



# State Services for the Blind

## 2012 Annual Report



# DIRECTOR'S REPORT

I am pleased to present State Services for the Blind's (SSB) annual report for 2012. As we do each year, we will use this report to provide a snapshot of where we are as an organization, but we will also tell some of the stories that provide a personal illustration of our work. We hope that by learning about customers such as Louise Wyly, Timothy Wheeler, Helen Bartlett and Bill Haessig you will get a glimpse of the interplay between individuals and the variety of services we provide. We hope these stories help show how SSB helps our customers answer an often-asked question, "what do you do?"

Before welcoming you into the stories of our customers, I would like to highlight some of the broad accomplishments that were made during 2012. Following on the heels of a challenging 2011 in which we had an interruption in services, 2012 by comparison was full of positive momentum that will impact our staff and customers for years to come.

- The Workforce Development Unit, the Senior Services Unit and now the Business Enterprises Program have updated decades-old administrative rules. This was done with community involvement and without controversy and sets a clear, understandable path for us to follow.
- The Workforce Development Unit, the Senior Services Unit and Assistive and Adaptive Technology were recognized by the Governor for their Kaizen event of last year where they achieved huge efficiencies in assessing customers for access technology. They have continued their improvement efforts with another Kaizen/Continuous Improvement effort in November that will build on the progress already made.
- A Kaizen event took place in August to reduce processing time and complexity between the Braille and Talking Book Library in Faribault and the Audio Services Unit in Saint Paul. A new common customer service system will ensure seamless customer access to the Talking Book Program. The outcome will decrease processing time and effort by more than 7,000 person-hours; hours to be redirected to serving more customers in a better manner.

- The Braille Unit now has an online ordering system for teachers ordering braille. It has decreased confusion and increased efficiencies in the requesting process. Because of their efforts, providing nearly a million pages of braille a year, kids have the materials needed to compete.
- The Radio Talking Book is now in the final stages of the conversion from an outdated analog broadcasting system to a completely modernized digital system.
- SSB has secured outside funding for a redesign effort in the Senior Services Unit. The ultimate goal of this redesign will be to double the number of customers serviced with same or fewer resources. The Public and Non-profit Leadership Center at the Humphrey Institute will provide project management for this undertaking.
- We completed Master Contracts with more than 50 vendors, using a newly developed fee setting protocol. These contracts will run for five years. This newly developed system will ensure we have proper monitoring in place for those contracts.

By no means is this an exhaustive list. Though there promises to be challenges ahead in terms of resources, one can see by most of the items above that SSB is taking significant steps to make sure that our services remain of the highest quality, that services are provided efficiently and that they meet the highest possible standards. We will continue to work with the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind on behalf of Minnesotans who are blind, DeafBlind, visually impaired or print impaired. In the end, we are ultimately here to ensure that our customers can answer that simple question, "what do you do?"



Richard Strong,  
SSB Director

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Richard Strong".

**Richard Strong • Director**

# CHAIR'S MESSAGE: MEET THE COUNCIL

## **Dear Reader:**

As you are introduced to State Services for the Blind (SSB) you should be aware of the important role played by the very people who are the recipients of the services that SSB provides. SSB is very open to working closely with its customers and the blindness community to make sure that its work is truly beneficial. One of the ways that this happens is through the work of the Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council--Blind (SRC-B) whose members are appointed by the governor and who come from throughout the state to provide counsel to SSB. In addition to the governor's appointees, we have an active committee structure that allows volunteers in the community to lend their support.

## **Here is a sampling of the support we give:**

**Customer Satisfaction:** We work with SSB to analyze the results of surveys that gauge whether customers find SSB's services valuable. In addition, we help develop the goals and priorities for the agency.

**Minority Outreach:** We help the agency reach out to underserved populations in the state to upgrade services for everyone. An example of this effort focuses on how to better serve new citizens to our country. Innovative programs are being developed that teach both Braille and English at the same time.

