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Minnesota State Rehabilitation
Council for the Blind



Annual Report

October 1, 2007 - September 30, 2008

Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	2
MISSION AND VISION	3
MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR.....	4
DIRECTOR’S COMMENTS	5
COMMITTEE REPORTS.....	6
Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee	6
Minority Outreach Committee	9
Vendor Outcomes and Measures Committee.....	10
DeafBlind Committee	11
Senior Services Committee.....	12
The Child Committee	13
Communication Center Committee	14
TASK FORCES	16
Technology Task Force.....	16
APPENDICES	18
Appendix I Council Members.....	18
Appendix II Council Work Plan FFY2008.....	20
Appendix III Federal Standards and Indicators	23
Appendix IV 2008 Goals and Priorities for State Services for the Blind.....	25

Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

Annual Report

Introduction

Long before it was required by federal law, blind consumers and Minnesota State Services for the Blind (SSB) recognized the wisdom of developing a partnership. In 1985, the Advisory Council for the Blind was formed. Prior to its existence in federal law, the majority of the membership of the Advisory Council for the Blind was composed of blind consumers with some representation from the business community. The Federal Government mandated the existence of a State Rehabilitation Advisory Council for the Blind in 1992 and the existing Minnesota Advisory Council for the Blind was expanded to comply with federal requirements.

In August, 1998, the Rehabilitation Act was again changed to rename this federally mandated council by deleting the word “advisory” and expanding its duties. The renamed State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B) is now asked to carry out its responsibilities after consultation with the Governor’s Workforce Development Council and in partnership with SSB. The SRC-B’s role is still advisory in relation to SSB; however, SSB’s relationship with the SRC-B is no longer discretionary. The implications of these changes indicate a stronger directive for the SRC-B and SSB to work in a more equal relationship.

The SRC-B has increased responsibilities to work in partnership with SSB to develop, agree to and review state goals and priorities. This is accomplished by evaluating programs for rehabilitation and submitting progress reports to the commissioner and in an annual report to the Governor. The SRC-B still has responsibility for overseeing services provided by public and private agencies, and now must review employment outcomes as well as service outcomes for blind people.

The SRC-B now has a stronger role in coordinating efforts with other state and federally mandated councils. Minnesota has made an effort to avoid duplication of these councils since the early days of our Advisory Council for the Blind. The Minnesota SRC-B has always had members that represented the Statewide Independent Living Council, advocacy organizations for the blind, advocacy organizations for children with disabilities, and representatives of business, industry, and labor. Another responsibility of the SRC-B is to enhance its current organizational contacts to incorporate a system of working with the Governor’s Workforce Development Council.

This report is produced pursuant to federal law, Section 105(c) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, which calls for each state rehabilitation council to prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor or appropriate state entity and the Commissioner of the Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration.

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 insuring 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 insure 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

The State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (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 the quality of 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 insure 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 which fulfills each individual's needs and aspirations.

Message from the Chair

Federal Fiscal Year 2008 has been another busy year for the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B) and our partner State Services for the Blind (SSB). Most of the work occurred in our committees and task forces, but I will highlight some additional activities.

I appointed Judy Sanders to attend meetings of rehabilitation council chairs or their designees at the fall and spring conferences of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB), and the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC). Judy participated in the phone meetings for boards, commissions and agencies for the Blind, while I participated in teleconferences for the NCSRC. Through these conferences and calls, we were able to be engaged with other state rehabilitation councils across the nation. Judy and I brought information relevant to a resolution from NCSRC which all rehabilitation councils were asked to support. After reading and discussing the resolution at length, the Minnesota SRC-B decided not to support this version of the resolution.

I sent Michael Malver to attend the session on the new web-based training for council members at <http://www.erehab.org> created by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). I completed the training and found the majority of the information was relevant to our Council's work. At our August council meeting, Michael and I encouraged all members -- especially new ones -- to participate in this training, and we emphasized its accessibility.

I am pleased by the work of a couple of specially convened task forces. The RSA Strategic Performance Task Force discussed, produced, and sent written comments first on RSA strategic performance goals and later on RSA's measures for achieving those goals. A Technology Task Force developed a report including recommendations for SSB. A couple of members of that task force are involved in an agency technology work group, and implementation of the task force recommendations are one area of focus for this group.

For the second year in a row, SSB staff, SRC-B members, people in the blind community, and Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Commissioner Dan McElroy volunteered to work at the SSB State Fair booth. We were fortunate to have the support of DEED in this endeavor, and our booth was twice the size of last year's space.

My second term on the SRC-B will be at an end early next year, so there will be a new SRC-B chair writing the message for FFY2009. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the SSB staff with whom I worked closely during my time as chair: Chuk Hamilton, Cathy Carlson, Sharon Killa, Linda Lingen, Pam Brown, Richard Strong, and the entire Braille section staff. I would like to thank my two vice chairs. Jean Martin was with me through July 2008 and then was replaced on the Council. Judy Sanders was elected Vice Chair for the remainder of the year at the August meeting. Both women have been good sounding boards, provided good advice when asked, and graciously put up with my mistakes. Finally, I would like to thank all of the Council and committee members who have worked with me so diligently to help make the SRC-B and SSB the best they can be.

Rebecca Kragens, Chair

Director's Comments

2008 has been another very productive year for State Services for the Blind (SSB) and the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B). SSB is pleased to partner with the SRC-B on many important activities throughout the year. Rebecca Kragnes has ably led the SRC-B for a second year. Two members left the Council this year: Jane Toleno and Jean Martin. We welcomed one new member: Joan Breslin-Larson. The contribution of each member is greatly appreciated.

