ind 1.1	≥ 2	42
	Ind 1.2	$\geq 68.90\%$	69.41%
	Ind 1.3	$\geq 35.40\%$	91.34%
	Ind 1.4	$\geq 89.00\%$	100%
	Ind 1.5	≥ 0.59	77.20%
	Ind 1.6	$\geq 30.40\%$	28.20%
Standard 2		Performance rate	
	Ind 2.1	≥ 0.80	0.817

- Performance for blind agencies is based on two years of data.
- FFY 2015 performance data is not official until approved by RSA.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Dunnam

FY2015 COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Jennifer Dunnam—Chair,
Steve Jacobson, Ken Rodgers.

SSB STAFF—Jon Benson, Jennifer Beilke, Carol Pankow.



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DECEMBER 2015

Upon request, the information in this document can be
made accessible for persons with disabilities.

Equal opportunity employer and service provider.