



YOUR RESOURCE WITHIN REACH

Minnesota State Services For the Blind 2016 ANNUAL REPORT

m EMPLOYMENT AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
STATE SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

DIRECTOR'S REPORT



Carol Pankow

Letter from SSB Director, Carol Pankow

For many of our staff here at State Services for the Blind (SSB) a highlight of our 2016 All-Staff gathering was hearing from our customers. We asked four customers who have worked with various sections of SSB to give us their perspective on how we were doing, and also to tell us about their own hopes and aspirations. Often, annual reports do not truly reflect the lives behind the numbers. While the numbers show progress and are important, I am most interested in the personal successes our agency helps to foster. Each of the four customers who spoke that day, Lisan, Barb, Megan and Scott, highlighted some of the good work that happened this past year. Their stories frame my own thoughts about SSB's successes and challenges in 2016.

Insuring a Bright Future for Young Adults

Lisan is a sophomore in high school. He is the youngest person who spoke to our staff, and his future is brimming with possibility. SSB has helped him by creating accessible reading materials, and connecting him with work and teen program opportunities. He told our staff that he is thrilled to be giving back to SSB as a student intern in our Audio Services section. We have benefited enormously from his attention to detail and hard work. You'll read more about him later in these pages.

Nothing gives me more hope than the bright futures of the students like Lisan. Here at SSB, our transition team helps high schoolers, ages 14 – 21, to make a successful leap from school to college, training, or work. This past year we rounded out our transition team by bringing on Tou Yang. Tou's role is to connect students with a variety of work experiences. Tou joins a counselor, assistive tech specialist and a transition coordinator. Together, they focus exclusively on making sure our nearly 125 students get what they need for life after high school.

One highlight of the year in our work with students was the career expo. This event gave students like Lisan the opportunity to connect with blind, DeafBlind and low vision working adults. From a package handler, to a physical therapist, to an HR professional, these role models showed students that vision loss is no barrier to following their dreams.

Expanding Opportunities

One of the 140 SSB customers who found work this year is Megan. As she explained to our staff, life as a new mother, a marriage and family therapist, and an adjunct professor is both busy and fulfilling. It's clear that her work draws on both her passion and her talent. Truly, we succeed when people like Megan succeed in creating the life they want.

I believe we can always be improving what we do in order to better meet our goal of providing the best customer service. After taking a hard look at how our customers get connected with our employment services, this year we've re-tooled our intake process. Now, potential new customers can come to an orientation meeting to learn about all that SSB offers, and to get an overview, in plain language, of what's involved in partnering with our employment team.

Getting a New Lease on Life

Barb, now retired after a busy and successful career, began by telling our staff of her fear and denial as she first realized she was losing vision. Nudged by family members to contact us, she still wanted to hang up the phone as soon as our front desk staff answered her call. Fortunately, the encouragement, persistence, and enthusiasm of a member from our Senior Services team was enough for her to agree to at least talk with one of our counselors. As it turns out, that initial contact was all Barb needed to confront her fears and breakthrough her denial.

This year, in addition to customers like Barb who received direct support from one of our Senior

Services Counselors, about 450 customers with less significant vision loss got the help they needed through our Aging Eyes Initiative. As I described in this space last year, the Aging Eyes initiative trains those already working with seniors out in the community to offer simple low vision assessments and provide practical tools and devices for everyday tasks. Just a year out of the gate, the Aging Eyes Initiative has served as many customers as a full-time counselor would have. Our own counselors have been freed up to support seniors with more extensive vision loss.

Because of the clear demand for more in-depth training for seniors, we, along with the National Federation of the Blind of Minnesota, successfully persuaded the legislature to increase funding for Minnesota seniors. This increase goes directly to train seniors in technology and skills for living independently.

Supporting Entrepreneurs

Scott, a successful small business owner in our Business Enterprise Program (BEP), told our staff about working with a SSB counselor as a high school student. A later conversation with this same staff member led him to investigate the BEP program. It took having a good connection with someone who knew his personality, interests and skills to help Scott find work that was challenging and rewarding.

Scott is one of 35 small business entrepreneurs thriving and giving back to their communities. New to the BEP program this year is another student intern, Josh. You'll read more about Josh as well in the following pages.

Critical Access to Information

Whether a student like Lisan, a senior like Barb, working professionals like Megan and Scott, or any of us navigating our fast-paced, twenty-first century digital world, access to information is more critical

than ever. Our Communication Center continues to innovate, even as we maintain our commitment to provide high-quality materials in formats that work for our customers. The work of three interns highlights some of our efforts to meet the changing needs of our customers:

Lisan has helped out on a labor-intensive project to create a searchable online database of our books.