This report provides an excellent opportunity to highlight the outcomes of our productive partnership with the SRC-B, consumers and other partners.

Highlights include:

- SSB surpassed last year's number of successful closures and will meet the federal standard for that measure. 93 individuals achieved an employment outcome.
- The Senior Services Unit (Older Blind Program) served 3,383 customers.
- The Communication Center's 21st Century digitization project continues to make progress. We have trained 100 volunteers to record in the DAISY format in our studios, and 40 who record at home. We are now producing CD's with the DAISY format.
- SSB has contracted with a company who has experience and success with the employment of DeafBlind persons. Together we are improving a course for our customers called "Creative Job Search." Customers will come to fully understand the world of work and the expectations of workers.
- Recently SSB was awarded a small grant by the STAR Program (System To Achieve Results) which will assist SSB to continue reutilizing technology equipment for the benefit of our customers.
- Nearly 1,000,000 pages of braille have been provided to customers.

These accomplishments are important, but in some cases, they are only the start. Our strong partnership with the SRC-B, the work of our dedicated staff, consumers and their representatives, and the commitment of our many volunteers provide us with great momentum as we focus on 2009. Thank you to all those people who make SSB's services so meaningful!

Charles Hamilton, Director

Committee Reports

Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee

Jennifer Dunnam--Chair, Bonita Kallestad, Steve Jacobson, Rebecca Kragnes, Jo Taliferro. SSB staff—Pam Brown, Cathy Carlson, Sharon Ostrom, and Jennifer Beilke.

CHARGE: 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 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.

2008 Report

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee is to review the effectiveness of and customer satisfaction with State Services for the Blind's Vocational Rehabilitation program and employment outcomes of persons served by SSB. The Committee is also to evaluate the extent to which SSB achieved its goals and priorities and met the standards and indicators set by the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

Customer Satisfaction Survey

The Committee reviewed the Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) results through March 31, 2008. Five survey items were analyzed to compare the results for years ending 3/31/04, 3/31/05, 3/31/06, and 3/31/07. While there has been some fluctuation in results, no significant changes have taken place from year to year.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY REVIEW
for Customer Satisfaction & Outcomes and Measures Committee
Minnesota Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

Summary	YE 3/31/05	YE 3/31/06	YE 3/31/07	YE 3/31/08
Q1: Overall satisfaction with services provided	82%	81%	82%	84%
Q2: Extent to which services have met expectations	74%	71%	77%	77%
Q3: Comparison with "ideal" set of services	72%	73%	72%	80%
Q5 (now Q4): Satisfied that counselor (staff) understood customer's needs	80%	85%	79%	88%
Q10 (now Q5): How satisfied are you with the time it usually took to get your answer	84%	83%	80%	85%

Additionally, the committee reviews the verbatim comments in response to questions 8 and 9 regarding services customers found most helpful and areas needing improvement. The committee tracks the categories of comments receiving the three highest percentages from quarter to quarter. 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.

For the complete Customer Satisfaction Survey results see:
www.deed.state.mn.us/customersurvey/ssb/index.htm

Progress on FFY08 Goals and Priorities:

Goal and Priority #1: Employment Outcomes

RSA Indicator 1.1 was met for FFY08. All strategies toward meeting this goal were implemented. Targeted outreach activities have been implemented although the results of these activities will not be measured until the end of FY09.

Goal and Priority #2: Minority Service Rate

During FFY08, fewer than 100 persons from minority backgrounds exited services. Thus, SSB did not calculate the ratio in RSA Indicator 2.1. All strategies toward meeting this goal were implemented and SSB has become a regular participant in many of the outreach activities of the various cultural communities.

Goal and Priority #3: DeafBlind Outreach and Service

During FFY08, 8 individuals with a dual sensory loss secured employment as a result of SSB's services. This goal was met. Additionally, all five strategies focused on increasing services to DeafBlind were implemented.

Goal and Priority #4: Increase customer satisfaction with services provided. At the end of FFY08, the annual overall satisfaction with services provided by SSB was at 84%. The goal was 85%

satisfaction; thus, this goal was not met. All strategies for meeting this goal continue to be a standard part of determining, analyzing and developing strategies to increase customer satisfaction.

Goal and Priority #5: Insure every SSB customer has the information needed to make an informed choice in selecting providers for adjustment to blindness training. During FFY08, 100% of SSB customers attending ATB half time or more indicated that they were given the opportunity to choose their provider. Thus, SSB met this goal. All strategies for meeting this goal continue to be standard procedure within the WorkForce Development Unit.

Goal and Priority #6: All VR staff members new to SSB will receive Introduction to Blindness Phase 1 and/or Phase 2 training on the essential aspects of blindness and visual impairment. All VR staff members new to SSB in FFY08, including new BEP staff members, completed both Phase 1 and Phase 2 ATB training. All strategies for meeting this goal continue to be standard procedure within the WorkForce Development Unit.

Goals and priorities for FFY08 are in Appendix IV.

Standards and Indicators

The performance of the WorkForce Development Unit of State Services for the Blind on the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Standards and Indicators for FY2008 follows.

The numbers reported for FFY2008 are unofficial because the information is still being validated. The RSA requires that at least four of the six indicators of Standard 1 must be met. The RSA requires that the State agency meet or exceed at least 2 of the 3 primary indicators. An explanation about what the standards and indicators cover is in Appendix III.