**DeafBlind Services:** We are helping SSB rewrite some of its brochures so that they can be better understood by speakers of American Sign Language.

**Services to Youth:** We are brainstorming methods to introduce teenagers to the world of work. And the senior population: We have a committee who advises our Senior Services Unit on ways to serve an ever-growing population of blind people. With little money and lots of need their creativity is priceless.

**Further Advice:** One unit of SSB that touches almost every customer is the Communication Center. We keep close track of its many programs and provide positive reinforcement for their good work.

**Monitoring service providers:** SSB contracts with many community rehabilitation programs and



Front Row: Francis Whetstone, Kristin Oien  
Middle Row: Ken Rodgers, Jeff Mihelich, Kathy Hagen, Jan Bailey (chair), Ken Trebelhorn  
Back Row: Steve Ditschler, Jeffery West, Jamie Taylor, Michael O'Day, Tom Scanlan, Richard Strong (SSB Director)  
Not Pictured: Connie Lee Berg, Rochelle Roehrlich, Lisa Vala, Candace Whittaker

instructors that teach blind customers the skills needed to maintain their independence. We evaluate these providers through feedback from the users of these programs and share this data with future customers.

**Employment Committee:** It will give SSB advice on how to help more blind customers become employed.

This year the Council began something new. We began having guest speakers from the different units of SSB: BEP, Workforce Development, and in December we hope to hear from Senior Services.

We are pleased that SSB values the opinions of the blind community and this Council is a major force in guiding SSB.

Our meetings are open to the public and more information is available on SSB's website.

While the members of this Council rotate, our interest and dedication to insuring a quality service from SSB never flags.

I will be ending my final term on this Council, and have enjoyed being chair of the Council. A new chair will be elected in February, 2013.

*Jan Bailey • Chair*



## **Mission:**

To facilitate the achievement of vocational and personal independence by Minnesotans who are blind, visually impaired or DeafBlind.

## **Philosophy:**

Blindness is a natural part of the human experience, a characteristic, like the hundreds of others that, taken together, mold each of us into a unique human being.

People who are blind are a cross-section of society as a whole, mirroring society in every way with the same hopes, interests and desires, the same dreams, abilities and potential as everyone else.

Most all the physical limitations associated with blindness can be overcome by learning and using alternative techniques for doing without sight what you would do with sight.

With appropriate education, training and opportunity, persons who are blind can achieve in the world of work, can be independent in their home and community, can have and take care of a family, can be a tax paying and participating citizen and can be in every way a contributing member of society who can compete equally with his or her sighted neighbors.

Everyone has different dreams and expectations, attitudes and aptitudes, potential and possibilities — so an important ingredient to our programs is customer choice.



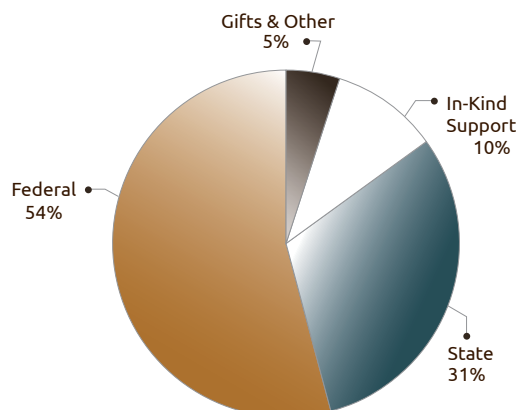
Our job is to encourage high expectations and independence and provide the services needed to achieve customer goals while respecting customer choice. Success depends greatly on the effort and commitment by the customer. ●