Daniel Sellers, a student at Minnesota College of Art and Design, worked with our Braille Section in creating tactile graphics used in textbooks.

Hailey Roering was part of our podcasting team in Radio Talking Book. Hailey also works with our Senior Services team, and you'll read more about her as well.

Exceptional Customer Service

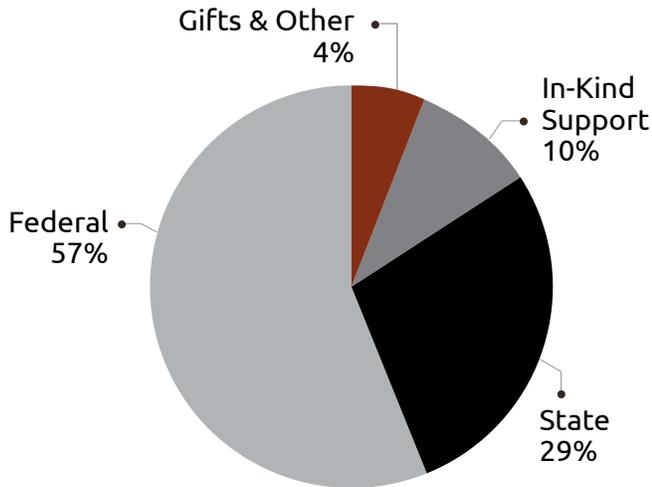
Exceptional customer service is the phrase I have written in large letters on the white board in my office where I track important initiatives around SSB. When it comes to our customers, good enough isn't good enough. Looking for a job, getting a textbook for their classes, figuring out what they need to do to stay in the home they love in the community they know – all of these things are critically important for our customers, and they need to be critically important for us too. Looking back on 2016, I'm proud of what we've done to make good on our commitment to deliver quality services to our customers. Heading into 2017, our goal is to keep refining, re-tooling, adjusting and evaluating, with the one goal of improving what we do for the people we serve.



Carol Pankow
Director, State Services for the Blind

SSB Funding Streams

FISCAL YEAR 2016



SSB Funding Streams

FISCAL YEAR 2016

Federal Funds	
Basic VR	\$10,051,000
Supported Employment	\$111,000
Training Grant	\$7,000
Independent Living	\$47,000
Independent Living — Older Blind	\$893,000
Special Education Agreement	\$547,000
Total Federal Funds	\$11,656,000

Total State Funds	
State Funds	\$5,999,000

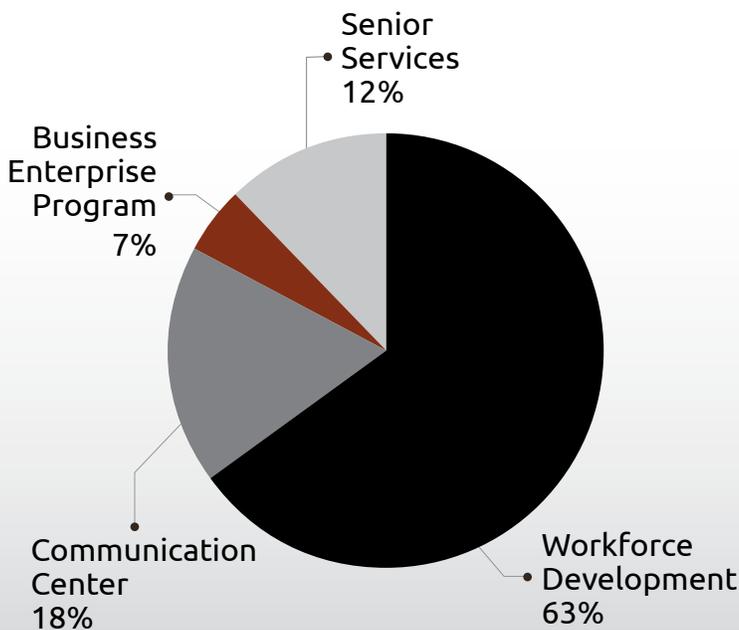
Other Funds	
Gifts/Bequests	\$188,000
Telecommunications Access MN	\$96,000
Aging Eyes	\$94,000
Communication Center	\$14,000
Business Enterprises	\$505,000
Total Other Funds	\$897,000

In-Kind Support	
From Volunteers	\$2,000,000

Total All Funds	\$20,552,000
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SSB Funding Distribution

FISCAL YEAR 2016



Diverse Careers of our Customers who Found Work in 2016

This complete list of occupation titles for our 2015 successful employment closures demonstrates the breadth and scope of our customer's skills and experience.