State Services for the Blind Performance on Standards 1 and 2

Must pass at least 4 of 6 Indicators and 2 of 3 Primary Indicators for Standard 1

Federal Fiscal Year

	2008*	2007	2006	2005
Ind 1.1: Change in employment outcomes(>=0)	12	-47	-5	1
Ind 1.2: Percent of employment outcomes (>=68.9%)	46.97%	46.6%	48.74%	43.97%
Ind 1.3: Competitive employment (>=35.4%)	94.62%	94.05%	93.54%	93.409%
Ind 1.4: Significant Disability (>=89.0%)	100%	98.85%	97.70%	98.65%
Ind 1.5: Earnings ratio (>=.59)	0.680	.69	.717	.650
Ind 1.6: Self support (>=30.4)	31.82	43.68	30.87	35.43
Number of indicators in standard 1 that were passed	5	4	4	4
Number of primary indicators (1.3 to 1.5) in Standard 1 that were passed	3	3	3	3
Ind 2.1 Ratio of Minority to Non-Minority Service Rate (>=.80)**	**	**	**	**

*Not official until approved by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. Approval pending at time of publication.

**The ratio of minority to non-minority service rate is not calculated if fewer than 100 persons from minority backgrounds exit the program during the fiscal year.

Minority Outreach Committee

Rebecca Kragnes--Chair, Connie Lee Berg, Vince Llanas, Fannie Primm, Ken Rodgers, Joyce Scanlan. SSB staff—Pam Brown, Linda Lingen.

CHARGE: This committee exists to recommend specific strategies for increasing and improving services to individuals from minority backgrounds. 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.

2008 Report

The Minority Outreach Committee has moved from research into a focus on finding avenues for outreach into various cultural communities. This focus was accomplished by:

- Learning more about teaching braille and English simultaneously to blind immigrants and how SSB could impact on the various programs in the Twin Cities which teach English language learning (ELL).
- SSB remained an active participant in the planning and implementation of the Hmong Resource Fair.
- The RAMP Project continued to share information on other cultures with staff and Council members. This information included monthly Public Television programming and a calendar of culturally significant days in each month.
- In December SSB and Century College organized a panel presentation of blind individuals from other cultures. The goal of the presentation was to learn about their experiences as blind people in their countries, in the U.S. in general, and specifically as SSB customers. The committee suggested that SSB contact those individuals who were on the panel as a link to their communities.
- One of the committee members provided SSB with a link to the African-American community through the North Minneapolis Urban League. This connection was in harmony with a 2009 goal regarding targeting transition students of minority status in Minneapolis and St. Paul schools.

The committee will continue to advise SSB in developing future goals, activities and outreach strategies for FFY2009.

Vendor Outcomes and Measures Committee

Tom Scanlan--Chair, Michael Malver. SSB staff—Chuk Hamilton, Jennifer Beilke, Cathy Carlson.

CHARGE: This committee exists to support and advise SSB regarding measuring the outcomes realized by the recipients of training in adjustment to blindness and technology. 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.

2008 Report

Last year the committee continued the survey of 20 items given to each SSB customer after completing specific training with a vendor. Since the population base is relatively small in statistical

terms, especially for a single vendor, the committee was concerned that the highest return possible is needed. The company surveying for the Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee (Strategic Research Group) also surveys for this committee. That provides the maximum response rate by contacting people at night as well as during the day.

The survey results are published in a semiannual report covering 12 months of activity. The report is available in print, braille, tape, and the SSB website so that all customers, SSB staff, vendors, and the public have access to the results.

The data collected showed good customer satisfaction, but some areas of training need improvement. The best results were achieved in travel and computer. The areas that were weakest in the results were for challenging the student, increasing self confidence, and reading/writing braille.

SSB management continued to provide full support for the survey.

DeafBlind Committee

Lynette Boyer--Chair, Randee Boerboom, Jessica Eggert, Adrienne Haugen, Bonita Kallestad, Les Peterson. SSB staff—Lindsey Baker, Pam Brown, Linda Lingen, Roselee Siegler, Sharon Ostrom.

CHARGE: 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 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.

2008 Report

This has been an exciting year for me and the work we as the committee have accomplished as a member and now the Chairperson of the committee. However, considering there is so much work to be done and so little time, we really had to take the approach of “baby steps”. I was asked to chair the DeafBlind Committee in March of 2007 and in April I accepted the role of Chair. We had a wonderful team last year and I was equally excited about this year team which includes from SSB: 1. Linda Lingen, 2. Pam Brown, 3. Lindsey Baker and the volunteers who have helped throughout the year are as follows: 1. Kim Williams, 2. Jessica Eggert, 3. Adrienne Haugen 4. Bonita Kallestad 5. Randee Boerboom and myself. It was a good group and we accomplished a lot. However, I am sad to say, George and Craig went on to bigger and better adventures. They will be missed and I am just thankful I had the chance to get to know them and I so much appreciated their insight and work this past year. Good luck to the both of you.

