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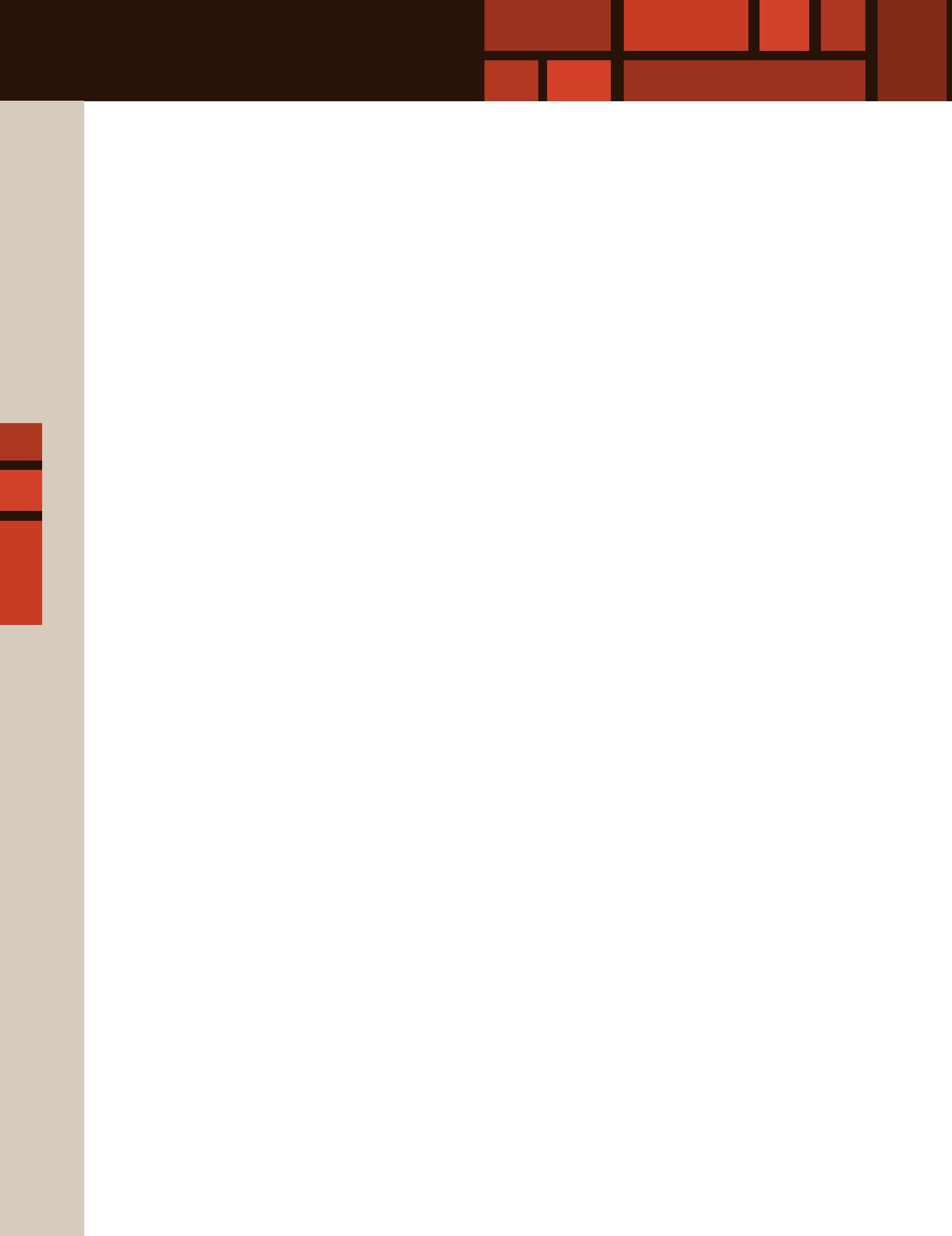
— M I N N E S O T A —

# State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

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2014 ANNUAL REPORT

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# State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

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

November 2014

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

**Dear Governor Dayton:**

In 2014, the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind continued its work to ensure that blind, DeafBlind and visually impaired Minnesotans had the best resources available to pursue their goals of employment, independence and access to information. The 17 members of the council take seriously their role of oversight of the programs and services of State Services for the Blind (SSB). This year, we took a number of significant steps that will result in more timely, effective and relevant services for our constituents.

The committee reports that follow provide a picture of the role of our council in the ongoing work of SSB. In addition to the work of its committees, the council met 6 times during the year to review the work of the agency and provide oversight and guidance.

**Staffing**

At the end of 2013, the council extended thanks to Richard Strong for his leadership upon his retirement as director of SSB. In March, we welcomed Carol Pankow as she began her work as SSB's new director.

At our March meeting, Carol set out for us her road map for strengthening the programs of SSB. We believe that the edition of two deputy directors with oversight of programs and operations will strengthen agency effectiveness. We welcome Jon Benson and Brianna Holeman as they begin their new work in these positions. The council also affirms the director's appointment of six working groups to implement improvements in the areas of intake, data collection and analysis, outreach, placement, assistive technology, and the creation of a team model for employment services.

## **Listening to Customers**

The heart of our work as a council is to guide the work of SSB to better serve the needs of our customers. In 2014, the council took action to improve the feedback we collect from customers in order to refine services. We heard directly from blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind Minnesotans about their experiences using SSB services. A major re-design of the Customer Satisfaction survey means we will collect more relevant and useful information to hone services and monitor vendors. More importantly, the personal stories shared by a college student, a children's book author and learning specialist, and a small business owner, gave us insight into the breadth and scope of the aspirations of the Minnesotans who turn to SSB for services.

## **Serving Seniors**

Throughout the year the council, along with members of the general public attending council meetings, provided input on the major program re-design of services to seniors. SSB is working to develop the necessary infrastructure to meet the expanding needs of seniors in the coming decades. The council heard presentations on the commissioned report of the Humphrey School of Public Policy outlining potential redesign options to meet this expanding need. This careful evaluation of options and strategic planning will lay the foundation that will ensure that Minnesotans continue to enjoy the high quality of life that is a hallmark of our state, and save state revenue by ensuring that seniors will remain independent in their homes for as long as possible.

## **Minnesotans at Work and at Home**

The 116 customers who found or retained meaningful employment this year, the 3,223 seniors who achieved greater personal independence through SSB services, and the 13,000 Minnesotans who turned to the Communication Center for timely access to information, add to the growing number of blind, visually impaired or DeafBlind Minnesotans contributing to our communities. The 116 customers who found work or who were able to keep the job they had, represent a 43 percent increase in successful employment closures since 2011. The number of seniors served in this past year was also up by 20 percent. Changes in the Communication Center, including a database overhaul, ensure that services provided are as robust as ever.

## **In School, At Work, Out in the Community**

SSB customers contribute to a thriving Minnesota, such as the student who reads course materials transcribed at the Communication Center, the young adult in the Transitions Program who learns about career and education options, the job-seeker who lands that first job, and the senior who is adjusting to vision loss by learning the skills to remain independent. The pages that follow will demonstrate the ways in which the SRC-B worked throughout 2014 to create a better SSB for a better Minnesota.

Respectfully submitted by  
Michael O'Day, Council Chair

## Mission and Vision

### **Mission Statement for the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind**

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

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

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

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

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

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



*Back Row (Left to Right): Carol Pankow, Scott Eggen, Michael O'Day, Steve Ditschler, Rob Hobson, Jeff Thompson, Angela Christle*

*Middle Row (Left to Right): Rachel Magario, Kristin Oien, Jeff Mihelich, Ken Rogers, Jennifer Dunnam, Steve Jacobson*

*Front Row (Left to Right): Jamie Taylor, Frances Whetstone, Gloria LaFriniere*



Dan Bernstrom and Family

### The Good Life

Dan Bernstrom is a happy man. He's up before dawn every day writing. He has written one children's book, which will come out from Harper Collins sometime next year, and has several more in the pipeline.

Then he's off to his day job as the coordinator of the learning lab at Southeast Technical College. In addition to managing the lab, Dan puts in several hours tutoring students in a wide range of subjects. "It can be challenging, especially in subjects I don't know as well, but it is always satisfying."

In the evenings, Dan often has parenting responsibilities for his 17-month old daughter, Lavonne. Dan and his wife will have a new baby in the family soon. Even with this busy schedule, Dan is grateful for all of it. "It's a simple life," he reflects, "but I am very happy with it."

Dan even appreciates paying taxes, "Working with SSB showed me the value of the services available to Minnesotans," he says, "and I'm glad to give back."

Not too many years ago, Dan could not imagine that any of these ordinary pieces of a satisfying life would ever come his way. In high school and college, Dan experienced dramatic changes in his vision. He has a degenerative condition called Juvenile X-Linked Retinoschisis, which, like Macular Degeneration, is characterized by a deterioration of the central vision. As his sight worsened, much

that Dan took for granted, such as driving a car or reading a book, began to slip from him.

Like many people who lose vision, Dan alternated between denial and fear. "More and more, my transportation options narrowed," Dan remembers. "First, I couldn't drive at night. Then, I couldn't drive when it was rainy or foggy. Then, I nearly hit someone, and it was so terrifying to me that I quit on my own."

Even so, Dan wasn't quite ready to admit the extent of his vision loss to his friends. "I would say that I forgot my glasses, or that I just didn't like driving. I would depend on others for rides. I had no idea how to get around on my own."

With the steady loss of functional vision, Dan could only imagine a bleak future. "I didn't see how I

could do anything. How could I apply for a job? How could I date? Who would go out with me? How would I be able to live?"

In college, Dan's deteriorating vision began to seriously impede his school work. "As my functionality began to drop, it would take me longer and longer to take tests. I was struggling to read. That's when I realized I couldn't keep running away from this much longer."

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."

"I learned how to do things I never imagined doing," Dan continued, "We went out in the woods and cut down our own Christmas tree, then brought it home and decorated it. I learned how to cook, how to clean, how to get around. I did everything wearing the blindfold so I had no vision, and I learned how to appreciate life without seeing at all."

Dan shared a telling example of the difference that adjustment to blindness training made for him. "Before I started the program, I had applied to ten graduate schools and didn't get in to any of them.

But when I applied after I had learned how to use technology and not depend on my failing vision, I applied to two schools I was really interested in and was accepted at both."

On his way to becoming a published author, Dan enrolled in the Master of Fine Arts program at Hamline University in St. Paul. There he received the Critical Thesis Award in the writing program. "I actually found I was way ahead of my classmates," Dan remembers, "because I was taking the bus everywhere and always reading while I was waiting for the bus or riding."

In his final year of school, Dan wanted to push himself to make sure he could balance both work and writing. He found work as a tutor and an evening job as a custodian. It added another hour of bus time, and a two-mile walk, but the grueling schedule and the self-discipline gave him the confidence to know he could meet the challenges he set for himself.

Even so, after graduating from Hamline, finding fulltime work wasn't easy. He met prospective employers who were unsure that he could do the job with his limited vision. "I've learned to be completely up front about my vision," Dan says, "I tell people what I learned to do getting around downtown Minneapolis wearing sleep shades. I'd ask folks to give me the chance to prove what I can do."

Now Dan is proving what he can do every day. "It's a pretty simple life," Dan says of his days of writing, working, and spending time with his family, "but it's a good one."

# Message from Director Pankow



## Message from Director Pankow

### Dear Members of the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind:

Since stepping in to the position of Director of SSB in March of 2014, it has been a pleasure to partner with the council as we work together to provide blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind Minnesotans with the resources and services to find jobs, build careers, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. I have benefited from the feedback and guidance the council has offered, both formally in its actions and informally through conversations with individual members. I have taken the headings from our 2015 RSA goals to organize my reflections on the work of SSB in 2014.

#### **Jobs, More Jobs, Better Jobs**

**JOBs** — The 116 customers of our Workforce Development team who found a job or were able to keep their jobs this year took positions in a diverse range of fields. A partial list of those positions include: accountant, animal breeder, clinical counselor, computer systems manager, custodian, dietetic technician, elementary school teacher, financial analyst, fitness trainer, market research analyst, physical therapist, realtor, registered nurse and software engineer.

**MORE JOBS** — The number of successful job closures this year is up 15 percent from 2013, and that year's total ran 20 percent above 2012.

**BETTER JOBS** — The average wage for these closures is \$17.37 which compares to \$15.48 from the prior year, and \$14.30 from two years back. That's a 21 percent increase over two years.

#### **SSB: A Resource within Reach**

Every day we work to ensure that every Minnesotan who needs our services knows about our services; that every customer gets what they need in the time they need it; and that customers

get connected through SSB to the tools and resources they need in order to live with greater independence and dignity.

**AGENCY-WIDE** — We created six work groups to make structural recommendations in the areas of assistive technology, data analysis, intake, outreach, placement and staff collaboration (team modeling.)

I am pleased that a number of our council members serve on these work groups.

The work groups will make preliminary recommendations at the close of calendar year 2014 and will continue their work into 2015.

**SENIOR SERVICES** — Having thoroughly reviewed the recommendations in the commissioned report of the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, we are already putting in place new practices that will ensure that we will be able to meet the increase in need for our services. We have already made improvements in providing technology training to seniors, and we are developing more robust and flexible models for serving more seniors in all areas of the state.

## Message from Director Pankow

**COMMUNICATION CENTER** — Innovations in our Communication Center mean that customers now have more ways to get the information they need in a form that works for them:

- New podcasts created by the Radio Talking Book and posted on our website for job seekers has generated tremendous interest and helped to increase the number of visitors to our archived RTB programming.
- Our braille section is preparing for a major overhaul of the braille code which will affect all aspects of braille production. The braille team is also at work to find cost-effective ways to harness the power of 3-D printing to create useful tactile images for customers.
- In addition to transcribing 140,000 pages of print material in to audio, our audio services team scaled up its capacity to provide material in e-text formats to better meet the diverse needs of customers.
- Mostly behind the scenes, our engineering staff maintains 23,000 pieces of equipment including repairs made for customers.

### SSB: A Great Place to Work

Council members have been involved in all aspects of SSB's work and it's that kind of commitment and dedication that makes working at SSB so rewarding. The council gives us direct feedback from customers, consumers and constituents, and that feedback is critical to what we do. This year, we reconfigured our staffing to be a more agile, streamlined and customer-driven agency. We brought on Jon Benson as deputy director for program services and Brianna Holeman as deputy director of administrative services. Their oversight will help ensure that we're on target to meet the ambitious goals we've set for ourselves.

Joining the council as they do their work at their regular meetings, or talking one-on-one with council members, reminds me again of what this work is all about. The SRC-B keeps it real for us — connecting our work with the hopes and aspirations of a diverse community that is making a difference all across Minnesota.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

### COMMUNICATION CENTER COMMITTEE

The product of this committee consists of reports to the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind containing specific strategies for increasing and improving Communication Center services. During FFY 2014, the Communication Center Committee met four times to receive updates and offer input on the projects, staffing changes, and other ongoing work of the Communication Center.

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

Listed below are highlights and accomplishments of the Communication Center and this committee in FFY 2014:

**SUPPORT THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN IN MINNESOTA SCHOOLS** — The Communication Center continues to provide braille and audio textbooks to blind students through an interagency agreement with the Minnesota Department of Education. This reduces the need for school districts to provide this kind of support for their blind students directly and increases the efficiency of service by creating materials common to multiple school districts one time.

**EVOLUTION OF TEXTBOOK PRODUCTION** — During this past year, there has been an increase in the production of books in electronic format, which can be delivered sooner and accessed on different types of devices. In some cases, the same book can be read in braille or read with high-quality synthesized speech. DAISY markup allows direct access to chapters and pages, much as one can do with a printed text.

#### **SUPPORT OF NATIONAL LIBRARY SERVICE**

**FUNCTIONS** — The Communication Center is the agency in Minnesota that distributes and repairs the equipment used to read books from the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), a division of the Library of Congress. For some time, an effort has been underway to allow more efficient service delivery by using common software for tracking of customer information and by allowing the staff from either to handle incoming inquiries. This work is now very close to complete.

#### **MODERNIZATION OF THE RADIO TALKING BOOK SERVICE**

**SERVICE** — In addition to making the operation of this service more efficient, new methods of getting programs to customers have been developed and expanded. Programs are archived on a secure web site and can be accessed by customer at times that fit their schedules. Also, programs can now be delivered on NLS digital cartridges, playable on the new National Library Service digital machines which, as noted above, the Communication Center distributes. The process that makes books recorded for the Radio Talking Book broadcasts available through the Minnesota Braille and Talking Book Library on cartridge is now in full operation. This makes the efforts of the Communication Center available to more customers.

**BRAILLE PRODUCTION** — Huge numbers of print pages were converted to braille and audio to support Minnesota students in K-12 and in post-secondary institutions. Over 825,000 braille pages were produced directly or distributed from other sources during this year. This effort has a direct impact on the quality of education of blind Minnesotans and, ultimately, their potential for employment.

**SPECIAL PROJECTS** — An effort was begun during this past year to have the committee work with the Communication Center on special projects that could benefit from the involvement of its customers. Examples of

projects that were discussed include the development of an alternative radio talking book service in languages other than English, further expansion of the delivery of Radio Talking Book programming through streaming technologies, and discussion of strategies to implement the new Unified English Braille standard which becomes effective in 2016.

## **■ INCREASING THE COMMUNICATION CENTER'S CATALOG PRESENCE**

**CATALOG PRESENCE** — During 2013, work was begun to make the content of the Communication Center's library visible in a standard library cataloging system. While these books are only available to those with a reading disability, it will allow searches to be executed from standard library interfaces.

## **■ NFB-NEWSLINE AND DIAL-IN NEWS SERVICE**

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

### Fundraising Activities

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

### Annual Volunteer Recognition Events

The Communication Center conducted the annual volunteer recognition events to applaud the work of nearly 700 volunteers who make possible much of the work of the Communication Center. This year, the major event honoring current volunteers was a murder mystery play and luncheon. Almost three hundred people enjoyed this event, which is funded by the Hamm Family Fund of the Saint Paul Foundation, to recognize the importance of volunteers to the success of this program.

### National and International Involvement

During the year, staff and committee members were involved in a number of national and international activities including: the DAISY Consortium, National Braille Association, and the Braille Authority of North America. The supervisor of the Communication Center's Radio Talking Book section, Stuart Holland, has been serving as the president of the International Association of Audio Information Services, IAAIS.

Respectfully submitted by Steve Jacobson

#### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

Steve Jacobson — Chair, Elizabeth Bruber, Catherine Durivage, Jeff Mihelich, Jennifer Moeller, Kristin Oien, Carla Steinbring, Ryan Strunk, Renee Youngberg

#### **SSB STAFF:**

Dave Andrews, Gwen Bighley, Angela Bodensteiner, Stuart Holland, Donna Marhoun, Hal Schardin, Annette Toews

# Committee Reports

## DEAFBLIND COMMITTEE

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

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

- Due to some unforeseen circumstances, the response rate for the DeafBlind Survey 2013 was very low — only 15 responses. The committee proposed that SSB resend the survey in May of 2014. As a result, DeafBlind customers from Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2013 will be added to the current list of customers.
- The committee spent time working with the chairperson of the Transition Committee, Wendy Devore. After hearing the priorities for the Transition Committee, the discussion focused on ways the two committees could work together. Two areas were identified:
  1. Continue to simplify the English in SSB and education documents to make it easier for English Language Learners (ELL) and families to understand the information provided to students; and
  2. Begin a search for models in other states for ideas on providing an employment interaction for transition-age students.

The discussion ended on a positive note of continued collaboration between the two committees.

■ The committee chose a document to simplify the English. The document was: "Choosing Adjustment to Blindness Training". The document was completed and the committee voted unanimously to approve the simplified English version and forward it to the Workforce Development Unit.

■ The committee worked on an improved version of the DeafBlind brochure. There will be an accessible PDF version of the brochure, along with a text only version on the SSB website, as well as a printed version for distribution. The following locations were recommended by the committee for distribution sites once the brochure is updated and printed:

1. Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services offices throughout Minnesota
2. Minnesota DeafBlind Project Office
3. Commission Serving Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Persons office
4. DeafBlind Services Minnesota (DBSM)
5. Stonearch Employment Solutions, LLC
6. Other organizations serving deaf, DeafBlind and hard of hearing Minnesotans

■ We heard presentations from:

1. Cathy Lyle and Deanna Rothbauer about the DeafBlind Project.
2. Mary Hartnett from the Minnesota Commission serving Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans (MCDHH) about the 5-Year Strategic Plan.

The Plan is not completely finished yet, in terms of writing up the final results. The commission held many focus groups around the state and with various stakeholders, such as DeafBlind, seniors, teachers, etc. In addition to the focus groups, a statewide survey was sent out to 600 people. Three hundred people responded to the survey.

The commission wanted to hear from stakeholders what different groups felt was important for MCDHH to work on for the next five years.

- a. One of the goals of the MCDHH 5-year strategic plan states that children who are deaf, DeafBlind and hard of hearing will graduate with skills on par with their hearing peers. MCDHH and their partner agencies will continue to work on the Collaborative Education Plan. SSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Katy Thorpe is part of the collaborative working on the Transition piece of this plan. MCDHH will be seeking someone from the DeafBlind Project to also be a part of this collaboration. Katy will be able to provide periodic updates on the activities of this collaboration and bring back to the MCDHH meetings any recommendations from the DeafBlind Committee.
- b. Another goal was to increase employment opportunities for people who are deaf, DeafBlind and hard of hearing. The Governor has released his executive order stating that Minnesota will hire at least 7 percent of new state employees with disabilities. This is a big step forward in increasing employment for people with disabilities.
- c. Another goal for MCDHH is to advocate for age-related hearing loss to be viewed as a public health issue. The discussion here revolved around the fact that there has been a spike in hearing loss for young adults between the ages of 18-24 due to the ear buds everyone is using today.
- d. The question was raised regarding training for SSB counselors in recognizing the signs and symptoms of hearing loss in customers. SSB does have a procedure in place for determining hearing loss. Hearing issues are addressed first at intake. If the person self-discloses, that individual will be referred to Katy for further assessment.

e. Counselors are provided with an annual review on the signs and symptoms of gradual hearing and/or vision loss. If this is noticed later in the rehabilitation process, steps will be taken by the counselor to further assess the impact of this loss on the customer's vocational rehabilitation process.

f. The committee will continue to get updates regarding the MCDHH 5-year strategic plan and offer any suggestions for further action to the commission. In this way, the DeafBlind Committee will play a role in helping MCDHH carry out its plan.

3. Carol Pankow the new director of State Services for the Blind.

Carol worked for the Department of Human Services (DHS) for 25 years in the area of community-based services. In 2005, she worked for a non-profit organization for 18 months before moving to the Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI). She came to SSB as the Workforce Development Unit (WFD) director, then moved to be the Administrative Services Unit (ASU) director for the past two years.

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

Respectfully submitted by Lynette Boyer

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

Lynette Boyer — Chair, Adrienne Haugen, Debbie Lentz, Cathy Lyle, Chris Marble, Michael O'Reilly, Jamie Taylor

**SSB STAFF:**

Lindsey Hanson, Natasha Lemler, Linda Lingen, Katy Thorpe

# Committee Reports

## EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

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

The Employment Committee met on the following dates during FY 2014: 11/6/13, 1/16/14, 3/13/14, 5/15/14 and 7/17/14.

### *Survey of WDU Staff on Barriers in Placing Blind Clients*

At our November 2013 meeting, the employment subcommittee discussed various barriers that blind clients face in gaining employment. The committee decided to survey WDU staff to find out from those directly involved in the placement process what barriers they face in successfully placing blind clients. With that information, the employment subcommittee would be in a better position to meet its charge to "provide advice and propose strategies to increase the quantity and quality of employment outcomes for individuals served by SSB".

In January 2014, the employment subcommittee approved the survey developed by WDU supervisory staff. The survey questions sent to WDU staff for their input were:

- 1.** Please list the top three barriers to employment that you feel SSB job seekers most commonly face.
- 2.** Next, list the solution that was used to address the barrier.
- 3.** If no solution for the barrier has been identified, what do you propose?

### *Results of the Survey*

In April 2014, the committee received the results of the survey. Of the 19 employees in the WDU who were sent the survey, 14 responded. The committee focused its attention on the "Proposed Solutions" section of Table 2 of the document. The proposed solutions identified by WDU staff were:

- 1.** Better employer education to eliminate job discrimination.
- 2.** Provide relevant and quality information to employers related to misconceptions about blindness and vision loss.
- 3.** Balance paper/computer work with the person/consumer.
- 4.** Increase consumer/counselor working alliances and increase access to employed role models to improve consumer desire/passion for work.
- 5.** Help customers gain skills needed for today's job market.
- 6.** Increase use of volunteers within WDU, similar to how the Communication Center uses volunteers.
- 7.** Put more pressure on manufacturers to make their software accessible.
- 8.** Form consumer groups to petition for better transportation options.
- 9.** Create more reliable transportation systems.

In May, we reviewed the "Proposed Solutions" cited above and discussed a couple of possible recommendations/guidance in more detail. The first discussion centered around a possible recommendation to evaluate the amount of time counselors spend on paperwork compared to meeting with clients, to see if efficiencies can be gained through streamlining the amount of paperwork or reconfiguring how paperwork is processed.

The other item that received considerable discussion during the May meeting related to education of clients on the labor market and job search techniques, perhaps through the use of volunteers. This might include education around dealing with on-line application processes, improving interviewing skills, managing questions related to accommodations, proper etiquette during the interview and on the job, etc.

During the July meeting, the committee continued its discussion on education of clients on the labor market and job search techniques and what that process might look like. There was more discussion of how volunteers might be used in the process and some of the drawbacks, such as time spent training volunteers and ensuring quality control. There was also a discussion of the limitations of classroom-type training for those clients outside the Twin Cities.

The committee also discussed the proposed solution of reducing the paperwork burden faced by counselors, so they could spend more time with clients. The committee decided to propose that the full SRC-B board pass a resolution to have the WDU look into the paperwork reduction issue more thoroughly. The following statement was approved by the employment subcommittee and forwarded to the full board for action at its August meeting. It read as follows:

## **BACKGROUND:**

The Employment Subcommittee of the SRC-B has been working on providing appropriate guidance to SSB on measures that would support improved employment outcomes for blind clients. We have asked the Workforce Development Unit to provide feedback on barriers that they encounter when trying to place blind clients in jobs. One of the areas of feedback from staff was that WDU staff felt the need to

"balance paper/computer work with the person/consumer," meaning that they were spending a great deal of time on paper and computer work at the expense of spending time with the client.

## **RESOLUTION**

Therefore, the Employment Subcommittee recommends that SSB look at the administrative burden placed on WDU staff to determine if any can be eliminated, streamlined, or processed in a more efficient manner. We believe this is an ideal time for this analysis since there appears to be plans to reorganize the work in the unit. We also recommend periodic reports to the Employment Subcommittee on the progress of this analysis.

The full board passed this resolution at its August meeting.

Respectfully submitted by

### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

Michael O'Day — Chair, Angela Christle, Ken Rogers, Chris Marble, Dick Davis, Emily Zitek, Steve Ditschler, Lisa Vala

### **SSB STAFF:**

Mike Newman, Pam Gowan

# Committee Reports

## MINORITY OUTREACH COMMITTEE

It is paramount that every eligible person receives quality services from State Services for the Blind. To deliver this high quality service, staff must understand that new potential customers may not all share the same values or have the same expectations for blind, DeafBlind and visually impaired individuals.

With that in mind, we spent the first part of the year learning about and formulating plans to better serve customers whose first language is not English. Two people deserve special thanks for their work in developing information for teaching blind persons English. Sharon Monthei is a former teacher of English language learners at BLIND, Inc. where they focus on teaching English without pictures. Linda Lingen, longtime member of SSB's staff, has invaluable experience of outreach to culturally diverse communities throughout Minnesota. Together, these women wrote guidelines which now appear on the SSB internal website and aid SSB staff in reaching out to all Minnesotans interested in blindness.

The other concern for this committee in the past year has been to explore the regrettable possibility that people are falling through the cracks of bureaucracy and not receiving the services that would be the most helpful to them. After much discussion, we are endeavoring to answer the following questions:

- How many SSB customers are from minority backgrounds?
- How many people who inquire about services do not complete the process of establishing eligibility and how many of them are part of a minority group?
- What percentage of minority customers find employment? What are the main reasons given

by those who do not complete SSB programs to become employed?

- Are there outreach activities in which we could engage to improve our successes?

We are just beginning to explore these issues. Many thanks to last year's committee for raising these issues to which we will find answers that will ensure we are an agency that helps all blind, DeafBlind and visually impaired adults find the success they want and deserve.

Respectfully submitted by Judy Sanders

### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

Judy Sanders — Chair (Connie Lee Berg was unable to complete her term as chair.), Candice Chapman, Sheila Koenig, Sharon Monthei, Jamie Taylor

### **SSB STAFF:**

Linda Lingen, Jannae Hanson-Parkes, Meredith Larson

## SENIOR SERVICES COMMITTEE

The Senior Services Committee exists to assist State Services for the Blind in order to improve and expand services to blind, visually impaired, or DeafBlind Minnesotans who are not interested in employment. The majority of this group is seniors. These customers face significant barriers to independence, but they can benefit from services which help maintain or increase their independence. Activities include identifying unmet needs, recommending services necessary to meet these needs and identifying strategies to remove or reduce barriers to their independence.

The Senior Services Committee met four times during the past year with excellent attendance by all members. Our primary concern always is making certain that SSB is providing superior services to its elderly and independent living customers WITH ADEQUATE FUNDING. Committee members eagerly receive regular reports from Ed Lecher, former Director Richard Strong and Director Carol Pankow. We were pleased that funding during the most recent legislative session remained at fairly acceptable figures to permit services to remain fairly stable.

We look forward to continuing our committee work during the next fiscal year with special emphasis placed on providing feedback and advice related to the recommendations laid out in the study conducted by the Humphrey Institute of the University of Minnesota.

In the last year SSU got a grant to purchase various equipment items.

SSU has been approved for a new tech position. Half of this position's time will be devoted to training. Other duties will include performing tech assessments, installing adaptive software, troubleshooting as well as providing group or individual training.

This employee will be able to supplement the current 10 hour cap of contracted training of assistive technology per the administrative rule.

### Outreach and Marketing

Lisa Larges started in July of 2013 as the Outreach and Marketing Coordinator. Lisa loves working with the Senior Services Unit and is going to Senior Expos in every county, as well as speaking to assisted living facilities, senior condominiums and independent living facilities.

The following are a few things Lisa is working on for outreach:

- creating a data base of resources to include parish nurses, block nurse programs and Home Health Care Companies for future mailings;
- looking into ways of promoting the Radio Talking Book because of the overlap with Senior Services Unit;
- contacting ophthalmologists and optometrists regarding their requirement to notify all legally blind patients about Services for the Blind;
- submitting an article for publication in an upcoming edition of Physician's Journal;
- having a table at the upcoming Gerontological Society conference; and
- contacting the Federation Senior Division on the state and national level for new ideas.

### Other Items

Motion was raised to recommend to the full council that additional computer training to seniors increase to 20 hours. Motion was seconded and passed. The council and the director took no action.

The Possibilities Fair is an outreach opportunity taking place August 12th at the Radisson Roseville.

This is a partnership between SSB, NFB of Minnesota and BLIND, Inc. It is an information day consisting of a guest speaker, Diane McGeorge, from Denver, Colorado as well as various vendors/staff offering information on services available.

Respectfully submitted by Amy Baron

### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

Amy Baron — Chair, Beverly Barrett, Patrick Barrett, Angela Christle, Gene Hochhalter, Bob Raisbeck, Frances Whetstone

### **SSB STAFF:**

Sue Crancer, Ed Lecher, Jean Wojahn

# Committee Reports

## TRANSITION COMMITTEE

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

### Dates the Committee Met

The Transition Committee met on the following dates during FY 2014: 9/1/13; 11/1/13; 1/17/14; 3/14/14; 6/20/14; 9/27/14

### Review of the Federal Fiscal Year 2014 (FFY14) Goals & Priorities

**PRIORITY #2.3:** Transition Services — Engage with Blind and DeafBlind transition age students and their families on an annual basis to ensure that they are made aware of SSB services and given the tools to utilize services.

The strategies for meeting this priority—

- a. **PRIORITY 1:** SSB needs to still obtain information on how many IEP meetings staff attended. Does this number need to be improved and how?
- b. **PRIORITY 2:** A survey was sent out to determine how useful the Transition Newsletter is. We had a response rate of 6 percent (6 out of 100). Out of those 6 responses, 4 people took action based on the content of the newsletter. There is a need to provide it in alternate formats, including email.
- c. **PRIORITY 3:** In the winter, there were plans for the Minority Outreach Committee and the Transition Committee to get together to do a diversity panel and workshop. There was no information on this, and further investigation needs to occur. There is a brochure that was created, but there were some comments on how busy visually it was.

d. **PRIORITY 4:** This was regarding a proposal for WDU with a focus on employment for transition. SSB is actively involved with transition kids and employment.

e. **PRIORITY 5:** The roundtable session with transition kids did not happen because the Summer Transition Program was canceled. The roundtable was supposed to occur during that time.

**TRANSITION TIMELINE:** This document has been edited as a group and has been posted to the SSB website.

### Review of the Federal Fiscal Year 2015 (FFY15) Goals & Priorities

**FFY 2015 GOALS AND PRIORITIES:** In September of 2014, committee members reviewed the FFY 2015 Goals and Priorities and identified 3 areas that pertain to the Transition Committee. The goals identified are listed below.

Committee members expressed that these goals are suggestions only and would like to hear from other committee members at our next meeting held November 7, 2014, before adopting them as goals for the Transition Committee:

- a. 4.11(d) Strategies to Achieve the SRC-B and SSB Joint Goals and Priorities FFY2015

SSB will continue to communicate with transition-age students and their families through the Transition Newsletter. The effectiveness of this Newsletter will continue to be monitored by the results of surveys and customer comments, and the newsletter will continue to evolve based on the survey results.

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

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

**STRATEGIES:**

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

**c. SECTION #3: SSB-A Great Place to Work.**

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

**STRATEGIES:**

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

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

Wendy DeVore — Chair, Elizabeth Bruber, Kristin Oien, Emily Zitek, Lisa Vala, Diane Dohnalik

**SSB STAFF:**

Mary Kolles, Chad Bowe

**VENDOR OUTCOMES COMMITTEE**

In 2014, the Vendor Outcomes Committee changed the timing of the survey, as well as some of the survey questions. In the past, the survey was administered every six months. The committee felt SSB was missing a few customers when their training ended in the beginning of the six-month period between the survey sessions. SSB will now survey once a quarter, lessening the window from a maximum of six months between the completions of Adjustment to Blindness Training to a window of no more than three months. SSB felt this would help add more to the sample.

The questions were changed to gather more information about the vendors.

The survey is split into two parts to reflect the different training programs provided by Senior Services and Workforce Development. The survey results are published in quarterly reports covering 12 months of activity. These four separate reports better reflect the needs of each unit and provide more accurate information to the users of the reports. The reports contain extensive tables for each vendor. To reduce the complexity and volume of the full table-laden reports, the committee also produced a condensed report for each service unit with explanatory text and a summary of vendor ratings according to skill area. This report can be used as an introduction to the full respective report to narrow focus on the desired training. Both reports for each unit are available in print, braille, audio, and on the SSB website so all customers, SSB staff, vendors, and the general public have access to the results. The data collected shows overall good customer satisfaction with some areas needing improvement.

SSB is currently taking and reviewing bids for a new company to administer the survey.

Respectfully submitted by  
Robert Hobson, Chair

# Committee Reports

## CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND GOALS AND PRIORITIES COMMITTEE

### Part 1 — Overview

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

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

### Part II — Customer Satisfaction Survey Review

The Committee reviewed the Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) results through March 31, 2014.

Five survey items were analyzed to compare the results for years ending 3/31/11, 3/31/12, 3/31/13 and 3/31/14. While there has been some fluctuation in results, no significant changes have taken place from year to year.

Summary	YE 3/31/11	YE 3/31/12	YE 3/31/13	YE 3/31/14
Q1: Overall satisfaction with services provided	80%	87%	84%	82%
Q2: Extent to which services have met expectations	89%	76%	77%	73%
Q3: Comparison with "ideal" set of services	81%	80%	80%	77%
Q4: Satisfied that counselor (staff) understood customer's needs	90%	88%	83%	85%
Q5: How satisfied are you with the time it usually took to get your answer	81%	79%	79%	79%

SSB's results on the Customer Satisfaction Survey are also computed by the Minnesota Department of Economic Development utilizing the Minnesota Customer Satisfaction Index (MnCSI). Simply put, this index summarizes overall satisfaction with services by applying a formula to the responses for Questions 1, 2, and 3 on the survey. Using the MnCSI makes it possible to compare the customer satisfaction ratings of SSB with those of other agencies in Minnesota and with industry in general.

Customers Served	Apr 12 – Mar 13	Jul 12 – Jun 13	Oct 12 – Sep 13	Jan 13 – Dec 13	Apr 13 – Mar 14
Average MnCSI Scores	72.4	73.3	72.8	72.7	72.4
N size	235	244	237	243	243

## Committee Reports

The committee continued to track the VR-specific questions which were added to the survey in 2010. The data for FFY14 were as follows:

Responses	Apr–Jun 13 (62)	Jul–Sep 13 (58)	Oct–Dec 13 (64)	Jan–Mar 14 (47)	
QVR1: Satisfied that customer given enough info to make good choices on employment plan	81%	84%	83%	81%	83%
QVR2: Satisfied that customer had an active role in decisions about services	90%	89%	89%	88%	89%

On the survey, each customer is asked 2 of 3 open-ended questions: "What would you like the program to START doing?" or "What would you like the program to STOP doing?" or "What would you like the program to KEEP doing?" The committee reviewed the verbatim comments in response to these open-ended questions and tracked the categories of comments receiving the four highest percentages from quarter to quarter.

### OEQ4: What would you like [SSB] to START doing?

Comments	Apr–Jun 13 (61)	Jul–Sep 13 (61)	Oct–Dec 13 (57)	Jan–Mar 14 (41)
Highest	54% (33)	Misc. 54% (30)	Help finding job 46% (26)	Misc. 44% (18)
2nd	Help finding Job 34% (21)	Staff Improvements 27% (16)	Staff Improvements 35% (20)	Staff improvements 41% (17)
3rd	Staff improvements 23% (14)	Help Finding Job 21% (12)	Misc. 32% (18)	Help finding job 24% (10)
4th	Job leads 18% (11)	Program improvements 9% (5)	Ed./Classes 16% (9)	Job Leads 7% (3)

### OEQ5: What would you like [SSB] to STOP doing?

Comments	Apr–Jun 13 (62)	Jul–Sep 13 (54)	Oct–Dec 13 (53)	Jan–Mar 14 (38)
Highest	Misc. 84% (52)	89% Misc. (48)	Misc. 66% (35)	Misc. 92% (35)
2nd	Staff issues 16% (10)	General job issues 7% (4)	General Job issues 26% (14)	General Job issues 8% (3)
3rd	General job issues 13% (8)	Process issues 7% (4)	21% (11)	Job leads 3% (1)
4th		Staff issues 2% (1)	Process issues 6% (3)	Staff issues 0% (0)

## Committee Reports

### OEQ6: What would you like [SSB] to KEEP doing?

Comments	Apr–Jun 13 (56)	Jul–Sep 13 (46)	Oct–Dec 13 (53)	Jan–Mar 14 (37)
Highest	Misc. 54% (30)	Help finding job 41% (19)	Misc. 43% (23)	Misc. 54% (20)
2nd	Help finding job 32% (18)	Staff strengths 33% (15)	Staff strengths 30% (16)	Help finding job 30% (11)
3rd	Education/Training 23% (13)	Misc. 28% (13)	Help finding job 25% (13)	Staff strengths 14% (5)
4th	Staff strengths 21% (12)	Information and resources 15% (7)	Education/Classes 15% (8)	Information and resources 14% (5)

In addition, the members of the committee also read the verbatim comments to determine if trends or issues specific to SSB arise which may not be apparent from these categories. No significant trends were identified from this data.

As a result of a legislative audit of the entire Workforce Center System which provided feedback on areas that may be underrepresented, four new questions were added to the customer satisfaction survey in July of 2010. The questions specifically examine customers' satisfaction with how services impact their vocational process (career exploration, knowledge of job seeking skills, interviewing, etc.). Some of these new questions do not apply to individuals SSB is serving because they are in early stages of the rehabilitation process.

Responses	Apr–Jun 13	Jul–Sep 13	Oct–Dec 13	Jan–Mar 14	
QS1 Satisfied that services helped customer find job *	31%	40%	40%	34%	36%
QS2 Satisfied that services helped customer with career planning *	62%	57%	56%	60%	58%
QS3 Satisfied that services helped customer connect with employers who were hiring*	28%	32%	33%	32%	31%
QS4 Satisfied that services helped customer improve job-seeking skills*	65%	62%	46%	57%	57%

\*For the complete Customer Satisfaction Survey results see:

[http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/About\\_Us/Customer\\_Satisfaction/Job\\_Seeker\\_Satisfaction/Results\\_by\\_Program\\_5.aspx](http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/About_Us/Customer_Satisfaction/Job_Seeker_Satisfaction/Results_by_Program_5.aspx)

## Part III — Progress on FFY14 Goals, Priorities, and Strategies

### **GOAL #1: IMPROVE NUMBER AND PERCENT OF CLOSED CASES ACHIEVING EMPLOYMENT AFTER RECEIVING SERVICES.**

**PRIORITY #1.1: EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES** — By the end of FFY 2014, SSB will meet RSA Indicator 1.1 by increasing for the two year period (FFY2013 and FFY 2014) the number of individuals achieving employment over the base period of FFY2011-FFY2012.

During FFY 2013 and 2014, the strategies for meeting this priority are—

4. By August 31 of each year, each counselor and their supervisor will meet to review the potential of each customer for successful employment by the end of the next FFY. Each counselor with at least two years of experience will be expected to identify at least six individuals for whom successful closure is realistic during the next FFY.

**RESULTS:** *This strategy has been completed, resulting in 116 successful employment outcomes.*

Between January 1 and January 31 of each year, supervisors and counselors will review the projections, taking into account any changes in the caseload. As appropriate, the supervisor will revise the outcome goal and customers identified as potential successful closures. Supervisors will monitor progress of designated customers toward their employment outcome during required monthly meetings with each counselor and provide assistance as needed. Recognition of counselors who met and who exceeded their individual outcomes goals will occur at the February staff meeting each year.

**RESULTS:** *Appropriate adjustments in projections were made and the yearend level of employment outcomes, set at 104, was well exceeded as we hit 116. Counselor recognition will take place after the New Year.*

5. Staff new to SSB have little, if any, experience with blindness, and a lack of understanding of the capabilities of persons competent in the skills of blindness. Therefore all new WFD staff will successfully complete Introduction to Blindness — Phase 1 and WDU staff who regularly interact directly with customers will successfully complete Phase 2 training on the essential aspects of blindness and visual impairment within three months of hire and before any caseload activity is assigned.

**RESULTS:** *Five new Program Services staff completed both phases of training.*

**PRIORITY #1.2: EMPLOYMENT RATE** — SSB's performance on RSA Indicator 1.2 will meet or exceed 68.9 percent reflecting an increase in the percentage of persons closed achieving employment after receiving services.

The strategies for meeting this priority are—

1. SSB will provide training to staff on the topic of Business Intelligence by December 31, 2013. Business Intelligence in the context of the WDU staff consists of understanding general concepts around how businesses operate, what things are important to their function and success, and how to be comfortable in business settings, culture, and language, as examples. Understanding would lead to the application of these concepts in working with customers and employers in achieving employment outcomes. SSB will implement and operationalize identified strategies of the Business Intelligence training and design a method to measure the success of identified strategies of Business Intelligence by September 30, 2014.

**RESULTS:** *Training completed. Current SSB work group looking at placement, outreach, data collection, and team model will inform the design strategies and measures.*

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2. By December 31, 2013, the SSB internal workgroup will complete the evaluation and updates to the self-employment/entrepreneurship program."

**RESULTS:** *The workgroup completed the evaluation and updates, providing staff training for the newly developed self-employment guide in January 2014.*

3. SSB will develop and implement an active strategic tool for promotion of successful outcomes for customers to include counselor training and developing expectations on case noting as part of case record documentation. A self-evaluation survey will be completed by December 31 of 2013 to measure effectiveness of the tool.

**RESULTS:** *Case documentation training completed. Employment Readiness Checklist tool developed and established in case documentation practice. Survey not developed as oversight will be part of the newly developed case review tool which is currently in a trial period and will be fully implemented in December 2014.*

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**PRIORITY #1.3: INCREASE WORK EXPERIENCE, JOB SHADOWING OPPORTUNITIES, INTERNSHIPS AND ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES** — WDU staff will aggressively pursue work experience, job shadowing opportunities, internships and enrichment activities for SSB customers.

The strategies for meeting this priority are—

1. SSB will establish a close working relationship with a large scale employer to enrich the opportunities of job shadowing, job tryouts and internships for SSB customers by February 2014.

**RESULTS:** *A working relationship has been established with Gillette Children's Hospital.*

2. By December 31, 2014, a minimum of two customers will complete a job shadow, job tryout or internship with the established employer.

**RESULTS:** *One individual completed a work trial and was subsequently hired as a full time employee.*

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**PRIORITY #1.4: INCREASE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION WITH SERVICES PROVIDED**

**WITH SERVICES PROVIDED** — By the end of FFY2014 the annual overall satisfaction with services provided by SSB will be at or above 85 percent. (Q1 on the Customer Satisfaction Survey, "What is your overall satisfaction with the services provided?" The scale is from 1 to 10 where "1" means "very dissatisfied" and "10" means "very satisfied". A response equal to or greater than "6" fall in the "satisfied" range).

The strategies for meeting this priority are—

1. Customer satisfaction surveys will be administered quarterly to approximately 70 SSB customers as part of the DEED customer satisfaction initiative. The surveys are conducted by an external organization.

**RESULTS:** *This has been met.*

2. SSB and the SRC-B Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee will continue to review and analyze the data on a quarterly basis including specific customer comments.

**RESULTS:** *This has been met and findings are shared with relevant staff as part of continuous improvement activities.*

3. By October 31st, 2013, SSB and the Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee will jointly review the effectiveness of the current survey methodology and determine any recommendations to be made to the Council.

**RESULTS:** *The entire survey was revamped and approved by the Council. The first data set was shared from the first quarter of the new survey at the last meeting of the Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities meeting.*

**PRIORITY #1.5:** Continue to ensure every customer has access to customer satisfaction information needed to make an informed choice in selecting a vendor for Adjustment To Blindness (ATB) training. During FFY 2014, all customers surveyed under strategy #1 will report they have been provided access to information they needed to make an informed choice about the provider of ATB services.

The strategies for meeting this priority are —

1. SSB and the Vendor Outcomes and Measures Committee of the SRC-B developed and implemented a customer satisfaction survey for all customers who complete adjustment to blindness training. During FFY2013, each SSB customer will be surveyed six months after completion of adjustment to blindness training or at time of case file closure, whichever comes first. Each month an estimated ten to fifteen customers will be contacted to complete the telephone survey of eighteen questions.

**RESULTS:** This strategy is on-going. Pertinent data is shared with appropriate vendors for continuous improvement purposes.

2. The data gathered from the completed customer satisfaction surveys will be formatted, posted externally on the SSB website, and made available in an accessible format for customer review when selecting a service provider to meet their rehabilitation needs. ATB providers will be able to use the results for continuous improvement of their services. The results will be reported to the SRC-B and will be used to identify customer needs and areas for service improvements.

**RESULTS:** This strategy is on-going. Information is shared with customers as part of making informed choice service decisions.

3. By October 31st, 2013, SSB and the Vendor Outcomes Committee will jointly review the effectiveness of the current survey methodology and determine any recommendations to be made to the Council.

**RESULTS:** The entire survey was revamped and approved by the council and the new survey methodology went into effect in May. The first results were given to the Vendor Outcome Committee at their last meeting.

**GOAL #2: IN THE TARGETED GROUPS, INCREASE THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED AND THE VOCATIONAL OUTCOMES ACHIEVED.**

**PRIORITY #2.1: MINORITY SERVICE RATE** — By the end of FFY2014, SSB will address RSA Indicator 2.1, as follows: The ratio of customers from the minority population exiting after receiving services under an IPE to all customers from the minority population exiting will exceed 80 percent of the same ratio calculated for customers from the non-minority population. Current (FFY2012) performance level is 0.7128.

The strategies for meeting this priority are —

1. During FFY2014, SSB staff will conduct at least four marketing and outreach activities to minority communities and inform SSB staff of current marketing and outreach activities to minority communities and strategies in serving these populations.