# 2012 SSB BUDGET BREAKOUT

SSB Funding Streams Fiscal Year 2012		
Federal Funds		Percent of Total Funding
Basic VR	\$9,240,000	
Supported Employment	\$73,000	
Training Grant	\$72,000	
Independent Living	\$52,000	
IL-Older Blind	\$595,000	
Special Education Agreement	\$490,000	
<b>Total Federal Funds</b>	<b>\$10,522,000</b>	<b>54%</b>
<b>Total State Funds</b>	<b>\$5,928,000</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>Other Funds</b>		
Gift/Bequest	\$322,000	
Dept. of Commerce --		
Telecommunications Access MN	\$100,000	
Special Revenue		
Communication Center	\$116,000	
Business Enterprises	\$405,000	
<b>Total Other Funds</b>	<b>\$943,000</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>In-Kind Support</b>		
<b>In-Kind Support from Volunteers</b>	<b>\$1,872,000</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Total All Funds</b>	<b>\$19,265,000</b>	<b>100%</b>

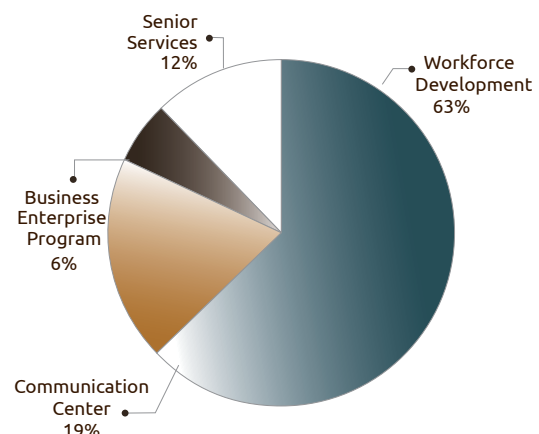
## SSB Funding Streams

Fiscal Year 2012



## SSB Funding Distribution

Fiscal Year 2012



Communication Center Statistics			
	FFY 2012	FFY 2011	FFY 2010
Braille Pages Provided	748,438	900,000	933,000
Radio Talking Book Receivers Placed	5,789	5,816	5,879
Audio Equipment Maintained and Circulated	23,052	24,960	26,000
Number of Customers Accessing Communication Center Services	13,855	13,685	13,014

The Communication Center is a wonderful resource for individuals who are blind, visually impaired, DeafBlind and print-disabled. This expansive public library is located at State Services for the Blind (SSB) St. Paul Midway office. Through transcription and reading services, customers now have access to the same print media as sighted Minnesotans!

## The Center:

- transcribes textbooks into braille, tape and digital formats for hundreds of Minnesota students of all ages, as well as leisure reading materials;
- lends and repairs special radio receivers;
- lends and repairs audio players through the National Library Service Talking Book Program; and
- broadcasts a 24-hour radio reading service — the Radio Talking Book (RTB) — through a closed-circuit radio network that includes six Greater Minnesota outreach sites:
  - Fergus Falls      ● Duluth      ● St. Cloud
  - Mankato      ● Rochester      ● Grand Rapids

These outreach sites allow the Center to broadcast local news from publications such as the *Fergus Falls Daily Journal*, *Mankato Free Press*, *Duluth News Tribune*, *Rochester*

*Post-Bulletin*, *St. Cloud Times*, *Grand Rapids Herald-Review* and others. RTB is also streamed on the Internet.

The complete program schedule for the RTB is available online at the SSB Web site: [www.mnssb.org](http://www.mnssb.org).

Customers of the Communication Center can also access via telephone two 24-hour audio newspaper reading services. Dial-In News is available for metro-area newspapers. To access local Minnesota and 250 national newspapers, customers can call into NFB-NEWSLINE®. These services are supported, in part, by funds from the Department of Commerce's Telecommunications Access Minnesota Fund.

The Center provides all of these audio, braille, and digital communication services through SSB staff and a network of over 650 volunteers. These highly valued volunteers are honored with recognition events every year. ●



# COMMUNICATION CENTER SUCCESS STORY

## Louise Wyly

Louise Wyly of Crystal is one of those very resourceful people who always seems to find a way to make things work. Whether relocating to never-before-visited Minnesota as a young person, giving up a teaching career to raise children or deciding to start writing and teaching at an age when most people are considering retirement, she has made successful adjustments.

