



YOUR RESOURCE Within Reach



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Minnesota State Services For the Blind
2014 Annual Report



DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Since March 2014, it has been my privilege to serve as the director of State Services for the Blind in Minnesota. As you will read in the following pages, in 2014 we reaped the rewards of past years of hard work and dedication. This year, more of our customers found work, more listeners discovered Radio Talking Book content online, more students got the books they needed in a format that worked for them, and more seniors received timely services to live well with vision loss.

The following pages will showcase the work that we've done this year. In this space, however, I want to take the opportunity to tell you about the actions we're taking now in order to be a stronger, more customer-focused, results-driven agency in the year ahead.



Carol Pankow

Staffing Structure

In 2014, we created two deputy director positions. In July, Jon Benson, who has been a part of our SSB team for several years, became deputy director for program services. In October, Brianna Holeman, who has a background in operations, finance and communications, joined us as deputy director of the communication center and operations. Jon has primary responsibility for Senior Services and Workforce Development, while Brianna has oversight of the Communication Center and Administrative Services. Together, Jon and Brianna will focus on ensuring that our work and resources align with our long-term strategic goals.

Cross-Agency Initiatives

SSB has a lot of moving parts, but our one overarching goal is to provide Minnesotans who are blind, visually impaired or DeafBlind with quality and timely services for work, education and independence. In 2014, the leadership team of SSB conducted an assessment of how we're carrying out that mission and of where we could strengthen our work. We identified six key areas and brought together teams composed of staff from across the agency to determine best practices for improving our services. The six focus areas are:

Assistive Tech: Making sure that our customers get the right technology and the best training at the best price for the state of Minnesota.

Data: Doing a deep dive into all the data we collect and then organizing and streamlining it so that we can make decisions that better anticipate our customers' needs.

Intake: Looking at the first point of contact for anyone seeking services from our agency and determining how we can make sure they are finding what they need in the time they need it.

Outreach: Making sure "every Minnesotan who could use our services should know about our services." That's the watchword for our Outreach Team. They're spreading the word about our services to every corner of the state and every sector of our population.

Placement: Getting our skilled, educated and motivated job seekers in front of employers. That is a central goal for our workforce team. The Placement Working Group is designing improvements for that critical last mile between job ready and "you're hired."

Team Model: Leveraging the skills, knowledge and networks of our whole staff in order to better assist our customers in their job searches. Our Team Model Working Group is looking at how other agencies across the country have redesigned their approach to employment services.



2015: A Landmark Year

In July 2015, Minnesotans and the rest of the country will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). It can't be denied that blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind Minnesotans have made tremendous gains in access, independence and employment in the last quarter century. It is equally evident that we have some distance to go before blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind citizens share fully in the tremendous opportunities in our state. We at SSB are at work to help ensure that every day we come a little bit closer to that reality. To paraphrase U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin, the principal author of the ADA, it's time we opened the door for people who are blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind to full participation in our neighborhoods, workplaces, our economy and our American dream.

Carol Pankow
Director, State Services for the Blind

STATE SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

2014 in Numbers

3,223 Seniors with vision loss served, helping them to continue living in their homes.
Up 9 percent from the previous year.

116 Successful employment closures: SSB customers who found a job or got the services they needed to stay at their job. Up 15 percent from the previous year and up 40 percent in two years.

\$17.37..... Average hourly wage for those 116 Minnesotans who reached their employment goals.
Up 21 percent over two years.

\$6,442,000.. Total program sales for the 40 business owners in the Business Enterprise Program.

825,000..... Braille pages created, mostly for students in K-12.

335,000..... Print pages transcribed into audio.

140,000..... Print pages transcribed into e-text, helping college students keep up with the rigors of their coursework.

23,000..... Pieces of equipment maintained and distributed by the Engineering Department to help people access the written word.

11,367..... Hours of original Radio Talking Book broadcast programming.



SSB FINANCIALS

SSB Funding Streams

FISCAL YEAR 2014

| Federal Funds | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Basic VR | \$10,804,000 |
| Supported Employment | \$100,000 |
| Training Grant | \$67,000 |
| Independent Living | \$58,000 |
| Independent Living — Older Blind | \$613,000 |
| Special Education Agreement | \$520,000 |
| Total Federal Funds | \$12,162,000 |

| Total State Funds | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| State Funds | \$5,925,000 |

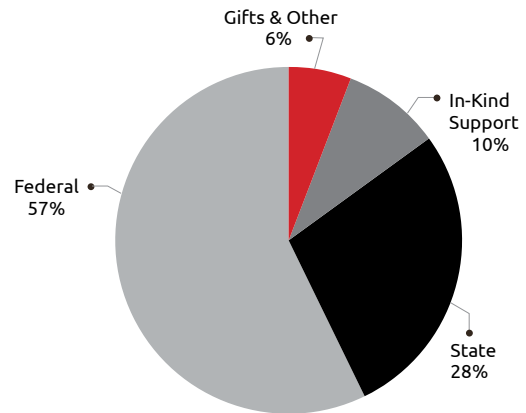
| Other Funds | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Gifts/Bequests | \$354,000 |
| Telecommunications Access MN | \$96,000 |
| Communication Center | \$110,000 |
| Business Enterprises | \$611,000 |
| Total Other Funds | \$1,171,000 |

| In-Kind Support | |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| From Volunteers | \$1,945,000 |

| | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| Total All Funds | \$21,203,000 |
|------------------------|---------------------|

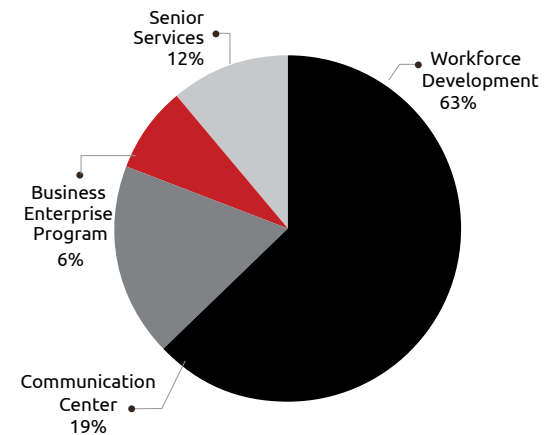
SSB Funding Streams

FISCAL YEAR 2014



SSB Funding Distribution

FISCAL YEAR 2014



Outreach coordinator Lisa Larges shown with tactile emergency map.



THE DIVERSE CAREERS OF OUR SSB 2014 EMPLOYMENT SERVICES CUSTOMERS

From realty to animal training, to bookkeeping and radio announcing, our customers found work in a diverse range of fields in 2014. This list of occupation titles for our 2014 successful employment closures demonstrates the breadth and scope of our customers' skills and experience.

- Animal Breeder
- Assembler/Fabricator
- Bill and Account Collector
- Bookkeeping and Auditing Clerk
- Business Operations Specialist
- Cashier
- Child Care Worker
- Coin, Vending, and Amusement Machine Servicer and Repairer
- Computer and Information Systems Manager
- Computer and Office Machine Repairer
- Computer Technician
- Counselor
- Credit Authorizer
- Crossing Guard
- Customer Service Representative
- Data Entry Keyer
- Demonstrator and Product Promoter
- Dietetic Technician
- Dishwasher
- Editor
- Elementary School Teacher
- Eligibility Interviewer
- Financial Analyst
- Fitness Instructor
- Food Preparation Worker
- Fundraiser
- Graphic Designer
- Health Technician
- Health Care Support Worker
- Housekeeper/Cleaner
- Instructional Coordinator
- Instructor
- Janitor and Cleaner
- Laundry and Dry Cleaning Worker
- Library Assistant
- Low Vision Therapist
- Mail Clerk and Mail Machine Operator
- Maintenance Worker
- Management Analyst
- Market Research Analyst
- Massage Therapist
- Medical and Clinical Laboratory Technician
- Medical Assistant
- Medical Transcriptionist
- Mental Health Professional
- Music Composer/Arranger
- Office Administrative Specialist
- Order Filler
- Personal Care Aid
- Physical Therapist
- Property Association Manager
- Psychologist
- Radio and Television Announcer
- Real Estate Broker
- Receptionist
- Recreation Worker
- Registered Nurse
- Regulatory Affairs Specialist
- Retail Sales Clerk
- Retail Sales Supervisor
- Sales Representative
- Shipping and Receiving Clerk
- Social Service Manager
- Software Quality Assurance Engineer
- Special Education Teacher
- Stock Clerk
- Teacher Assistant
- Team Assembler
- Training and Development Specialist
- Transportation Attendant
- Usher



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT UNIT



Debbie Lentz repairs a Perkins Braille.

immediately interested. "I like the challenge of trying something new," Debbie says.

Invented in 1951 by a teacher at the Perkins School, the standard Perkins Braille has 756 parts. Even though a lot of braille production is now done on computers, people still love their braille.

"I like to do the deep cleaning on the machines," Debbie says, "and then figure out repairs and adjustments."

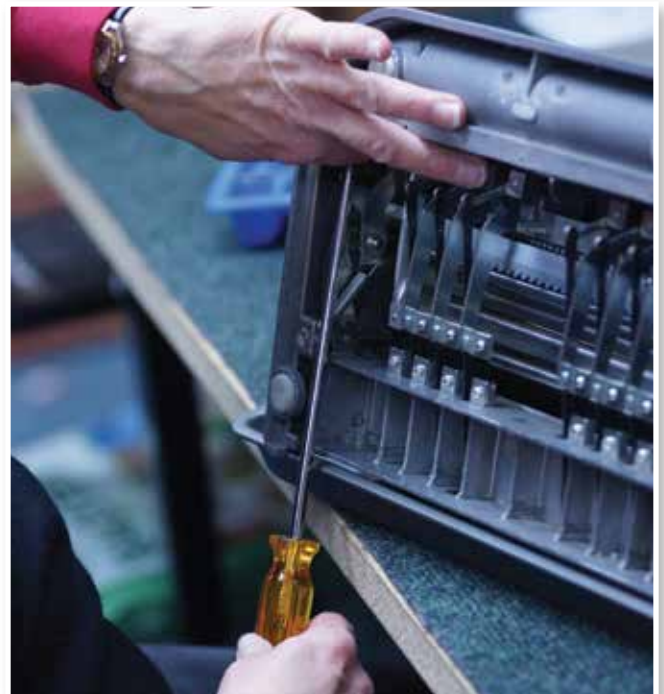
In addition to her work, Debbie serves on the DeafBlind Committee of the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind, which provides guidance to SSB. Debbie is president of the Minnesota DeafBlind Association. She has been active in deaf theater and teaching Sunday school. She also enjoys travel.

Doctor of Dots

In the basement workshop of her St. Louis Park home, Debbie Lentz repairs Perkins Braille. It's a second career for Debbie, who worked for 35 years for U.S. Bank as an account specialist.

Deaf from birth, Debbie graduated from Minneapolis Lutheran High School and earned her bachelor's degree in studio art from Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. Diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa in 1984, Debbie maintained stable vision for nearly 20 years. After several eye surgeries in 2006 and 2007, Debbie began to experience more blurred vision. In 2009 she lost all of her vision in one eye and 90 percent in the other. Only six months earlier she had been laid off from her job at the bank due to the financial crisis.

Having to adjust to these major changes in her life, Debbie worked with SSB's Workforce Development team and enrolled in classes to learn braille, access technology and develop other skills. When she learned about the course at the Perkins School in Massachusetts on repairing braille, she was



Closeup view of Debbie Lentz repairing a Perkins Braille.



Up and Out

On the morning of May 5, 2010, Paul Bloomst was driving his car. It was just another day in his busy life as a delivery driver for the Pioneer Press. By the end of the day, he could not see out of one eye, and most of the vision in the other was gone as well.

Paul learned that he had a rare autoimmune condition called ocular cicatricial pemphigoid, which, in his case, led to scarring of the corneas. Two years of chemotherapy followed, but much of his vision never came back.

Paul now had to adjust to life as a person who is visually impaired.

“Let’s just say,” Paul says, “that those first two years were really rough. I would say I was seriously depressed.”

Paul enrolled in Vision Loss Resources’ Adjustment to Blindness training. “It was extremely helpful,” Paul says. “Otherwise, I think I never would have gotten off the couch.”

One day while riding the bus, Paul struck up a conversation with another passenger who also happened to be visually impaired. She told him about the business she ran managing a convenience store and vending machines at several locations in the Twin Cities.



BEP operator Paul Bloomst loading snacks in SSB break room.

“I had been a delivery person all my life, and this didn’t seem that much different,” Paul says. “I thought, ‘I can do this.’”

That’s how Paul Bloomst came to SSB to enroll in the Business Enterprise Program. He started his business in February 2014 and now manages nine locations in the Twin Cities, including the Federal Courthouse and the Central Library in Minneapolis.

When he’s not working, Paul participates in the Blind Dart League and is a regular bowler. “What’s great about my job is that every day there’s something different going on. I like the challenge.”

Business Enterprise Program, 2014 • By the Numbers

SSB’s Business Enterprise Program (BEP) provides profitable vending machine business opportunities to qualified licensed legally blind Minnesotans. You’ve probably come across one of our vendor sites in a state or federal office building, a rest area, or on a state college or university campus.

10 Number of BEP business owners who exceeded \$50,000 in annual net profits in 2014

\$37,529..... Average net profit for a BEP business owner

\$6,442,000.. Total program sales

\$426,000..... Sales taxes paid by BEP business owners

75 Employees working for BEP business owners, 15 of whom have a disability

40 Business owners in the program

193 Locations served in Minnesota



Elisabeth von Berrinberg at work writing in her office.

Still Writing, Still Reading

After a long career as a dark room technician, and an active volunteer with many organizations, Elisabeth von Berrinberg has turned to writing. A customer of SSB's Senior Services, Elisabeth uses magnifiers to read and proof her work. She's also turned to our Audio Services team to have her books recorded.

Like a lot of seniors who still have usable vision, Elisabeth realized that vision loss was making it difficult to do many of the things that mattered most to her, including reading and writing. Our SSB counselor met with her in her home and assessed how she was using her vision and where she was having the greatest difficulties. After talking about her concerns, our counselor provided several

magnifiers and other simple aids that allowed Elisabeth to continue to do what she enjoyed most. It was an easy solution that made all the difference.

In the spring, Elisabeth met with SSB Senior Services staff at a resource fair. She asked whether it would be possible to have her recently published memoir transcribed into audio. Soon after, our Audio Services Department sent her the recorded version of her book. "City in Flames" is Elisabeth's account of growing up in war-ravaged Germany during and after the Second World War.

In addition to her memoir, Elisabeth is the author of a "cozy" mysteries series, featuring Countess von Schleppmeister as a sleuth. She's now at work on a series of children's books.



Making Gold

"I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the volunteers at SSB who scanned my textbooks," says Naomi Cohn, who just earned her Marriage and Family Clinical Counseling (MFCC) degree from St. Mary's University in the Twin Cities. "I can't imagine that it's very exciting work, but it made such a difference for me. I would not have been able to earn my degree if it wasn't for those volunteers who took apart each of my books and scanned them so that I could have access to them in a form that I could use."