- Accountants
- Agriculture Workers and Managers
- Art
- Drama, and Music Teachers
- Assemblers and Fabricators
- Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics
- Bakers
- Bill and Account Collectors
- Business Operations Specialists
- Childcare Workers
- Clergy
- Coin Vending, and Amusement Machine Servicers and Repairers
- Community and Social Service Specialists
- Community Health Workers
- Computer Network Specialists
- Computer Systems Analysts
- Computer Technicians
- Computer User Support Specialists
- Counselors
- Counter and Rental Clerks
- Counter Attendants
- Craft Artists
- Customer Service Representatives
- Dining Attendants
- Dishwashers
- Environmental Science and Protection Technicians
- Equal Opportunity Representatives and Officers
- Fine Artists
- Fitness and Wellness Coordinators
- Food Prep and Serving Workers
- General and Operations Managers
- Geospatial Information Scientists and Technologists
- Healthcare Support Workers
- Installation, Maintenance and Repair Workers
- Instructional Coordinators
- Janitorial Workers
- Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners
- Manufacturing Production Technicians
- Massage Therapists
- Mechanical Drafters
- Medical Records and Health Information Technicians
- Medical Secretaries
- Medical Transcriptionists
- Middle School Teachers
- Musicians and Singers
- Nurse Practitioners
- Nursing Assistants
- Office and Administrative Support Workers
- Office Clerks
- Order Fillers
- Packers and Packagers
- Parking Lot Attendants
- Personal Care and Service Workers
- Poets, Lyricists and Creative Writers
- Postsecondary Teachers
- Product Promoters
- Production Workers
- Public Relations and Fundraising Managers
- Radio and Television Announcers
- Real Estate Appraisers
- Receptionists and Information Clerks
- Recreation Workers
- Registered Nurses
- Religious Workers
- Retail Salespersons
- Sales Managers
- Sales Representatives
- Sculptors, and Illustrators
- Security Guards
- Shipping and Receiving Clerks
- Small Engine Mechanics
- Social and Human Service Assistants
- Special Education Teachers
- Speech-Language Pathologists
- Stock Clerks and Order Fillers
- Storage and Distribution Managers
- Substance Abuse and Behavioral Disorder Counselors
- Teacher Assistants
- Teachers and Instructors
- Team Assemblers
- Telemarketers
- Tutors

PROFILE: CATHERINE JACOBSON

Meet Catherine Jacobson

When you first meet Catherine Jacobson, you will be impressed by her enthusiasm, energy, and quick intelligence. Spend time with her, and you'll realize she possesses a self-assurance and poise beyond her years.

"Don't worry about sticking out," is Catherine's advice to blind young adults navigating the worlds of work and school. "It's good to be the one they remember. Because I have albinism, people remember me. When I was in high school, I used to worry about sticking out, like most teenagers do. As I became more confident in myself, I no longer think of sticking out as a bad thing. My job is just to make a good impression."

Born in South Korea, Catherine was adopted by Steve and Nadine Jacobson when she was six months old. "The adoption agency realized that it would be good for me, and my sister too, to be raised by parents who were blind." With her parents as role models, Catherine reflects that, "There was never anything I thought I couldn't do because I was blind."

For her, the sky was the limit. Now a thriving senior at Hamline University, Catherine's drive and resilience are paying off. Last summer she interned in Senator Amy Klobuchar's office through the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD). Along with some of the predictable tasks of an intern, running errands, staffing the front desk, leading capitol tours, attending hearings, Catherine was able to work on healthcare policy. "I really learned the intricacies of how Congress works, and that was fascinating. I learned how to read bills, and got to talk to the people who write them. I got sent to all kinds of hearings and committee meetings. Getting a broad exposure to all kinds of policy issues was extremely useful for me."



Catherine Jacobson

At Hamline, Catherine is the Editor in Chief of the literary and arts magazine, *The Fulcrum Journal*, has a leadership role in peer education for student health, and is on her way to graduation in the spring with a degree in Public Health and a concentration in social justice. Catherine became a customer in our transition program as a high school student. "I've especially appreciated the support and encouragement I've received," Catherine says, as she reflects on her connection with SSB. "It's good to know what resources are available, especially as I think about graduation."

What's ahead for Catherine? Perhaps it's more schooling which will move her closer to her goal of finding a place to make a difference in building a healthier world. "I have big dreams, and I'm willing to work hard. I believe that you won't grow unless you try, and even when you fail, you learn, and step by step, you grow in confidence."

In Focus: SSB Transition Team

Our transition team works with students ages 14 – 21 to get the skills, experience and confidence they need to make that successful transition from high school to life after graduation.