**RESULTS:** Marketing and outreach activities included reaching out, for example, to Hmong and African American communities with staff informed of activities, opportunities to participate in community events, and of community concerns. The following details activities:

- Gave a presentation on services provided by SSB to the Council on Black Minnesotans.
- Gave a brief presentation as well as attending the Employment Summit sponsored by the Council on Black Minnesotans which included employers from companies owned by Black Americans
- Gave a presentation on services provided by SSB to the Chicano/Latino Affairs Council
- Staffed a booth at the American Indian Wisdom Steps for elders in the Native American communities throughout Minnesota
- Participated on technical assistance discussions with the two VR 121 projects on the White Earth and Red Lake Reservations

# Committee Reports

- Participated in staffing and planning for the Hmong Resource Fair which provides information on resources to the Hmong Community throughout Minnesota.
  - Met with and provided information about SSB to an organization called Urban Ventures which provides re-entry services to mainly Black and Latino Minnesotans exiting the prison system.
  - Met with and coordinated a tour of SSB for a court interpreter/translator for the Minnesota Court System. This individual agreed to provide assistance to SSB in making inroads into the South Sudanese and East African communities.
- 2.** Guidelines to Effectively Serve Non-English Speaking SSB Customers will be completed by September 30, 2013 and posted on SSB's external and internal website, and on the Workforce Development Unit (WDU) shared drive for use by SSB staff and the public. These Guidelines will be sent out to Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs), vendors and Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs who are teaching blind customers who have English as another language. An orientation to these Guidelines will be provided during FFY2014 at WDU and Senior Services Unit (SSU) staff meetings.  
**RESULTS:** *This strategy has been completed.*
- 3.** The SSB intraweb includes information on Cultural Diversity Best Practices completed by the Minority Outreach Committee and SSB in 2009. In order to operationalize this information, a review of this web site will be conducted for WFD and SSU at their respective staff meetings during FFY2014. Any other unit requesting a review of this information will be provided such at one of their unit staff meetings during FFY2014. In addition, all new SSB staff will be oriented to this website information during their new staff training process.  
**RESULTS:** *57 staff received training and orientation during 2014.*

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**PRIORITY #2.2: DEAFBLIND OUTREACH AND SERVICE —**

Enhance effective communication between SSB and individuals who have a hearing and vision loss, including persons who are DeafBlind.

The strategies for meeting this priority are—

- 1.** All new WFD staff will receive one-on-one training on the DeafBlind Procedures Manual to include communication styles and communication issues as part of the orientation that occurs within the first three months of hire. All WFD staff will receive an annual review of the communication methods at their October staff meeting.

**RESULTS:** *This strategy has been met.*

- 2.** The Plan to increase effective communication approved at the March 14, 2011 DeafBlind Committee Meeting between counselors and DeafBlind customers will continue as written until June 2013. In June 2013, the DeafBlind needs assessment will be administered. This needs assessment will contain questions specifically designed to determine the effectiveness of the Plan to increase effective communication.

**RESULTS:** *The communication strategy is on-going. The needs assessment was completed in June 2014 – analysis is on-going at this time and is expected to be available after the New Year.*

- 3.** To increase and improve communication between DeafBlind customers and SSB, the DeafBlind Committee of the SRC-B, in cooperation with SSB, will continue to review standard written communications at least once per year to determine their effectiveness with ASL users. Additional materials will be developed as determined by the DeafBlind Committee.

**RESULTS:** *The document, "Choosing Adjustment to Blindness Training" was approved by the Committee in June 2014 as having met the standard for simplified English.*

4. Between October 1, 2012 and June 30, 2014, the collaborative efforts of SSB, Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services of the Department of Human Services to improve statewide services to DeafBlind individuals will be reported to the DeafBlind Committee by SSB's representative on the Quad-Agency Team after the annual meeting of that group. As a result of the DeafBlind needs assessment administered in June 2013, strategies for additional collaborative efforts will be developed.

**RESULTS:** Efforts are on-going: a resource fair is planned for 2015.

**PRIORITY #2.3: TRANSITION SERVICES** — Engage with Blind and DeafBlind transition age students and their families on an annual basis to ensure that they are made aware of SSB services and given the tools to utilize services.

The strategies for meeting this priority are—

1. Continue working statewide with Special Education teachers, teachers of the blind, visually impaired, or DeafBlind and other IEP team members in designated school districts to facilitate regular information meetings with SSB counselors.

**RESULTS:** Staff attended the quarterly Blind and Visually Impaired special education meetings as a forum to exchange information and plan activities. We are currently in discussion about planning summer activities specifically to address students with disabilities Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requirements.

2. A new format for communicating information about SSB to transition students and their families is in place and will continue. By March 31, 2014, the Transition Committee will identify methods to evaluate the effectiveness of communication about SSB to transition students and their families.

**RESULTS:** A twice yearly newsletter is produced and made available to parents and care-givers of students with disabilities. Feedback from families indicates the newsletter is beneficial and so it will continue as a communication tool.

3. Working collaboratively with the Minority Outreach Committee, develop outreach strategies for teachers of the blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind to provide information to students and their families from minority communities about SSB by September 30, 2014.

**RESULTS:** This strategy will be undergoing additional actions based on the Olmstead Act and WIOA criteria.

4. By December 31, 2013, SSB will identify a plan to engage with counselors, teachers, leaders, employers, businesses and community resources to focus on student employment during high school so that every student will have at least one employment interaction by September 30th, 2014. An employment interaction consists of an in-person meeting such as a job shadow, informational interview, employment interview, mentoring session, etc.

**RESULTS:** This strategy is a part of the Workforce Development Transition Timeline. As with above, this strategy will become an important part of the Olmstead Act and the WIOA.

5. By October 31, 2014, explore and make recommendations on the concept of engaging SSB student customers in a "Think Tank" committee of their own and/ or encouraging SSB student customers to join one or more of the existing committees of the Council.

**RESULTS:** This strategy was not pursued as further exploration determined that as a greater value, student participation in school and community groups, faith groups, and any other local activities that support the goals of social development, team participation, and independence are more immediate and better meet individual needs.

# Committee Reports

## *Part IV — Standards and Indicators Vocational Rehabilitation Program*

### Federal Program Evaluation Standards

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

#### **STANDARD 1: EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES**

- 1.1** The number of successful case closures compared to the preceding two years' number of successful closures.

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

### FFY 2014 SSB Performance on Standard 1 Performance Indicators

Indicator	Minimum Requirement	SSB Performance
<b>Standard 1: Employment Outcomes</b>		Meet 4 of the 6 indicators
Indicator 1.1	2	35
Indicator 1.2	68.9%	61.1%
Indicator 1.3	35.4%	96.3%
Indicator 1.4	89.0%	99.5%
Indicator 1.5	0.59	0.716
Indicator 1.6	30.4%	32.3%
<b>Standard 2: Performance Indicator</b>		
Indicator 2.1: Ratio of Minority to Non-Minority Service Rate	.80	0.88

- Performance for blind agencies is based on two years of data.
- FFY 2014 performance data is not official until approved by RSA.

Respectfully submitted by Jennifer Dunnam

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