Wyly is an unusual customer of State Services for the Blind (SSB) in a couple ways. Generally, older customers experiencing vision loss receive services from SSB's Senior Services Unit. Not Wyly. She uses SSB's vocational rehabilitation services and all the services of SSB's Communication Center. One of these Communication Center services is Audio Services.

By using volunteer readers, the Audio Services Unit transcribes print materials into an audio format. They deliver materials to customers by electronic file transfers, digital cartridges, CDs or cassettes. The recording is done by a volunteer who has expertise in the subject area, and the materials are recorded very quickly. For Wyly, the transcription is essential to continue teaching, reading and writing. These services allow her to continue a career journey she started at a time when most people's careers are ending.

In 1982, Wyly had raised her kids and was thinking that she really wanted to go back to something she loved, which was writing. She entered a writing course at Northwestern College and was surprised when her instructor told her, "There's a difference between a beginner and a professional, and you're not a beginner." From there, she started writing and was able to secure the support of Standard Publishing. She has published three books which

emphasize fun and spirituality for kids. She has also written numerous magazine features and school instructional materials.

Since 1991, Wyly has been teaching writing and professional training and development at North Hennepin Community College. This is where, in 1992, she first heard about SSB from a student whose dad had used the services because of his vision loss. She lost her husband that year, but in her positive way and with SSB's help, she has continued to do what she loves.

As her vision became worse, she has had to give up her driver's license. She jokes, "It might have been harder to lose my license than to lose my husband." She gets frustrated socially because it's hard for her to identify faces. Sometimes she gets frustrated with the computer technology she has had to learn, yet none of this has stopped her from what she loves. She keeps writing and teaching at the college and does "writing workouts"

on Saturdays. Things take longer with her vision loss, but she is determined to teach "as long as they will keep me," she laughs. "I feel like going blind is a blessing. I get all these books to hear. I would never have read these books otherwise. I think to go to the TV, but I go to a book instead."

Wyly is truly an inspirational person. When faced with challenges that can be debilitating, she has chosen to access services that help her stay productive and independent. She adds, "My dealing with SSB puts them on a high pedestal." What she doesn't say is that it takes hard work to learn new things, such as reading using audio instead of print. Wyly has embraced services because she is determined to keep doing what she likes and for SSB, that is a productive partnership. ●



# COMMUNICATION CENTER: MINNESOTA RADIO TALKING BOOK

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conversion Completion

The story of Minnesota Radio Talking Book (RTB) is rich in tradition and pride that comes from being the first radio reading service in the world. It's the brainchild of former and long-time State Services for the Blind (SSB) director, C. Stanley Potter and public radio pioneers William Kling and the Rev. Colman Barry. Much of the early technical work was made possible through the hard work of former SSB engineer Robert Watson.

From the beginning of this radio reading service in 1969, there have been advancements, additions and improvements. However, one constant has

been that RTB was transmitted via an analog subcarrier. This means RTB's signal "rides" along the edges of a main channel, which in RTB's case is mainly Minnesota Public Radio's

transmissions and some independent stations in greater Minnesota. An analog subcarrier is subject to static and to music or voices bleeding through from the main program channel.

Well, not anymore! As of 2012, RTB is now a completely digitized system. It still uses a subcarrier, but the digital technology eliminates the background noise. This means the signal will now be clearer, there will be reception in previously unreachable areas of the state and the radio can self-tune for each area of the state. This new system should be sustainable for at least ten years.

It's no secret that technology is advancing fast, but when it comes to delivering a unique product such as RTB, the reality is that the technology isn't specific to the particular product. At the outset of this process in the late 1990s, it was determined that the technology to transmit a digital signal using a subcarrier existed, but no receivers existed anywhere in the world that could be used to receive the digital signal. The receivers had to be custom designed. And not just the inner workings of the receivers, but external design elements such as knobs and speakers and packaging.

Once the basic design was achieved, the difficult process began to find someone to build and produce it. In 2005, a company was found, and prototypes and testing followed. In 2007, an agreement was reached with Minnesota Public Radio to provide the digital band width. After further testing, the packaging design was finalized and instruction for users was developed.