Some of what we do includes:

- Coordinate with schools around assistive technology for students
- Create work experiences and internships for students
- Develop programs for success after high school
- Provide individualized services

2016 Highlights include:

- Career Expo
- “Employment Day” workshops
- Publication of “The Spectacle”, our newsletter for those who work with teens
- School year programs for teens

Employment Services by the Numbers

Catherine is one of the customers in SSB’s workforce development section. Some customers, like Catherine, are completing their education, others are completing adjustment to blindness or other training, and still others are actively looking for a job. All these customers have the same shared goal of finding the right job. 2016 was a successful year for 140 customers.

140 Minnesotans	Successful closures representing 140 more blind, DeafBlind and visually impaired. Working, paying taxes, and contributing to their communities across the state.
\$16.75	Average hourly wage for full and part-time work.
\$19.75	Average hourly wage for full-time work.
\$14.31	Average hourly wage for part-time work.

IN MEMORIAM, FRANCES WHETTSTONE



Frances Whettstone

"Sometimes if life gives you a bad experience, it may be a blessing," reflected State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B) member, Frances Whettstone, "As I look back, I think I would have never met all of the wonderful people and would not have had the opportunities that I have had if I had not lost my eyesight."

The Council and staff of SSB were saddened by the death of Frances in 2016. Frances was 99, and still active on the council, calling in via conference call for meetings she was unable to attend in person.

Indeed, in her busy life, Frances exemplified how to face vision loss as a senior and continue to lead an active and fulfilling life. After losing a significant amount of vision in 1988, Frances turned to SSB for help. Through SSB she enrolled in classes at Vision Loss Resources and learned the skills to remain independent. She relied on these skills more and more after the death of her husband in 2000. Recently she reflected, "I am still in my own home, and able to do the things I love to do."

Frances was proud of her governor's appointment to the SRC-B (the consumer-based council that guides the work of SSB) and she also served on the council's Senior Services Committee.

Frances remained an voracious reader until the end of her life. She was a strong supporter of the Communication Center and could often be found with the digital talking book player close at hand.

"Frances was living proof that blindness isn't a barrier to living a happy and active life, even as a senior," said SRC-B Chair Steve Jacobson, "by her example, and through her service on the SRC-B, she made a difference for many Minnesotans. We will surely miss her."



Nancy Ludowese

In Focus: Nancy Ludowese

"Being a community partner in greater Minnesota has been so rewarding. I enjoy connecting, and encouraging seniors who have vision loss with tools to improve their lives."

Nancy Ludowese is a community partner with the Aging Eyes Initiative, offering a first level of support to seniors in the early stages of vision loss. Nancy conducts simple low vision assessments, provides aids like magnifiers and check-writing guides, signs seniors up for Communication Center Services and refers seniors with more significant vision loss to our Senior Services counselors.

"Betty, (not her real name), was an avid reader who developed Glaucoma, she had difficulty reading for long periods of time. Betty was frustrated because she could no longer continue this activity, which brought her so much joy. I spent some time listening to Betty share some of the highlights of her life. Then I proceeded to offer the "vision aids," that I had in my kit. Just as important, I helped Betty sign up for audio services and the Radio Talking Book. As I listened to Betty's frustration in regard to her vision loss, I drew on my experience with patient centered care, and I focused on her individual needs."

"I would encourage care providers and potential volunteers to take the training," Nancy adds, "not only to educate themselves about vision loss, but also to experience the joy of helping a senior improve their quality of life."

PROFILE: RAKEB MAX



Rakeb Max

Meet Rakeb Max

“Develop a worldview that you can articulate as well as defend. Test your theory with people who disagree with you. Debate, argue, adjust your philosophy as necessary...” The words are from television host and blogger Mike Rowe, and Rakeb Max asked that we include his words in this profile about her. As a careful and wide-ranging reader, deep thinker, debater, and honors student, Rakeb has clearly taken these words to heart.

SSB provides math and science textbooks in braille for this junior at South High School in Minneapolis. “When a text is really dense, or has a lot of information packed in, it’s better to read it in braille,” she says. With plans to pursue theoretical physics and public policy, or economics, having access to textbooks in a format that works is critical to her continued success.

An accomplished debater with several first-place finishes, Rakeb has shifted from using braille to audio to access the vast array of data used in debate. Many debaters, working under time

limits, use speed reading and rapid speech to make their points. Because reading braille is slower than reading print would be, Rakeb instead taught herself to listen to text at high speed through earbuds and rapidly speak what she hears. It’s one more way in which Rakeb is resourceful and creative in using a variety of accessibility options to succeed.

In addition to debate, Rakeb participates in the model UN program at South. