



2018 ANNUAL REPORT

MINNESOTA STATE

SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

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.



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LETTER FROM CAROL PANKOW, SSB DIRECTOR

When we come together, we're stronger. This is true not only for individuals, but for organizations. Our own Radio Talking

Book (RTB), the world's first radio reading service, went on the air on January 2, 1969. It was the realization of a creative and productive partnership between State Services for the Blind (SSB), the Hamm Family Foundation, Minnesota Public Radio, and a host of volunteers. Fifty years on, our partnership still flourishes.

In the pages of this annual report, you'll read about other productive partnerships that SSB has cultivated to better equip blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind Minnesotans to live, work, read, and succeed. Here are just a few examples of creative collaborations that have strengthened our work in 2018.

Partners in Serving Seniors

This summer, SSB received a State Government Innovation Award in recognition of our Aging Eyes Initiative. By the end of 2018, we'd trained more than 500 community partners through the initiative to provide a first level of support to seniors in the early stages of vision loss.

Like RTB, the Aging Eyes Initiative is the first of its kind in the nation and we've received queries from other states on how to replicate this model. Because many seniors are adapting to both vision and hearing losses, this year we've partnered in a pilot project with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS) at the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS). We trained DHHS staff as community partners in the Aging Eyes Initiative, and provided them with kits that include assistive listening devices

and other tools to help with vision loss. As we continue to expand our training, we've empowered more vendors to provide training classes in more locations.

Partners in Good Jobs and Bright Futures

In 2018, SSB continued a fruitful partnership with the International School of Protocol, teaching what are termed "soft skills" to students in an intensive class called "Blind and Socially Savvy." "Soft skills" are the personal attributes that support effective interaction with others. This year we expanded the partnership to offer a class for adults in the job search process.

"Blind and Socially Savvy" is a resource to equip consumers with a full set of skills to land a good job. Yet we know that even when blind, visually impaired, or DeafBlind job seekers are fully qualified for a position, hiring managers can still be reluctant to take a chance on an applicant with a disability. In 2018, the State of Minnesota launched the Connect 700 program to help overcome some of these barriers to employment. Through a 700-hour trial program, qualified job applicants with a disability receive a chance to prove that they can do the job well. This gives managers the option of bringing someone on for a trial period.

Several of the 105 blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind SSB customers who found jobs in 2018 began working for the state through Connect 700. Each used the trial period to demonstrate their ability, and each was hired on as a permanent employee.

Our Business Enterprise Program (BEP) continues a partnership with state agencies to host vending services at Minnesota highway rest areas. This gives SSB and the small business owners a place at the table when vending

contracts are created. Also in 2018, after a three-year negotiation process, we secured a new vending location at the Minneapolis VA hospital.

Partners in Access

In January David Andrews, SSB's Chief Technology Officer, received a MLK Commitment to Service Award at a celebration honoring the legacy of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Dave exemplifies the many SSB staff members who connect with organizations and agencies across our state: building awareness, advocating, and promoting equality and access for Minnesotans who are blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind. Dave has a wealth of knowledge about software, hardware, and online services, and has been a tireless advocate for accessibility and usability. Along with our Communication Center team, including more than 600 volunteers, Dave maintains high standards for quality access to print in alternative formats.

In 2017 we began an innovative partnership with a class of engineering students at the University of St. Thomas. These students collaborate with staff in our braille section to improve the ways we preserve and reproduce tactile graphics. These graphics are created by hand by both staff and volunteers, and represent some of our most labor-intensive work. A master copy of each tactile graphics page is stored in our library, and duplicate copies are made from them. The students accepted the challenge of finding a way to scan these master copies so that we have a backup. This work will not only benefit us, but will also have implications for other organizations seeking ways to preserve documents like these.

Our entire staff, our volunteers, and especially our customers were deeply saddened by the death in 2018 of our customer service representative Esther Dahl. Over the past several

years we have deepened our partnership with the Minnesota Braille and Talking Book Library, and Esther was integral in that process. Many Communication Center customers met Esther as their first connection with SSB, and for many she was their favorite connection. She represented us with warmth, patience, and kindness, and she is greatly missed.

Partners in Success

The pages of this report provide a snapshot of 2018 through statistics and financials. You'll also read about many of the creative and productive partnerships we engage in to improve our services. Most importantly you'll read success stories of a few of our customers. Their stories represent a myriad of successes, large and small, that made up 2018.

The litmus test of any partnership or any initiative, program, or innovation is whether it furthers SSB's goal of providing blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind Minnesotans the resources and tools to achieve equality, independence, and access. In 2019, we aim to build new partnerships and strengthen existing ones to better serve our consumers.

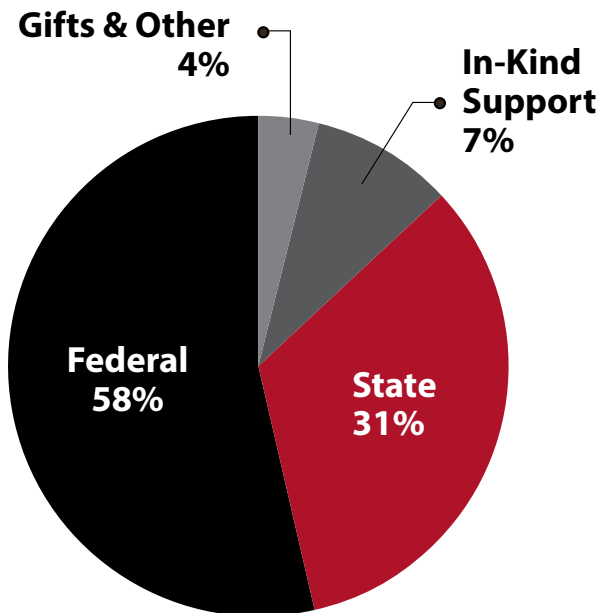


Carol Pankow
Director, State Services for the Blind

SSB FINANCIALS

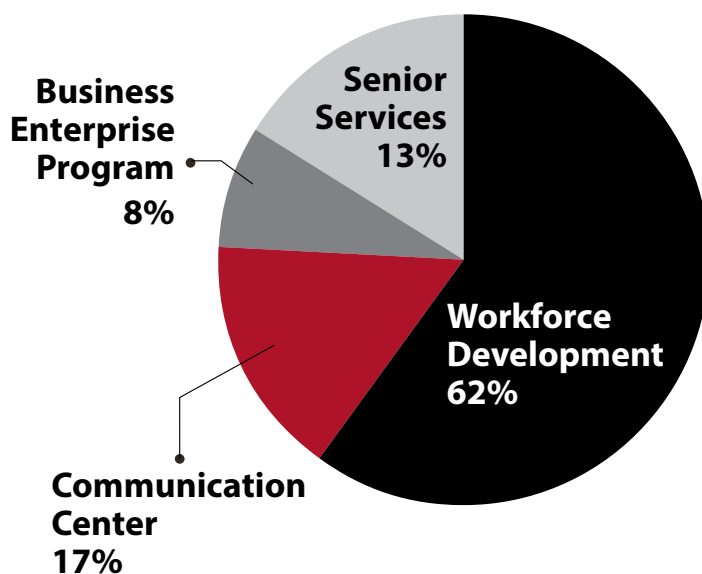
SSB Funding Streams

FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2018



SSB Funding Distribution

FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2018



SSB Expenditures

FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2018

Federal Funds

Basic VR	\$10,629,300
Supported Employment	\$1,400
Independent Living	\$56,000
IL-Older Blind	\$883,740
Special Education Agreement	\$609,430

Total Federal Funds	\$12,179,870
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Total State Funds	\$6,551,058
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Other Funds

Gifts/Bequests	\$202,190
Dept. of Commerce - Telecommunications Access	\$97,073
Aging Eyes	\$105,745
Communication Center	\$10,950
Business Enterprises	\$502,935

Total Other Funds	\$918,893
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In-Kind Support

From Volunteers	\$1,530,000
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Total All Funds	\$21,179,821
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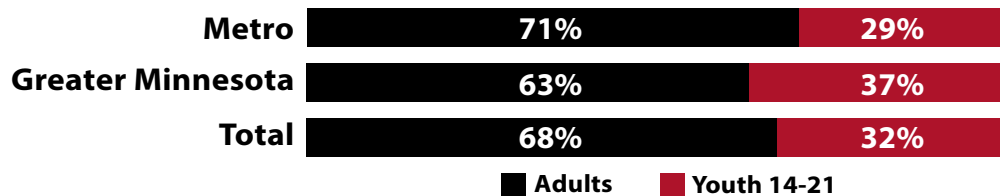
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

By the Numbers

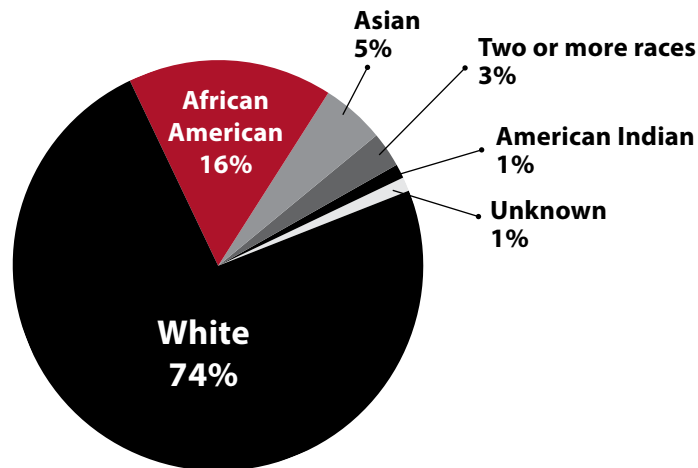
1,240 CUSTOMERS SERVED

- 235 New applications submitted
- 157 Customers started services for the first time
- 24 Customers placed on the wait list before receiving services

Preparing Adults & Youth for Work in all Regions of the State



Serving Minnesota's Diverse Population



Vision Impairments of Customers Served



Note: These totals do not include customers who exited prior to providing specific demographic information.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

By the Numbers

TOP JOBS AND EARNINGS

for Workforce Development Customers Exiting in FFY 2018

Job Category	*# of Customers	Average Hours a Week	Average Hourly Wage	Average Weekly Earnings
Office and Administrative Support	24	31	\$13.48	\$430.60
Sales and Related	9	24	\$14.89	\$350.75
Educational, Instructional and Library	8	32	\$23.00	\$818.38
Management	8	25	\$18.51	\$491.36
Community and Social Service	8	31	\$15.12	\$483.56
Bldg and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	8	19	\$13.37	\$293.42
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media	7	21	\$21.89	\$507.78
Production	7	31	\$11.07	\$345.54
Installation, Maintenance and Repair	4	25	\$17.00	\$494.00
Computer and Mathematical	4	35	\$25.69	\$980.00
Personal Care and Service	4	22	\$12.07	\$277.25
Food Preparation and Serving	4	22	\$11.47	\$251.31
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	3	33	\$20.00	\$650.67
Transportation and Material Moving	3	23	\$10.08	\$239.70
Healthcare Support	2	22	\$14.50	\$328.00
Legal	1	40	\$60.00	\$2,400.00
Business And Financial Operation	1	40	\$26.00	\$1,040.00
Life, Physical and Social Science	1	30	\$20.00	\$600.00
Architecture and Engineering	1	24	\$14.00	\$336.00

*Two of the 105 customers served were able to attain employment in more than one job category

Meet Jeff Madsen

For Jeff Madsen, a new Minnesota state program was his ticket to a good job.

When his business consultant work slowed to a trickle in 2017, Madsen knew it was time for a change. He lives in the little town of Svea, just outside of Willmar in southwest Minnesota, so he knew there would be obstacles to finding work in his field. But Madsen had drive, skills, and experience - and he was a quick study.

"Jeff is a really smart guy," said SSB Placement Specialist Dacia VanAlstine. "It was just a matter of finding a position near where he lived. That was the biggest challenge, and the Connect 700 program seemed like a really good option."

For people with disabilities, the hiring process may not provide the best opportunity to make the case that one is the best candidate for a position. Launched in 2014 by Governor Mark Dayton, Connect 700 creates a more flexible hiring process for positions with the state of Minnesota, and provides a 700-hour job trial period to give people with disabilities the chance to prove their abilities. Through Connect 700, Madsen was hired in May to a human resources position at the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) District 8 office in Willmar. He completed his 700 hours by September, and it was clear to his supervisor that he was the right fit for the job.

As a human resources technician, Madsen works on contracts and processes personnel and employment information. He draws on his MBA from Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall, and his years of experience as a business consultant. SSB provided a portable magnifier and optical character recognition (OCR) scanner that he uses to read paper documents.

When he's not working Madsen is busy with three kids, coaching, and sports.

"Jeff did all the heavy lifting," said John Hamilton, a SSB vocational counselor in Hutchinson. "He's a tremendously tenacious and competent individual, and he knows what he needs to do to succeed. SSB just provided some help along the way."

"The Connect 700 program opens doors," Madsen reflected. "It gave me a chance to show what I can do, and I'm really grateful to have that opportunity."



Jeff Madsen

*Photo courtesy of
West Central Tribune*



Meet Gary Otto

For many years, Gary Otto worked for a small, private senior care facility. He performed custodial duties and helped the residents. Then new licensing procedures created a cut in his interactions with residents, leaving him without enough work to continue his job.

Gary was disappointed, but not defeated. His mother told him about Epic Enterprise in Dundas, Minnesota, a nonprofit that specializes in assisting individuals with multiple disabilities in finding jobs. They sought someone to work in their adult day services program. With assistance from SSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Catherine Golding, Gary set out to prove that he was the best person for the job.

Gary shared his story at the April meeting of the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B). A governor-appointed council, SRC-B guides the work of SSB and has an ongoing interest in hearing directly from consumers.

Golding introduced Gary at the SRC-B meeting. "One of the reasons I'm proud of Gary," she said, "is that he was really the fuel behind landing this job. He called me up and told me about it, and he pursued it until he got it."

"When I talked with Epic about Gary, they had some questions at first. They had never worked with a blind person before, so they weren't sure how it would work out. Then, I got a call a few months later. They said to me, 'We absolutely love Gary, and we don't know what we'd do without him.'"

"Gary has a way with people," said Epic Executive Director Linda Hibbard. "He definitely brought something to our team that was very much needed. We are really appreciative of the help that SSB gave us in the process."

Gary told SRC-B that Epic is the kind of place where staff and clients all genuinely care about

one another. With his easy way with people and his caregiver skills, he fits right in. He spends most of each day

working exclusively with one client, assisting them in getting from place to place. In addition, he pitches in wherever he is needed. He uses a scanner to read client files in order to know about client allergies and other important information.

Gary was a stay-at-home dad before working in the personal care field. "Our oldest son was easy," Gary remembers, "but the younger one was more of a challenge. He'd do his best to try and sneak past me, but I just listened for the squeak of his diaper and I'd know exactly where he was."

In 1977 Gary was shot in a hunting accident, which would eventually lead to his loss of vision. The accident happened on the evening he had planned a first date with the woman who would eventually become his wife. "She's kept me on the path," Gary says warmly, "and we've made a great team!" Together they raised two boys, and now have six grandsons and a granddaughter.

These practical experiences and life lessons combine to make Gary a great fit at Epic. By sharing stories with SRC-B, it became clear how much he values work that gives him a chance to help others each day. "I'm helping people to get what they need," Gary said with a smile, "and help from SSB made that happen."



Gary Otto

Meet Kevin Awes

SSB's Workforce Development transition team works with students aged 14 to 21, providing tools and resources to make a successful transition from high school to work, college, and adult life. "It's a time of big opportunities and big challenges," says Sheila Koenig, SSB's transition coordinator. "You're figuring out who you are and what you want to do with your life. It's exciting and frightening all at the same time."

After high school, Kevin Awes successfully navigated his transition to that post-school world. He now takes classes at Normandale Community College in Bloomington, Minnesota, and works in the dining room of a senior living community.

But a few years ago thirteen-year-old Kevin was a thousand miles away at Johns Hopkins University in Maryland. Staff there explained the seizures Kevin had experienced since childhood. Kevin was diagnosed with Rasmussen encephalitis, and doctors said the best course forward would be to remove the right hemisphere of his brain. His family feared the treatment would be even more daunting than the seizures.

For the next two years Kevin went through intensive therapy in Minnesota and Maryland. Still, he graduated with his high school class and earned the rank of Eagle Scout. Even so, Kevin lost most of the functionality of his left arm and all the peripheral vision on his left side. "It's so frustrating how many things there are that require two hands," Kevin reflected. "And at first I was always running into things, but eventually I learned."

Kevin began working with SSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Marie Knapp in 2017. SSB connected him with Vision Loss Resources in Minneapolis; among other things, he learned to use the bus system and get around on his own. Later Kevin participated in the Summer Transition

Program, a week-long intensive training co-sponsored by SSB and the Minnesota Department of Education.

Marie also introduced Kevin to Tou Yang, SSB's work opportunities navigator. Tou helps students to find jobs, internships, and other work experiences. Kevin pursued a couple of part-time jobs without success. "When this job at the senior community came up," Tou remembered, "I had Kevin go through a mock interview with SSB Job Placement Specialist Dave Smith. It was tough, but Kevin really stepped up."

"I don't know that I would have gotten that job without SSB," said Kevin.

Tou also connects students with experiences and resources that help them think strategically about future careers. "Kevin told me he'd really like to build sets for Halloween haunted houses," said Tou. "So we arranged a behind-the-scenes tour at the Children's Theater Company in Minneapolis. It gave him a chance to see what that kind of work would be like."

Currently Kevin takes classes in communications, introduction to theater, and stage craft at Normandale. "I like to build things," Kevin said, "and I like to be social, so the theater classes are interesting."

Marie appreciates the changes Kevin's made since they first met nearly two years ago. "I saw so much growth in him," she reflected. "When we met the last time he was mature, respectful, appreciative, and confident. It's great to see someone as they grow and find their own way."



Kevin Awes

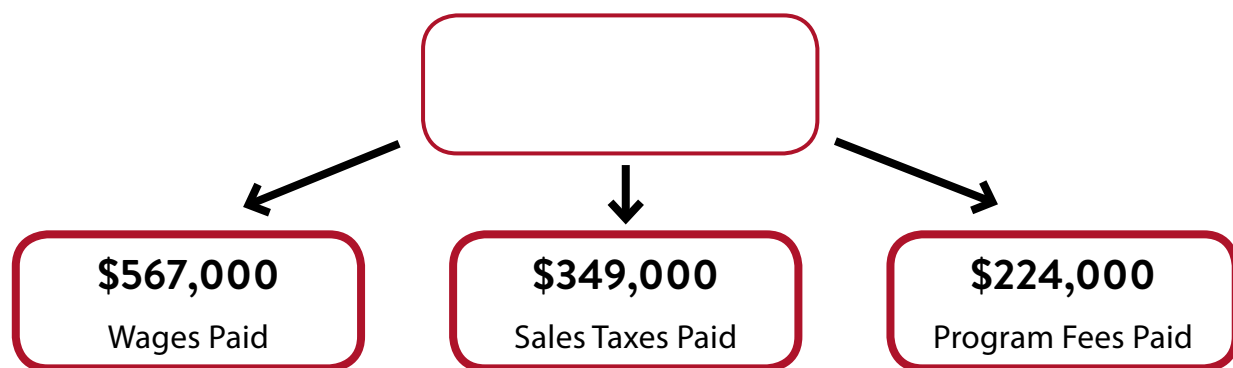
BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM

By the Numbers

35 BUSINESS OPERATORS SERVED

- 48 individuals employed by BEP operators
- 29 businesses in 150 locations in 46 cities across the state
- 2 BEP students graduated and became licensed BEP operators

Contributed More than \$1.1 Million to Minnesota's Economy



BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM Profiles

Meet Marvin Langanki and Nathan Whitlow

Two partnerships bring the convenience of cashless vending to Rochester Community and Technical College (RCTC) and Minnesota highway rest areas. And two Business Enterprises Program (BEP) participants are on the "cutting edge" of the new technology.

Marvin Langanki has been a BEP operator for 33 years, and is the first operator to utilize this technology at RCTC. "Credit card readers became available about eight years ago," Langanki said. "I did some reading and found that they increase sales by 20%. Vending machine sales have been going down for the past fifteen years, and most people don't carry much cash with them anymore."

Nathan Whitlow has been a BEP operator since 1981, and has seen a lot of changes in the vending industry. He's installed credit card readers in four operator-run rest areas along Interstate 35 in south central Minnesota. "We have them on about half of our machines right now," Whitlow said. "They've worked out pretty well. We don't have to deal with as much cash."



Nathan Whitlow

"The technology has been around for a while, and BEP operators have embraced it," said BEP Director John Hulet. "Our program chooses to invest in this technology in BEP businesses because we believe it is essential to remaining competitive."

Vending sales had declined at RCTC. "Campus enrollment has gone down due to online classes. I don't get to sell virtual candy bars!" Langanki joked. "But since adding credit card readers, sales have rebounded. When you swipe your card the information goes to an online bank. After about a week, a processing company transfers the funds to the vendor's account. It's safer in the long run; you don't need to handle any money."

"The readers are capable of giving us sales data about inventory, and where items need to be restocked," added Whitlow. "That helps us save trips. I wouldn't doubt that the industry will go completely cashless eventually."

BEP provides vending business opportunities to qualified and licensed legally blind Minnesotans, to broaden their economic opportunities. You've probably come across one of their sites in a state or federal office building, a rest area, or a state college or university campus.

Cashless payment systems have become popular in a wide range of vending machines. They accept credit and debit cards, and "mobile wallets" such as Apple Pay and Android Pay. Newer systems also add technology like touch screens that provide product information, especially useful as more people seek healthier foods, snacks, and beverages.

A 2014 industry study showed that American adults under 30 dislike using cash so much that 51% of them use credit or debit cards for purchases. A 2015 study showed that average vending machine sales increased 42% when



Marvin Langanki

a card reader was installed. Machines that offer cashless purchases also have average transactions of \$1.60 – nearly 40 cents higher than their cash counterparts. "When you use plastic, you don't worry about it until you get the bill!" Langanki quipped.

"Millennials want a cashless option. They don't carry cash, and 50% of government workers will become millennials in the next five to ten years," Hulet said. "The majority of our vending businesses are on government property, so vendors must provide this option or risk missing out on sales to half of their customers."

"Marvin and RCTC work together to ensure students and faculty have a positive experience on campus. He also partners with the credit card service provider to ensure the equipment is operating effectively. Nathan stays knowledgeable about the latest products and technological advances in the industry, to better serve customers and enhance his business," added Hulet.

Langanki said that he always focuses on customer service. "Everything I sell can be bought somewhere else. I really only have my charm to sell them!" he remarked. "I'll do anything so that customers can get what they want."

3,621 CLIENTS SERVED BY THE SENIOR SERVICES UNIT

October 2017 – September 2018



Private Homes	2,184	60.3%
Senior Living/ Retirement	645	17.8%
Assisted Living	417	11.5%
Independent Living (aged 18-55)	207	5.7%
Nursing Home/ Long-Term Care	165	4.6%
Homeless	3	Less than 1%

Providing Services to Help Seniors Choose Where to Live

SENIOR SERVICES Profiles

Meet Judy Voith

An old adage says “getting old is not for sissies.” Anyone in their 70s, 80s, or older will talk about physical changes they’ve dealt with; it won’t be unusual to hear complaints ranging from bad joints to poor hearing. Somehow, we all know we’re not going to move around as well as we once did. We’re not likely to be as sharp-witted, and that our level of activity will slow down.

But vision is enmeshed into most everything we do. The idea that we might lose our sight causes extra anxiety. We hope for the best, and in some cases deny that it can happen to us. When it does

happen, we are forced to confront the reality that we are not going to be able to do things the way we always have.

Many in our culture believe that old age is a kind of “second early childhood” that seniors can’t do certain things and need to be cared for. This is far from the truth: seniors have long lives’ worth of experiences, and do not change into toddlers because they are aging. If they were upbeat and optimistic in their earlier lives, they’ll likely remain that way when they are older.



Judy Voith

SSB's Senior Services Unit tries to find just the thing to help each senior adjust to vision loss. Sometimes the person isn't going to adjust and may come to rely on others, or enter an assisted living facility. More often, though, when we meet with a customer, we find people like Judy Voith.

Judy feels the effects of optic neuritis, which caused significant vision loss and forced her to adjust to a new reality. Her vision had been an issue for years, and like many people she came to rely on her spouse to get her around and stay active. Unfortunately, her husband passed away; she found herself not only terribly saddened but without the skills she needed to stay independent.

After moving around and finally settling back in Minnesota, Judy contacted the Senior Services Unit. She received a visit from SSB Blind Rehabilitation Specialist Sue Crancer, who

provided low vision aids and a scanning and reading appliance (SARA) character recognition device. The device scans printed material and reads it to the user. Judy also acquired a closed-circuit television (CCTV) electronic magnifier. These help her cook, read, keep track of finances, read mail and other materials, participate in activities, and keep up her home.

A service that meant the most to Judy was an eight-week Adjustment to Blindness class taught by SSB Senior Service Training Coordinator Charlene Guggisberg. In the class, seniors learn to complete daily tasks without being able to see well. They learn about adaptive devices, cooking techniques, how to organize their living spaces, and how to work through the challenges that come with vision loss.

"If someone asked me about what to do if you're losing your vision I would say seek help, keep a positive attitude, and don't give up," Judy said. "I started thinking about the class as a series of tips and tricks. It was fun for me to know there is almost always a tip or trick that can help you do the things you want to do."

There will always be challenges when dealing with aging and vision loss at the same time. The Senior Services Unit is here for those who want to add new tips and tricks to their repertoire.



Aging Eyes INITIATIVE

Minnesota's Accessible Reading Source

CUSTOMERS SERVED & 615 VOLUNTEERS SERVING

Audio Services, Radio Talking Book (RTB), and Engineering



3,240,085	Transcribed pages distributed to readers
521,297	Accesses to RTB audio stream, Dial-In News, and NFB-NEWSLINE
318,193	Print pages originally transcribed into audio, e-text, or large print
3,180	Talking book players, radios, & accessories disbursed
1,622	Equipment repairs made
50	Audio books uploaded to Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD)

Braille

55 Minnesota students served

Braille services provided to K-12 students

Braille Titles - 927 total



310	Purchased from other states
197	Newly transcribed by CC
420	Reproduced and re-used by CC

Braille Pages - 455,622 total



386,995	Purchased from other states
12,063	Newly transcribed by CC
56,564	Reproduced and re-used by CC

Meet the Minnesota Braille and Talking Book Library

This past year, SSB's senior service counselors asked for a supply of digital audio book players and Radio Talking Book (RTB) receivers to provide for customers. So the Minnesota Braille and Talking Book Library (MBTBL) in Faribault, Minnesota helped make it happen.

SSB began a partnership with MBTBL back in 1935 to provide National Library Service (NLS) braille and talking books to Minnesotans. The library circulates books recorded at SSB to patrons in Minnesota and world-wide on cassette and cartridges, and now through digital downloads from NLS's Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) service. Until recently, customers would call MBTBL for books and SSB for equipment; now staff members answer the same toll-free number, and are able to help with book searches and trouble-shooting equipment questions.

"We provide high-quality, seamless customer service to Minnesotans. And our partnership makes that happen," said MBTBL Director Catherine Durivage. "We now share a computer database and telephone number. Our customers only need to remember one phone number (1-800-722-0550) for assistance with reading services."

Staff members at MBTBL and SSB work together individually, and technology makes larger meetings possible. Staff uses Skype to discuss issues and policies, and work out how to better serve our customers.

"Working with colleagues at the library helps me do my job more efficiently. We go back and forth throughout the day helping each other," said SSB Customer Service Representative Ronnie Washington.

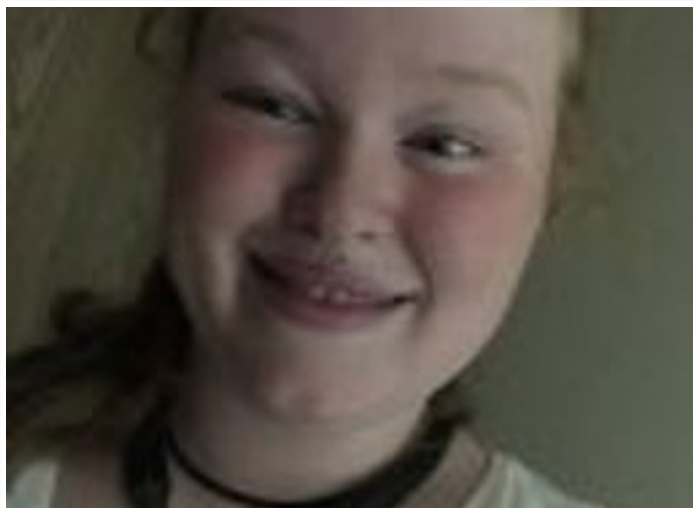


Ronnie Washington and Catherine Durivage

A reader and a Communication Center customer, Ronnie answers calls and assists customers from the center in St. Paul. "I love helping people find the books they want, and answer questions about equipment and services," he said. "I also handle our shared applications for service. A person only needs to sign up once to receive services, or change them as their needs or desires change."

"Very few state libraries and rehabilitation agencies enjoy the close, productive, and effective relationship that we take for granted in Minnesota," said SSB Director Carol Pankow. "Together, we've gotten the job done for our customers these past 80-plus years, even with our 55-mile distance and previously unconnected business systems. MBTBL promotes our SSB services such as custom braille and audio transcriptions, our radio reading service, and our newspaper telephone services NFB-NEWSLINE and Dial-In News."

We're proud that the SSB-MBTBL partnership continues to thrive, and that together we provide our customers easy access to what they need to keep reading. To find out more about MBTBL, visit their website at www.education.mn.gov/MDE/fam/mbtbl.



Jessica Hodges

Meet Jessica Hodges

Jessica Hodges is a podcast aide and student intern, working in a partnership between Blind Abilities LLC and Radio Taking Book. Blind Abilities works with individuals adapting to vision loss, helping to build the skills and confidence to transition to college and the workplace.

Jessica is well suited to work with students going from high school to college or the workplace. She provides tips for studying, technology reviews, guides to available services, and identifies resources.

"It's often said that blind people can do anything, and this is absolutely true," said Jessica. "But this is such a big statement that it goes right over the heads of some people, and they don't know how to begin making it true."

"That's where I come in. I wrap important information in story form, to keep readers engaged and help the connection along on a personal level. Someone's far more likely to remember an app for GPS, for example, if I'm talking about what it was like to use it when lost

and trying to find a coffee shop for quiche on the way to class, than if I simply told them about the app, and what it can do. I also break things down into basic steps. You have to make boiled eggs, for example, in order to make egg salad sandwiches, but even before that, you have to learn to boil water. This is why I try to start at the very beginnings of things, so that people who don't know how to ask don't have to."

Jessica grew up in Sequim, Washington, where she graduated from high school and college and served as secretary for the National Federation of the Blind Snohomish Chapter. Later she moved to Minnesota where she attended Adjustment to Blindness Training at Blind, Incorporated in Minneapolis. Currently, she is enrolled at Minneapolis Community and Technical College. "When I went to college I hoped to make a difference, have a lot of fun, and support myself," she said, "and I believe I've done all of those things reasonably well."

Jessica's first assignment was to write a blog entry about different ways in which a blind person could access books. "I know you're a reader and a writer, so I think you can do this well," Blind Abilities Director Jeff Thompson told her.

The response to Jessica's blog entry was overwhelmingly positive. "Jeff came to me the next day and said, 'Guess what you're going to be doing more of?' And I've been writing blogs ever since," she said.

"I've absolutely loved working here at SSB. Being part of a team that's accomplishing something is very important to me, and we certainly have that here. More than that, though, I love communicating with people to say things that don't often get said."

To find out more about Blind Abilities, visit their website at www.blindabilities.com.

Meet Magers & Quinn Booksellers

One of SSB's most fulfilling partnerships is with a well-known bookseller in Minneapolis' Uptown neighborhood, one with a long tradition of community outreach and involvement.

Magers & Quinn Booksellers is Minneapolis' largest independently-owned bookstore. The store opened in August 1994 and celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2019. Magers & Quinn has 8,000 square feet of sales space, 10,000 square feet of storage space, and an inventory of approximately 250,000 books.

Mary Magers is one of the managers of Magers & Quinn. "My father Denny loves books and is an eternal entrepreneur," she said. "About thirty years ago he came across a truckload of second-hand books. He realized he could sell these books to several of his sales contacts in Europe. Shortly after that a used and antiquarian book store in the Stadium Village neighborhood in Minneapolis became available, and he took that over. We ran several smaller 'pop-up' book stores around the area, and then our current location became available in 1994."

"We started out in used books, and then added new books. We're one of the few stores in the country that does both. It gives us greater inventory and allows more competitive pricing."

SSB's partnership with Magers & Quinn started about ten years ago when former Radio Talking Book supervisor Stuart Holland began working with Gary Mazzone, Magers & Quinn's outreach and sales director. Mazzone created and built partnerships with local organizations. He and Holland began acquiring new titles and "advance review" copies of recently-published books. The partnership continues today, as booksellers meet with RTB staff and recommend titles that listeners will enjoy.

Working with RTB is only one way that Magers & Quinn participates in the community. "Often an organization will host an author's presentation, and ask us to make his or her books available for purchase," said Magers. "Recent memorable events were with the American Association of University Women and the Economic Club of Minnesota."

"We also work with early literacy programs. We had a school group come in for a tour, and kids had so many great discussions about books that we thought: wouldn't it be fun to have students become booksellers for a day? We reached out to a school we work with, and it was a success. We plan to reach out to more."

Magers said that the staff is enthusiastic about community partnerships. "We don't just sell retail. We have a team that works with organizations to meet their unique needs, making it as easy as possible," she said. "We can be competitive with bigger chains and online sellers to meet their needs."

"Without independent booksellers, choices would be very narrow. We're happy to have the support of a very book-friendly community."

Magers & Quinn Booksellers is located at 3038 Hennepin Avenue in Minneapolis. You can find out more at their website, **www.magersandquinn.com**.



Meet Volunteer Braille Services

An enduring partnership between SSB and Volunteer Braille Services (VBS) in Golden Valley, Minnesota empowers those who are blind or visually impaired to reach their full potential.

“Braille is about literacy, and literacy is for everyone,” said Jay Maruska, SSB’s Braille supervisor. “Learning braille prepares students for a lifetime of literacy, and is a pathway to maximum independence and meaningful careers. Braille literacy is paramount to employability, and our partnership with VBS is key to providing that.”

SSB and VBS have been partners for more than thirty years. VBS serves as a formal consultant to SSB for formatting material that is to be transcribed into braille. The partnership includes:

- Responding to formatting questions from SSB’s braille transcribers.
- Maintaining up-to-date knowledge of changing braille format requirements.
- Consulting with SSB staff about changes not addressed in the braille textbook code.
- Transcribing Nemeth code (mathematical and scientific notation) as requested, including tactile input.

VBS provides a six-month braille transcriber training course, free of charge. This training is a prerequisite to apply for the National Library Service’s (NLS) certification in Unified English Braille (UEB), the 2016 official braille code for the United States. In addition, VBS prepares braille materials for individuals, school districts, non-profit organizations, restaurants, and more.

Maruska said SSB’s partnership with VBS is integral to providing services, most notably



the transcription of K-12 textbooks for the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). Future collaborations being discussed with VBS are a Certified Braille Transcriber course at the Communication Center in St. Paul, and a prison braille program in connection with MINNCOR Industries.

VBS is led by a Board of Directors, individuals dedicated to continuing the traditions begun in 1968. Coordinator Cindi Laurent and past President Dorothy Worthington have extensive experience in braille transcription, instruction, and education. Both participate locally and nationally with the National Braille Association (NBA) and The Braille Authority of North America (BANA), which provides prison braille programs.

VBS also hosts the “Very Bumpy Stories” library, a print/braille and bound-volume library of more than 1,500 titles. Though aimed at children and young adults, grown-up readers will also find books that are worth a read. Membership is open to any individual, school district, and organization within the U.S. Annual membership is \$10 for individuals and \$25 for schools and organizations; and members can order books online, by email, or by phone.

VBS is located at 1710 Douglas Drive, Golden Valley, MN. Find out more at their website, www.vbsmn.org.

Meet Our Multi-Talented Volunteers

We appreciate each of our more than 600 volunteers. Here are those who achieved a milestone in 2018:

5-Year Volunteers

- Melissa Barnes
- Marian Bluhm
- Heather Brandborg
- Rebekka Bucholz
- Linda Cannon
- Maureen Creason
- Charlotte Czarnechi
- Ann Dickey
- Linda Gail
- Philip Habeeb
- Vi (Michael) Haldeman
- Greg Harren
- Patricia Haswell
- John Holden
- Mary Jo Hustoles
- Annette Jaros
- Candace Kash
- Connie Krusemark
- Beth Lammer
- Becky Larson
- Steve LaTour
- Christine Lundquist
- Kathy Maegerlein
- Dianne Mandernach
- Susan Marino
- Janelle Mattson
- Robert Million II
- Stephanie Million
- Andrea Mirenda
- Mary Mollico
- Kayla Montgomery
- Rachel O'Brien

- Miguel Paz
- Stacey Petersen
- Michael Piscitelli
- Bobbi Ready
- Martha (Marti) Riley
- Richard Rowson
- Shirley Ruby
- Jim Sessler
- Roberta Shapiro
- Jim Sloan
- Jerry Smith
- Steven Thayer
- Rita Vavrosky
- Cynthia (Cindy) Weisert
- Beth Wicklund

10-Year Volunteers

- Kristin Almquist
- Miranda Attlesey
- Al Barthel
- John Beal
- Mark Dickey
- John Grape
- Mary Hanson
- Nathan Hunter
- Liz Husfeldt
- Andrew Judson
- John Mandernach
- Barb Miller
- William Patnaude
- Stevie Ray
- Jana Ristamaki
- Joean Schmidt

- Joyce Skogstad
- Amy Vanderscheuren
- Diane Volden
- Ron Volden
- Melissa Weiman
- Linda Westrom
- Virginia Winters

15-Year Volunteers

- Jim Ahler
- Heidi Ash
- Bette Blaisdell
- Sally Browne
- Scott Brush
- Marlis Cran
- Paul Glaesemann
- Nancy Hanson
- Byron Johnson
- Patricia Kovel-Jarboe
- Sandra Leake
- Ilze Mueller
- Annette Plante
- John Potts
- Michele Potts
- John Rollins
- Lloyd Schallberg
- Julie Schuster
- Ron Tabar
- Patti Tryhus
- Sandra Williams

20-Year Volunteers

- Patricia Berg

- Walt Blue
- John Gunter
- Carol McPherson

25-Year Volunteers

- James Brodtmann
- Arlan Dohrenburg
- John Marsicano
- Judy Nims
- Bev Norlin
- Virginia Paulson

30-Year Volunteers

- Frank Blomgren
- Linda Horton
- Lambert Krinke
- Nanette Stearns
- Dorothy Worthington

40-Year Volunteers

- Thomas Clark

45-Year Volunteers

- Nan Felknor

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Every Minnesotan who can benefit from State Services for the Blind should know about our services. Please help spread the word that SSB provides blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind Minnesotans the resources and tools to achieve equality, independence, and access.

- As we've shown in this annual report, SSB's Communication Center is funded through multiple public and private partnerships. Our work as Minnesota's Accessible Reading Source depends upon the generosity of our volunteers and financial donors.
- If there's a senior citizen in your life who is losing vision due to macular degeneration, glaucoma, or some other cause, we're here for them. The Aging Eyes Initiative partners with community programs and organizations throughout Minnesota to help seniors adjust to vision loss. Email us at aging.eyes@state.mn.us, call us at 651-539-2276, or visit us at www.mn.gov/deed/ssb/seniors/aging-eyes.jsp.
- When you visit your ophthalmologist or optometrist, ask if he or she knows that SSB has the knowledge, services, and resources to help patients with significant vision loss to live well after diagnosis.
- If you are an employer, talk with our business relations team about finding the candidate who can be your next great hire. SSB has a pool of job-seekers with skills and experience to fill a diverse range of positions.
- If you love the written and spoken word, check out the range of volunteer possibilities by visiting us at www.MNSSB.org.

**SSB is now part of GiveMN,
which you can visit at
mn.gov/deed/ssbdonate**



EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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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www.mnssb.org

An equal opportunity employer and program provider.
Upon request, this information can be made available
in alternate formats for individuals with disabilities.