In 2009, the radios arrived and it was time to start placing them with customers in small select areas. Warroad and Thief River Falls were the first markets activated. The idea of starting with small markets was to hedge against the possibility that something

would go wrong. In a large market such as the Twin Cities, even a small issue could create significant logistical problems. In each of the small market areas, our Audio Services Unit contacted customers



*The old and the new.*

with old radios and distributed new radios. Over the next several years, new markets were added slowly to ensure proper functioning in each case.

The Communication Center was Minnesota's first public-private partnership, and this entire project was a demonstration of how effective a public-private partnership can be. Through support from generous entities such as the Hamm Family Foundation, SSB was able to leverage an equal amount of funding from the state. Though this project took a long time to bring to fruition, it is a testament to the commitment Minnesota has in providing high-quality access to print materials in alternative formats.

In the future, the RTB may have minority-specific programming and channels specific to newspapers. New technology will likely make it possible to access archives and download completed books onto MP3 devices. (There is a downloadable archive for one week's worth of RTB programs available via the web but not for full books.) What will not change is the dedication of SSB staff and the hundreds of volunteers that work hard each day to bring this programming to people who need the service to be full participants in their communities. ●



(Photo by Martha Johnson)

Darlene Plante operates a six-keyed braille writer to transcribe a math book. She has devoted nine years to this volunteer service for blind persons.

## Past is Present

If you are a child in Minnesota, you are blind and you require braille to participate in school, you rely a great deal on a small corps of volunteers. The thing is, you would not even know that you rely on volunteers, because you would be working with a specialized teacher who determines what you need and presents you with the finished product.

Since the days of mainstreaming students, if kids needed braille materials in Minnesota they relied on volunteers. One who can speak with authority is long-time volunteer and former State Services for the Blind (SSB) staff member, Darlene Plante.

Plante started her volunteer service with SSB's braille unit in 1973. The unit consisted of only two people -- the manager and the librarian. All transcribers were volunteers from Temple Israel's Hadassah and eventually women from Volunteer Braille Services. Both groups trained volunteers to become braillists and raised funds to purchase brailers for their volunteers.

Because braille master copies were produced directly on a Perkins braille (manual, typewriter-like machine), any additional copies had to be duplicated one page at a time using a thermoform machine. Volunteers duplicated the materials, and the librarian prepared print title pages, bound the volumes, labeled, recorded and shipped them.

In the early days, there was one volunteer proofreader who worked in her home. She recruited her own sighted reader. The U.S. Postal Service was used to send the print book from SSB to the proofreader as well as the transcriber, the braille

to the proofreader then back to the transcriber for corrections, and then to SSB and finally to the reader. This took days for each transfer.

In those days, Temple Israel had the only transcriber of Nemeth Code for mathematics. There was no proofreader of that code, so none of the work was professionally proofread. Because of the increasing need for transcribers who could handle math and science assignments, Marge Krinski of Temple Israel was asked to tutor others in the code. Enter Darlene Plante.

There was no teaching manual at the time, so a code book was used to teach. "It's like being taught the English language out of the dictionary," laughs Plante. Krinski proofread the first volume of Plante's math material, but after that, math and science assignments were sent to students without being professionally proofread. Today, SSB has certified proofreaders on staff who check all the math and science assignments.

Eventually the Library of Congress produced a teaching manual and a certification test. Plante was the first person in Minnesota to take the course and become certified in "The Nemeth Braille Code for Mathematics and Science Notation." She used the new manual to teach others, including former braille unit supervisor Mary Archer, who became the second person in Minnesota to be certified.

Time brought more change. MicroBraille, a direct-input computer program, was created to produce braille as a transcriber entered it on the keyboard. A machine was developed to connect to the computer and produce the braille text, much as printers produce print text. This equipment meant copies could be produced merely by running the files again. SSB purchased computers and trained volunteers to run the new program. Volunteer Braille Services now teaches the transcribing code as well as the computer program.