The Step by Step Guide to Getting and Keeping a Job: Our project was definitely a work in progress for the step by step guide to getting and keeping a job this year. An ASL version which really in its own right is not something that typically is a written language. However, considering we needed a more simplified written document so that an ASL user would be able to understand the steps one has to take through the process that SSB requires in an understandable format. We have called this draft a simplified English draft. We also came up with a draft for anyone who was raised hard of

hearing and knows English as their primary language. We called this draft the English draft. Once we established that and really not knowing where and how to take this. It's how you say, the blind leading the blind; no pun intended. I think as we got into this project we realized the different needs, styles, temperaments, personalities and obvious dealing with the different degree of their disabilities in order for the staff at SSB has to work with and trying to meet each one individually. We really had to ask ourselves what is it that we need to help consumer truly understand the process in which a potential client goes through from start to finish. Then exactly how would one communicate that effectively to assist SSB potential client navigate through our system from point A to point B and so on and so forth. We decided to come up with a written document for ASL users and English users written in a way that would be understandable, simple and help SSB potential clients understand the loop holes one needs to go through in getting and keeping a job. We have successfully completed all of the steps thus far in both simplified English and English.

I personally want to thank the staff at SSB for the volunteers who take time out of their busy schedules to meet once a month and really get into the meat of what this is all about. The vision is clear and we have a tangible document that has laid the ground work, now building it, and such projects like we are working on truly exposes who we are and our beliefs and there will be disagreement, but it is not about our own agendas, it's about putting our differences aside and looking at who we are doing this for. I am pleased to say this new committee with the help of Rebecca Kragnes Chair of SSB Council and the support of the Council and their recommendations for all the new appointees and that includes I would like to welcome them. They too have offered different insight and their work is appreciated. Their hard work and determination really is evident this year. We have more people than we ever had and the commitment level is there. In conclusion, I want to personally say thanks for your support, I could not do it without the direction of the Council, our committee members and the support of the staff at SSB. I am thrilled to represent the DB community in this capacity and knowing that I am helping better the lives of my fellow DB community for years to come.

Senior Services Committee

Judy Sanders--Chair, Chris Bell, RoseAnn Faber, Larry Lura, Louise Michaelson, Coralmae (Coke) Stenstrom, Frances Whetstone. SSB staff—Lyle Lundquist, Richard Strong, Sue Crancer.

CHARGE: The Senior Services Committee exists to assist State Services for the Blind improve and expand services to blind, visually impaired, or DeafBlind Minnesotans who are not interested in employment. The majority of this group are 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.

2008 Report

Our committee meets six times a year where we have the chance to be updated on the activities of the Senior Services Unit (SSU). Our committee then advises SSB staff on how we believe they can improve independent living services to the fastest growing population of blind citizens in our state. This unit served over 3,000 people in the federal fiscal year 2008 with a very limited budget. It is

predicted that this population will double in the next twenty years and we are very concerned the explosion in need will far outstrip the already minimal funding for this program.

A recommendation we made in 2008 deals with an emphasis on nonvisual solutions for retaining one's independence. Most of the senior population has some remaining vision but it is not always stable. SSB has always been very thorough about finding low vision solutions to accomplish tasks such as magnifiers and large print. These solutions include CCTVs. Our committee maintained that as a person's vision changes, some of the solutions tried, especially the relatively expensive ones such as CCTVs, do not always retain their value. Therefore, we suggest that recording devices and products such as the KNFB Reader need further exploration as they might be extremely useful.

We spent one meeting learning about the functions of the KNFB Reader. This is a software program on a cell phone that captures print material; it then reads it aloud. This device ensures that no matter what happens with one's vision, print can still be accessible.

We focused a good deal of committee time exploring other technology--both low tech and high tech. SSB is considering changing the voices on Dial-in News--one of SSB's two telephone-based newspaper reading programs. The other option, NFB Newsline®, already has several choices in synthesized voices. Our committee gave a unanimous opinion about what voice not to use but were divided on which was our favorite.

We were also introduced to the new digital talking book player which will be distributed to all eligible readers by the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. It will take several years for this program to be fully implemented but it looks promising to meet the needs of blind readers.

Many thanks to the following people who voluntarily served on this committee: Coke Stenstrom, RoseAnn Faber, Frances Whetstone, Larry Lura, Louise Michaelson and Chris Bell. Judy Sanders served as chair.

The Child Committee

Elizabeth Bruber--Chair, Robin Exsted, Carrie Gilmer, Jean Martin, Nicole Schlender, and Jeffrey West. SSB staff--Pam Brown, Sharon Ostrom.

CHARGE: This committee provides specific advice and counsel to SSB's child services regarding collaborative outreach, information and referral services to:

The Child Committee has met to make recommendations and review the position of the Child Specialist, a position currently open at State Services for the Blind. The position has been vacant since October of 2006, and the committee has not been able to move forward with the Child Specialist position being vacant.

2008 Report

The Child Committee has met and reviewed the job description of the Child Specialist. The Committee has made specific and thoughtful recommendations for the job posting.

In order for the Child Committee to function in its duties as an advisory committee, it is critical that a Child Specialist be hired.

In light of the current open position of Child Specialist, I would like to thank the Child Committee for meeting, and working collaboratively with SSB. These efforts are supportive of the blind and visually impaired children to age 14 years and their families.

Communication Center Committee

Steve Jacobson--Chair, Julie Bauch, Catherine Durivage, Carol Earle, Wally Hinz, Jean Martin, Jane Toleno, Jo Taliferro, Andy Virden. SSB staff—Dick Strong, David Andrews, Mary Archer, Angela Bodensteiner, Gwen Bighley, Stuart Holland, Hal Schardin, Ellie Sevdy.

CHARGE: This committee exists to help SSB improve and expand the services of the Communication Center for blind, and visually impaired, and DeafBlind persons. 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.