Over the last several years, SSB's Audio Services has been processing more requests to have books scanned into an electronic text format. This allows readers greater flexibility in how they can access the text. They can enlarge the print, change the background color, hear and see the text at the same time, or review a word letter by letter to understand how a name or unfamiliar word is spelled.

Before earning her MFCC, Naomi worked in the nonprofit sector with environmental and arts organizations. An artist in her own right, Naomi is a sculptor, printmaker and poet. Among other awards and prizes, Naomi received two grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board. Her poetry chapbook, "Between Nectar and Eternity," was published by Red Dragonfly Press in 2014.

More than 20 years ago, Naomi was diagnosed with myopic degeneration, a condition that gradually leads to the loss of central vision. In 2009, Naomi enrolled at Vision Loss Resources (VLR) to learn nonvisual techniques for living independently. Naomi now volunteers as a peer counselor at VLR, helping others with vision loss adjust to new circumstances. "Having a chance to give back," Naomi reflects, "is a way to turn the bad stuff in your life into gold. The fact that you're here and you're still standing makes a big difference to others who are just beginning to confront their own vision loss."



Social worker Naomi Cohn works at her home computer.



Communication Center • By the Numbers

13,000..... Customers who turned to the Communication Center to meet their needs for accessing print

825,000..... Braille pages transcribed from print

335,000..... Print pages transcribed into audio

140,000..... Print pages transcribed into e-text

71,146..... Calls into Dial-In News and NFB-NEWSLINE

23,000..... Pieces of equipment maintained and distributed by our engineering department

11,367..... Hours of Radio Talking Book programming

1,253 Donors who contributed \$164,382 to the Communication Center and Senior Services

25 Podcasts produced on job searching and career building. This was a new service in 2014 that was available online and through audio streaming.

687 Skilled, dedicated and talented volunteers

The Road to Success

Pictured on the cover of this report, Dan Bernstrom addressed the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B) in the spring of 2014. The SRC-B advises SSB on its work and mission, and regularly hears from consumers about the services offered at SSB.

Dan told the council about the despair and powerlessness he felt as his vision deteriorated during his college years. "I couldn't imagine a future for myself. Who would hire me? Who would go out with me? Would I ever marry, have a job, have a life?"

Dan turned to State Services for the Blind and our Workforce Development team. His counselor recommended Adjustment to Blindness training as a way to gain the skills he needed to live successfully with less vision.

In 2009, Dan took a tour of Blind Inc. There he found blind people doing things better than he had done them when he had sight. "I said to myself, the way these people are acting doesn't seem like life is standing in their way."

That experience changed Dan's outlook and his future. A successful author, Dan has a children's book coming out this year from Harper Collins, and several more in the pipeline. In addition to writing, Dan works as the coordinator of the Learning Lab at Southeast Technical College in Red Wing.



Our Multi-Talented Volunteers

The 687 volunteers in our Communication Center bring an impressive array of talents to their work, from repairing digital equipment to creating tactile diagrams, describing complex charts and knowing the correct pronunciation of technical terms. On behalf of the 13,000 customers who use the services of the Communication Center each year, the staff of SSB wishes to thank the following volunteers who reached notable milestones with us in 2014.

15 Year Volunteers

| | |
|--------------------|---------|
| Alvin Apple | RTB |
| Charlie Boone | RTB |
| Jo McMullen-Boyer | RTB |
| MaryBeth Henderson | Audio |
| Steve McRoberts | Braille |
| Michael McTeague | Audio |
| John Ward | RTB |
| Larry Zenner | RTB |

20 Year Volunteers

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| Pamela Blackmoore | RTB |
| Marylyn Burridge | RTB |

| | |
|-----------------|---------|
| Jan Conroy | Braille |
| Margaret Durham | Audio |
| Scott Eckes | Audio |
| Joy Fogarty | RTB |
| Sharon Grose | RTB |
| Kay Peltier | Braille |
| Michael Tierney | RTB |

25 Year Volunteers

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| John Dehaven | RTB |
| John Hagman | RTB |
| Joni Luxem | RTB |

30 Year Volunteers

| | |
|---------------|---------|
| Neil Bright | RTB |
| Robert Dedeyn | Braille |
| Faye Herold | Audio |
| Dennis Peters | Audio |

40 Year Volunteers

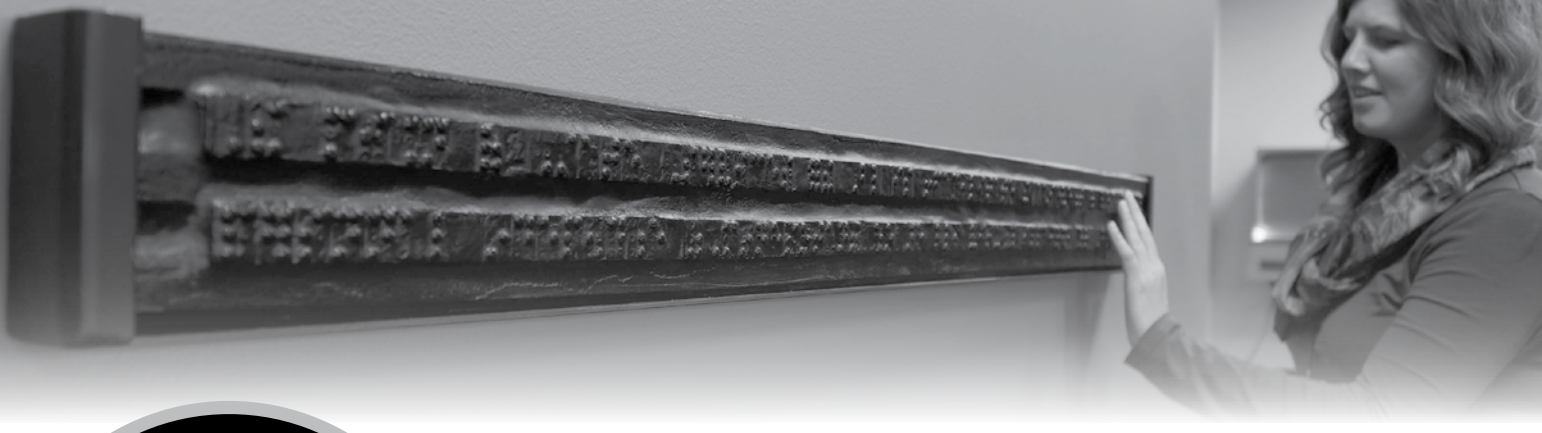
| | |
|-----------------|---------|
| Shirley Bowers | Audio |
| John Mandeville | RTB |
| Harriet Ryberg | Braille |



Help Spread the Word

Every Minnesotan who could use our services, should know about our services. Help us spread the word that SSB offers free or low-cost services for reading, working, and living safely and independently.

- If there's a senior in your life who has macular degeneration, glaucoma or some other form of vision loss, let them know that we're here to help.
- If you visit an ophthalmologist or optometrist, ask if they know about the valuable resources at SSB.
- If you are an employer, talk with our business relations team about finding the candidate who could be your next great hire.
- If you know people with hiring authority, please let them know that State Services for the Blind has a pool of job seekers with the skills and experience to fill a diverse range of positions.
- If you know an avid reader who is losing vision, let them know that the Communication Center will keep them reading.



Mission Statement

The mission of State Services for the Blind is to facilitate the achievement of vocational and personal independence by Minnesotans who are blind, visually impaired or DeafBlind.

State Services for the Blind

is a program of the
Minnesota Department of
Employment and Economic Development.

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Minnesota

Department of Employment and Economic Development

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Upon request, this information can be made available in alternate formats for individuals with disabilities.