*Past is Present continued on page 10*

# COMMUNICATION CENTER: BRAILLE UNIT

*Past is Present continued from page 9*

MegaDots and Braille 2000 are two programs available which translate print to braille. A person knowledgeable in braille is still required to proofread the translation and make the numerous needed corrections. Instead of only using the U.S. Postal Service, electronic files are attached to emails between transcribers and the Braille Unit, shortening the time it takes to get material to the requestors.

Over the years, new codes have emerged to challenge transcribers: computer notation, chemistry notation, graphing calculators notation, tactile graphics production, textbook formats and now a new basic transcribing code.

Two things haven't changed: Students need braille and braille is produced with the help of volunteers. Perhaps someday kids who are blind will have their braille materials at the same time as kids who are sighted have their print copies. That day is still in the future, but thanks to dedicated volunteers and a small, dedicated staff in SSB's braille unit, the kids who need braille are getting it even if they don't know who is producing it behind the scenes. ●



For customers such as Timothy Wheeler and Bill Haessig, the Workforce Development Unit of State Services for the Blind (SSB) ensures delivery of rehabilitation services individuals need to prepare for, seek, gain or retain employment. Services take many forms and may include:

- vocational assessment and counseling;
- training in adjustment-to-blindness, braille, use of assistive technology, job seeking skills and vocational skills;
- job placement assistance; and
- job adaptation assistance.

The customer and counselor work together to produce the right mix of services for an employment plan. A new customer, for example, may need the full spectrum of services, including assessment, cane travel, braille and adjustment to blindness training before enrolling in an educational program that will lead to employment. A future baker may need to develop vocational skills

and learn about professional food-related organizations. Such services are addressed in reaching an employment goal.

The services are provided by rehabilitation counselors in 11 field offices, 10 WorkForce Centers and a network of private vendors across Minnesota.

The Business Enterprises Program (BEP) is also included in the Workforce Development Unit. BEP provides training and support to blind Minnesotans so they can become self-employed. These small businesses include operating snack bars and counter operations, in a franchise-like manner with SSB and providing vending machine services in multiple locations. BEP blind vendors operate businesses at the Capitol, in state buildings, at rest areas and travel information centers statewide, on multiple MnSCU campuses and in several private industry locations. Professional, technical and clerical staff provides training, management assistance and technical support to these legally blind vendors. ●

Workforce Development Unit Statistics				
	2012	2011	2010	2009
Successful Closures	81	81	80	78
Average Wage per Hour	\$14.25	\$13.83	\$11.40	\$15.24
Number Served	948	1,018	1,062	1,064
BEP Sales Volume	\$7,048,698	\$7,471,117	\$7,039,025	\$7,206,168
BEP Average Net Profit	\$43,131	\$35,718	\$35,417	\$39,471

# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT UNIT SUCCESS STORY

## Timothy Wheeler

State Services for the Blind (SSB) primarily does three things. One is to help seniors maintain independence. The second is to make print material available in accessible formats. The third is to help Minnesotans who are blind, visually impaired or DeafBlind become employed. These efforts require a huge commitment in terms of staff time and financial resources, but success is ultimately the product of an effective partnership between the customer and the agency.

When rehabilitation works, it works because SSB's counselors, technology staff and placement specialists are acting as agents that help foster education, training, independence and ultimately careers for individuals who understand that this is a step along the way. Timothy Wheeler of Minneapolis is perhaps the ideal spokesperson for this way of conceptualizing the practice of rehabilitation. He puts it like this, "I've been given an opportunity, and you need people to help you along the way. It's worth it to go through rehab to discover aptitude and motivation. When you go to school, it's a sea of uncertainty. There's no such thing as 'true' independence. You need people to help you along the way!"

By his own description, Wheeler was a sedentary and largely uninformed teenager. He was overweight and wasn't really thinking much about his future. He has been legally blind since he was very young, but possessed none of the skills a person who is visually impaired needs to live independently. Coming out of high school, he was living with his parents and going to college to study music production. In this first attempt at college, he found out quickly that it was not very workable without having the skills of blindness that are necessary to negotiate the college environment. One has to be able to get from place to place, use technology and advocate for accommodations.



To his great credit, Wheeler learned from his first attempt at college and was determined to make a change. While he was processing his career options and connecting with SSB, he was evaluating his physical health.

Many details illustrate Wheeler's journey from there, but they all lead back to the essential partnership between his willingness to work and the state's ability to provide a meaningful service.

SSB's services included connecting Wheeler to Blind Incorporated, a community rehabilitation partner, which was essential in his development of skills of blindness. SSB also connected him with Employment Endeavors, an agency that prepared him for work.

In the end, Wheeler's journey toward physical fitness sparked a career decision. He lost 100 pounds and went on to earn a degree from the University of Minnesota in exercise science. He has his own place and is working full time in a career he loves. His constantly expanding repertoire includes total health concepts, karate and yoga. Wheeler has evolved into a highly motivated practitioner of his craft, and he feels a strong sense of the partnership that helped him get there.

Recently, he sent a note to SSB's leadership to express his thoughts, and they include this essential point, "As I shifted toward college, SSB gave me chances to explore my options and find out what I wanted, instead of what other people wanted for me. I chose the realm of fitness, thanks to a personal lifelong dream of overcoming obesity. I eventually entered the University of Minnesota. SSB and the university disability services department were able to equip me with the tools I needed. When I realized I didn't need everything, they consented. This is something I pride them for. They understand particular needs and know when independence is achieved."

At SSB, we know that none of this happens without great character and commitment from the individual. Wheeler is a model for how well the partnership can work. ●

# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT UNIT SUCCESS STORY

## Bill Haessig

The Business Enterprises Program (BEP) at State Services for the Blind (SSB) provides an opportunity for vocational rehabilitation program customers to operate their own vending business. The BEP staff train qualified, legally blind individuals to be BEP vendors. BEP staff assist with start-up logistics, develop business locations and provide support throughout the life of the business. Vending businesses are located primarily on state and federal property.

BEP vendors such as Bill Haessig are a testament to how meaningful the BEP is. Though Haessig is thankful for the opportunity to be a BEP vendor, he hadn't planned on it when he first started out. In fact, he began his career in the military. As is often the case with someone who is losing their vision gradually, Haessig found ways to compensate. During the Vietnam War, he was drafted and assigned to be a driver in a transportation unit. He was unable to see at night, but was told by the military to drive anyway. He laughs, "They should have figured out I couldn't see very well because I kept running into things."

As far as he can remember, Haessig's vision was always a problem. He has a genetic condition called retinitis pigmentosa (RP), which gradually diminishes one's vision over time. Eventually, one will lose their vision completely. Haessig also has glaucoma, macular degeneration and cataracts.

After leaving the military, Haessig worked in the printing business until his vision was almost completely gone. The RP was taking his peripheral vision while the macular degeneration was claiming his central vision. It was time to begin the adjustment process.

He signed up for rehabilitation services with SSB, completed his adjustment to blindness training and initially tried to make a go of a day care business. After a while, he decided he really needed to make more money. His counselor suggested he try the BEP, but he was reluctant. "Just try it," his counselor said.



Well, he did and 23 years later Haessig is expanding his current business. He started at the Federal Aviation Administration building, and eventually moved into a St. Paul-wide vending route, which at one time had as many as 20 locations. In 2008, he took over for a retiring vender at the Minneapolis post office, which until recently had two vending businesses. When it was time for the second vender to retire at the post office, the BEP staff approached him about taking over the entire building. He agreed and is now operating a service with 50 machines in 10

locations -- double what he was doing prior to the expansion.

Haessig doesn't take a lot of personal credit for his success. He is quick to say "if it wasn't for the BEP staff I wouldn't exist. When I think about where I'm at I just feel so blessed." He is a humble man, but the truth is, he has had to work very hard to get where he is. He has survived cancer and at an age that many consider retiring, he is beginning a new chapter with an expanded business. It is this kind of attitude and resourcefulness that allows the partnership between BEP staff and BEP vendors to create viable vending businesses. These businesses provide a good living for people like Haessig dealing with vision loss. So how long is he going to keep going? "I'll do it as long as the good Lord keeps me healthy." ●

Blind, visually impaired or DeafBlind Minnesotans aged 55 and older who wish to pursue personal independence are served by the Senior Services Unit. Customers like Helen Bartlett have found these services useful. The staff in this unit provides three levels of services:

- general information;
- direct provision of needed services exclusively by SSB staff; and
- more extensive training and other services by SSB staff and/or external vendors.

Senior Services Unit Statistics			
	FFY 2012	FFY 2011	FFY 2010
Number Served	2,412	3,119	3,625

In the more extensive services, the customer receives help via a plan for needs ranging from braille and cane travel instruction to money and household management skills. SSB uses a number of locations, or “hubs,” across the state where customers can visit to receive services and try various aids and assistive technology devices. ●



## Helen Bartlett

The Senior Services Unit (SSU) at State Services for the Blind (SSB) is a busy unit. A condition called macular degeneration, which causes the gradual loss of central vision, is quite common among people 70 years of age or older. It's not too hard to imagine the difficulties that arise when one has no central vision. It becomes difficult to read, cook, move around safely and perform many other everyday activities.

To provide services, SSU staff visit seniors in their homes. The process involves SSU staff assessing the senior's functional difficulties in a number of different areas. SSU staff then offer a variety of techniques, tips and devices such as magnifiers and talking devices. They also offer group training on alternative techniques of blindness. This may seem straightforward and easy, but if the person with the vision loss doesn't have the right attitude and the desire to put in some work, the only likely outcome would be a few modest improvements.

It takes a certain kind of person to work through all the possibilities, find the solutions and move through the learning and adjustment process. Helen Bartlett is that kind of person. Bartlett can only see shapes up close, but she does have some peripheral vision. So what has she done to adjust? Everything she possibly can! Bartlett is a model of how to adjust to life without vision.

Bartlett uses talking books and the Radio Talking Book radio reading service. She says, "I love books!" Her membership in several area book clubs is proof. She has learned how to use tactile markings on appliances and how to cook using alternative techniques. She uses a white cane to get around safely, and she has learned how to use a closed-circuit reading machine (electronic magnification) to read simple items. She arranges her food both in the refrigerator and in her cupboards, so she knows where things are and when they need to be rotated.

She also writes and publishes children's books, three of them under the name Grandma Huntzy. The characters in her children's series are mice patterned after her grandkids. Her grandson does



the illustrations, and her son publishes the books. On top of that, she actually sells enough of the books to cover her costs.

Not all her books are children's stories. In "Confusions of a Constipated Crone" Grandma Huntzy shares observations, poems and stories. In the poem "Ode to Frank" Bartlett uses humor to illustrate how meaningful and important her adjustment to vision loss has been by praising the skills of blindness instructor, Frank Alden from Vision Loss Resources (VLR), a community rehabilitation partner for SSB.

*He first loads up the Margaritas,  
thus fortified he tries to teach us  
to use sharp knives and kitchen widgets  
and not cut off precious digits.  
He had to coax and scold and wheedle,  
but we finally learned to thread a needle.  
Told us how to match up pants, shirts and frocks  
and a clever way to pair up socks.  
Then, how from scratch, our bread to bake,  
later, stir up great orange cake.  
For all of this, we have to thank  
this brave and patient man named Frank.*

Bartlett really is a model when it comes to using important resources offered by organizations like SSB, but she is also a great example of someone who makes a decision, identifies the issue and takes steps to do what she can. Her effort and attitude has made the critical difference in her determination to maintain independence. ●

# State Services for the Blind



State Services for the Blind is a program of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.

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