2008 Report

The Communication Center Advisory Committee exists to help State Services for the Blind (SSB) improve and expand the services of the Communication Center for blind and visually impaired persons. Committee membership includes representatives of the following: Minnesota Braille and Talking Book Library; Resource Center for the Blind /Visually Impaired (Department of Education); teachers of the blind and visually impaired; representatives from colleges/universities; and consumers at-large.

The product of this committee is a report to the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind containing specific strategies for increasing and improving Communication Center services. During FFY 2008 the Communication Center Committee adopted a new schedule and met four times to receive updates and offer input on the projects, staffing changes, and other on-going work of the Communication Center.

Listed below are highlights and accomplishments of the Communication Center in FFY 2008:

- Evolution of Textbook Production – While there are still obstacles, production of books in the DAISY format began this year and books can now be distributed on compact disks. Several dozen volunteers have now received training and can produce books using this new technology. The Communication Center is now also authorized to receive textbook files from NIMIS but has already been processing some files directly from publishers increasing the speed of braille production.
- Braille Transcription of Tests - The braille transcription of Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment Tests continues to be a critical role fulfilled by the Center.

- Radio Talking Book Receivers - Ongoing efforts to secure a new radio receiver appear to be nearing completion. During this year, an agreement was signed with Minnesota Public Radio that provides a stable platform upon which to build this new service. The production and distribution of the new digital radios is pending Federal Communications Commission and Underwriters Labs approvals along passing of final field testing by the pre-production model.
- Modernization of the Radio Talking Book service permitting greater automation of the broadcasts is being tested. Also being developed are approaches for more flexible listening options for listeners. Programs are now archived and can be retrieved through a secure web site.
- Huge numbers of print pages were converted to braille and audio to support Minnesota students in K-12 and in post-secondary institutions. Nearly a million braille pages were produced directly or distributed from other sources during this year. This effort has a strong affect on the quality of education of blind Minnesotans and thereby their potential employment.
- Newslines and Dial-in News Service Improvements - In response to requests of consumers, the Communication Center added procedures to more quickly identify interruption of Newslines or Dial-in News in 2008. During this year, the Advisory Committee monitored the results of these changes and noted significant improvements.
- Dial-in News and Newslines Expansion - Work continues on the implementation of another newspaper on Newslines with specific contact being made with the Rochester Post Bulletin. Also, work is being done to add the Brainerd paper to Dial-in News, which additionally involves new toll-free dial-in access.
- Annual Volunteer Recognition Events - The Communication Center conducted the annual volunteer recognition events to applaud the work of over 700 volunteers that make possible much of the work of the Communication Center. This year the major event honoring current volunteers was a wonderful meal and boat trip on the Mississippi River. Almost four hundred volunteers and their guests were in attendance, making the event an outstanding success. Among those attending was a volunteer who has forty-five years of service to the Communication Center. There was also a Volunteer Emeritus Recognition activity conducted last spring.
- 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, testing of new NLS Digital Talking Book format, National Braille Association, Braille Authority of North America, and the International Association of Audio Information Services. These efforts reflect continued national leadership by staff members and Communication Center Committee members.

Task Forces

A variety of SRC-B task forces met and completed their assigned activities during the year. The Technology Task Force report is included below. Other task forces were convened to work on items such as putting together the annual report, revising the Council work plan and the committee structure charters, designing and evaluating SSB needs assessment process and revising the Council resource plan.

Technology Task Force Recommendations

Members: Steve Jacobson, Chairperson; David Andrews; Jan Bailey; Jennifer Dunnam; Rebecca Kragnes; Michael Malver; Jean Martin

The Technology Task Force was asked to assist State Services for the Blind (SSB) in its role to advise the state of Minnesota regarding the Open Document Format, to study the current state of the accessibility of software purchased by state government, and to learn about and make suggestions regarding the services provided by SSB's Technology group. The following are our findings and recommendations.

Accessibility of Software and Documents:

Several initiatives are currently underway to raise the visibility of problems associated with accessible software and documents. Examples include work with the STAR project and the Office of Enterprise Technology. The task force members also discussed problems with some documents created by state government, particularly PDF documents that are not accessible. The Task Force does not see a need at this point for on-going involvement of the council, but recommends that progress in this area should be included in reports made to the Council by State Services for the blind. We further recommend that examples of software and documents that are not accessible be gathered from blind state employees and consumer groups, and that they be passed on to the Office of Enterprise Technology.

Open Document Format:

Since the discussions of the adoption of the Open Document Format began two years ago, a number of factors have changed. Minnesota is still studying this issue including the gathering of document archival needs throughout state government. Through meetings with the Office of Enterprise Technology, general awareness of the impact on blind employees and customers has been increased. Additional options for an open document format have also appeared. Therefore, the task force recommends that the document summarizing the potential impact of the adoption of an open document format, authored by Dave Andrews, be updated as necessary to include the changing landscape and that State Services for the Blind actively make this document available. We do not recommend any on-going involvement of the Council in this activity, but recommend that information on the status of this issue be included in regular reports to the Council by State Services for the Blind.

Assistive Technology and Customer Training:

As part of the task Force's mandate, the services provided by the Technology group were carefully reviewed. Discussions in several areas took place.

Some concern was expressed over the lack of specific guidelines for computer systems and assistive technology that are placed with customers. However, after learning of the wide variation in customer needs due to other disabilities, vocational objectives, previous experience with assistive technologies, the level of training, and the quickly changing cost and availability of equipment, the Technology Task Force believes that the most effective use of technology will be made through an individualized approach that involves the customer, the counselor, and the technology specialists as is currently done.

There were also concerns raised over the consistency of knowledge of customers, and how effectively systems purchased by SSB are used. The task force recognizes that the certification of trainers over the past few years has done much to make the training received of a consistent quality. We reviewed a sample curriculum from De Witt and Associates as well which is being studied by the technology group. Although the specifics of training are largely determined by the counselor and the customer with some input from the technology group, we recommend that a curriculum be adopted to provide a basic level of training that creates a consistent platform from which to build skills, and that the importance of basic training be communicated again to counselors. Feedback from the counseling staff should also be solicited regarding the content of a basic curriculum.

Another concern was raised with respect to document appearance and formatting. It appears to us that the basics of document formatting are taught, but that the knowledge may not be retained in some cases. We recommend that a paragraph be added to the SSB College Student Handbook that indicates the importance of document formatting and appearance. Possibly an analogy can be drawn between document appearance and personal appearance. We further recommend that the importance of document appearance on the job be emphasized to customers by gathering input from employers and employed blind persons that can be shared with customers. Again, achieving this requires the participation of the technology staff and counselors working together. A basic training curriculum may also play a role by providing consistency.

Some difficulties appear to arise when technologists visit job sites but do not have complete information regarding the training and experience of the individual being placed on that job site. Within the limits of confidentiality that might exist, we recommend that the information on the customer being placed provided to technologists evaluating a job site be as complete as possible.

Several items above require input from technologists and counselors. While it appears that individual technologists and counselors cooperate well, it would seem advantageous for State Services for the Blind management to facilitate communication between counselors and technologists at the group level. We again recommend that such efforts be included in reports to the Council.

Appendices

Appendix I Council Members

Member

Representing

Jan Bailey

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

Connie Lee Berg

American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Project

Lynette Boyer

DeafBlind Community

Elizabeth Bruber

Parent of Blind Child

Chuk Hamilton

Director, State Services for the Blind

Steve Jacobson

Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Bonita Kallestad

Client Assistance Project

Rebecca Kragnes, Chair

Disability Advocacy Group

Michael Malver

Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Jean Martin

MN Department of Education, Special Education

Fannie Primm

Business, Industry, and Labor

Judy Sanders

Statewide Independent Living Council

Tom Scanlan

Disability Advocacy Group

Coralmae Stenstrom

Disability Advocacy Group

Jane Toleno

Business, Industry, and Labor

Ken Trebelhorn

Community Rehabilitation Program

Vacant

Parent Training and Information Center

Jeffrey West

Business, Industry, and Labor

**STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL
FOR THE BLIND
MEMBERS
FFY 2008**



Back row: Chuk Hamilton, Coralmae Stenstrom, Jeffrey West, Bonita Kallestad, Tom Scanlan, Ken Trebelhorn.
Middle: Judy Sanders, Steve Jacobson, Fannie Primm, Joan Breslin-Larson. Seated in front: Rebecca Kragnes,
Jan Bailey and Lynnette Boyer.

Appendix II Council Work Plan FFY2008

October-2007

The Chair reports on current member terms and upcoming vacancies.

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee reports progress to the Council on achievement of goals and priorities.

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee review results of the Statewide Customer Satisfaction Survey and reports to the Council.

As necessary, the Chair appoints a Needs Assessment Task Force to comply with federal requirements and determines a reporting schedule for the rest of the year. This needs to occur every three years.

November-2007

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee, after receiving data around November 1, reviews preliminary VR effectiveness data and sends a draft report to the Council by 11/5.

The Annual Report Task Force delivers draft Annual Report to SSB by 11/5.

Council members review and comment on the draft Annual Report by 11/13.

SSB sends revised draft of Annual Report to Council members by 11/21 to ensure action at December meeting.

Council members must comment on VR Effectiveness Report by 11/13.

SSB sends comments on VR effectiveness to Council members by 11/21 to ensure action at December meeting.

December-2007

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee reports progress to Council on achievement of goals and priorities.

The Council approves Annual Report and VR Effectiveness Report.

Annual Report and VR Effectiveness Report are produced for distribution by December 31.

The Chair appoints a task force to review the Council's annual work plan.

January-2008

All committees assess progress on goals and priorities relevant to their committee and submit recommendations to the Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee.

The Coordinating Councils Task Force provides feedback on their activities to the Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee, if any.

February-2008

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee reports progress to the Council on achievement of goals and priorities.

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee reviews Statewide Customer Satisfaction Survey and reports to the Council.

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee and SSB begin drafting goals and priorities for next fiscal year.

The Council elects Chair and Vice Chair.

The Chair appoints a Budget Task Force to get update on current status of expenditures and to propose any necessary refinements in the Resource Plan for the current fiscal year at the April SRC-B meeting. This group will also meet in the summer and make recommendations for the Resource Plan for the next fiscal year at the August SRC-B meeting.

The Chair appoints a Task Force to review the SRC-B New Member Orientation Packet and make updates as needed.

The Work Plan Task Force reports on revisions to the annual work plan for Council approval.

March-2008

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee and SSB provide joint draft of the goals and priorities update to SSB by March 3.

Council members must provide comments on the goals and priorities update to SSB by March 13.

SSB will summarize and distribute comments on the update no later than March 20 to ensure Council action at the April meeting.

April-2008

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee and SSB present goals and priorities for next fiscal year for approval. The fiscal year begins October 1.

The Budget Task Force makes recommendations for any necessary changes to the Resource Plan for the current fiscal year.

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee reviews Statewide Customer Satisfaction Survey and reports to the Council.

The Chair appoints a Task Force on Council Committees to review committee structure and report recommendations on changes necessary at the June SRC-B meeting.

In even numbered years, the Council, in partnership with SSB, agrees on a pool of impartial hearing officers.

May-2008

The task force on Council Committees meets to review the committee structure and propose changes to the Council.

June-2008

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee reports progress to the Council on achievement of goals and priorities.

Review and act on report of the Task Force on Council Committee Structure. The Chair notifies members and the public at large in writing of the July 15 deadline to submit applications for committees.

Client Assistance Project annual report.

The Budget Task Force meets and makes recommendations at the August meeting for the resource plan for next fiscal year.

The Needs Assessment Task Force submits a written/oral report on their progress.

July-2008

Applications for committee appointments must be submitted to the Council chair or SSB designee by July 15.

August-2008

The Budget Task Force makes recommendations for the resource plan for next fiscal year. The Council acts on the recommended resource plan.

The Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee review results of the Statewide Customer Satisfaction Survey and report to the Council.

The Chair, with Council approval, appoints Council committee members and chairs.

The Chair appoints a task force to create an annual report.

The Chair appoints a Coordinating Councils Task Force to address the federal requirement of collaboration. The Task Force determines the councils appropriate for coordination and the methods to be used to carry out that coordination in keeping with the requirement in the Rehabilitation Act.

The Chair appoints a Needs Assessment Task Force.

September-2008

Chair reminds the Annual Report Task Force members to submit their section of the annual report to SSB by 10/15.

Appendix III Federal Standards and Indicators

Standard 1:

For any given year, calculations for indicators 1.1 through 1.6 for Designated State Units that exclusively serve individuals with visual impairments or blindness are based on aggregated data for the current year and the prior year, i.e., two years of data (34 CFR §361.81(4)). The Designated State Unit must pass four of the six indicators in Standard 1 and must pass two of the three primary indicators (1.3 to 1.5).

Indicator 1.1

The number of individuals exiting the VR program who achieved an employment outcome during the current performance period compared to the number of individuals who exit the VR program after achieving an employment outcome during the previous performance period.

Required Performance Level: DSUs performance in current period must equal or exceed performance in previous period.

Indicator 1.2

Of all individuals who exit the VR program after receiving services, the percentage who are determined to have achieved an employment outcome.

Required Performance Level: For the general and combined DSUs, the level is 55.8%; for agencies serving individuals who are blind, the level is 68.9%.

Indicator 1.3

Of all individuals determined to have achieved an employment outcome, the percentage who exit the VR program in competitive, self-, or business enterprise program (BEP) employment with earnings equivalent to at least the minimum wage.

Required Performance Level: For the general and combined DSUs, the level is 72.6%; for agencies serving individuals who are blind, the level is 35.4%.

Indicator 1.4

Of all individuals who exit the VR program in competitive, self-, or BEP employment with earnings equivalent to at least the minimum wage, the percentage who are individuals with significant disabilities.

Required Performance Level: For the general and combined DSUs, the level is 62.4%; for agencies serving individuals who are blind, the level is 89.0%.

Indicator 1.5

The average hourly earnings of all individuals who exit the VR program in competitive, self-, or BEP employment with earnings equivalent to at least the minimum wage as a ratio to the State's average hourly earnings for all individuals in the State who are employed (as derived from the Bureau of Labor Statistics report "State Average Annual Pay" for the most recent available year).

Required Performance Level: For the general and combined DSUs, the level is a ratio of .52; for agencies serving individuals who are blind, the ratio is .59.

Indicator 1.6

Of all individuals who exit the VR program in competitive, self-, or BEP employment with earnings equivalent to at least the minimum wage, the difference between the percentage who report their own income as the largest single source of economic support at the time they exit the VR program and the percentage who report their own income as the largest single source of support at the time they apply for VR services.

Required Performance Level: For the general and combined DSUs, the level is an arithmetic difference of 53.0; for agencies serving individuals who are blind, the level is a difference of 30.4.

Standard 2:

If a DSU had fewer than 100 individuals from a minority background exit the VR program during the reporting period, the DSU must describe the policies it has adopted or will adopt and the steps it has taken or will take to ensure that individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds have equal access to VR services, in lieu of calculating the ratio described below (34 CFR §361.86(b)(2)(iii)).

Indicator 2.1

The service rate for all individuals with disabilities from minority backgrounds as a ratio to the service rate for all individuals with disabilities from non-minority backgrounds.

Required Performance Level: All agencies must attain a ratio level of .80.

Appendix IV 2008 Goals and Priorities for State Services for the Blind

The following goals and priorities for FFY2008 were jointly developed by SRC-B and SSB and were approved by the Council at their meeting on April 12, 2007.

GOAL AND PRIORITY #1: Employment Outcomes—SSB will meet RSA Indicator 1.1.

SSB has identified a number of strategies for meeting this goal—

1. Each Counseling Supervisor will ensure staff of the Workforce Development Unit (WFD):
 - a) agree to specific paid closure goals by September 30 of each year for the following year;
 - b) actively participates in all relevant workforce-related activities to ensure customers are provided current, accurate information about employment demands, trends and opportunities.
2. Supervisors and staff annually assess individual training needs to improve staff counseling and placement skills. SSB annually assesses and redesigns organizational training plans. In-service training planned in FFY08 includes: Serving the DeafBlind Customer; Improving Cultural Competencies; and Low Vision.
3. Targeted outreach activities: i.e., presenting information on SSB services at various professional conferences; contacts with community based organizations; mailings to ophthalmologists; etc. Effectiveness will be measured by comparing referrals from FY07 through FY09.

GOAL AND PRIORITY #2: Minority Service Rate—By the end of FFY08 at least 100 persons from minority backgrounds will exit services annually and SSB will meet RSA Indicator 2.1.

SSB has identified a number of strategies for meeting this goal—

1. Develop and carry out the in-service training plan based on the results of the FFY07 organizational assessment.
2. Review and apply literature and research findings that may enhance staff and organizational competency in serving SSB customers from minority backgrounds.
3. Work with SSB WDU staff in outreach activities to Minnesota's community-based organizations representing minority groups, with emphasis on community-based organizations serving African-Americans.
4. Develop relationships with generic English Language Learner programs to co-train blind individuals from minority backgrounds in braille while also learning English.

GOAL AND PRIORITY #3: DeafBlind Outreach and Service—Enhance services for persons who have a dual sensory loss, including persons who are DeafBlind. During FFY08 at least 6 individuals with a dual sensory loss will secure employment as a result of SSB services.

SSB has identified a number of strategies for meeting this goal—

1. Continue to assess staff training needs and provide comprehensive staff training on understanding DeafBlindness and competency in serving SSB customers who are DeafBlind.
2. The results of the FFY07 needs assessment and customer satisfaction survey administered to each SSB customer with a dual sensory loss or who is DeafBlind will be reviewed periodically by SSB staff and the DeafBlind Committee of the SRC-B. Any new recommendations on goals and strategies will be brought to SSB management and the SRC-B.
3. Continue to identify and act on opportunities for outreach activities.
4. To increase and improve communication between DeafBlind customers and SSB, accessible fact sheets will be developed describing the vocational rehabilitation process in a step-by-step manner (eligibility, plan development, services, closure, and appeal process) and distributed to DeafBlind customers at each step in the process.
5. Promote collaborative efforts with other state agencies, which provide services to individuals who are DeafBlind, so that specific vocational needs, like the need for supported employment, can be met.

GOAL AND PRIORITY #4: Increase customer satisfaction with services provided—by the end of FFY08 the annual overall satisfaction with services provided by SSB will be at or above 85%. (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”.)

SSB has identified a number of strategies for meeting this goal—

1. Customer satisfaction surveys will be administered quarterly to approximately 60 SSB customers as part of the DEED customer satisfaction initiative. The surveys are conducted by the Strategic Research Group of Columbus, Ohio.
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.
3. Based on the analysis of the customer satisfaction survey results, recommendations for program improvements will be brought to SSB and the SRC-B to assure that services are available that meet customer needs.

GOAL AND PRIORITY #5: Insure every SSB customer has the information needed to make an informed choice in selecting providers for adjustment to blindness training.

During FFY08 100% of SSB customers attending ATB half time or more will indicate that they were given the opportunity to choose their provider.

During FFY08 the results of the customer satisfaction surveys for customers completing ATB will be posted externally for customer review.

SSB has identified a number of strategies for meeting this goal—

1. During FFY08 SSB counselors will complete the “Choosing ATB Training” form with each customer who is considering ATB training. Counselors will ensure that all customers are provided information, in an accessible format, about options for receiving adjustment to blindness services, and strongly encourage each customer to tour each community rehabilitation program. The “Choosing ATB Training” form is signed by the counselor and customer. The customer affirms that they received the information they needed to make an informed choice in the selection of the provider. A copy of the form will be sent to SSB’s State Director, and the information will be compiled and reported semi-annually to the SRC-B.
2. In FFY06, SSB and the Vendor Outcomes and Measures Committee of the SRC-B developed and implemented a customer satisfaction survey for customers who completed adjustment to blindness training. During FFY08, 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.

When sufficient data is gathered, it will be linked back to service providers for continuous improvement purposes. The data will be formatted and posted externally for customer review when selecting a service provider to meet their rehabilitation needs. The results will be reported to the SRC-B and will be used to identify customer needs and areas for service improvements.

3. SSB will continue to require individual vendors who provide training to SSB customers on access and assistive technology to pass a test, developed by SSB staff, on the software programs they wish to teach in order to be on the list of approved vendors. In addition, each individual vendor and CRP trainer must take and pass an adult learning course which was developed for SSB by Century College, a school within the Minnesota State College and University System. That course provides training on learning styles, teaching methods, multiple intelligences, and how to write individualized training plans and learning objectives.

GOAL AND PRIORITY #6: All VR staff members new to SSB will receive Introduction to Blindness —Phase 1 and/or Phase 2 training on the essential aspects of blindness and visual impairment.

SSB has identified a number of strategies for meeting this goal—

1. Supervisory staff will ensure all new VR staff will complete **Introduction to Blindness —Phase 1** training within three months of hire.
2. Supervisory staff will ensure all new Rehabilitation Counseling staff will complete **Introduction to Blindness—Phase 2** training within three months of hire.
3. **Introduction to Blindness—Phase 2** training will be discussed with and encouraged for career development for current staff that would otherwise not be required to attend.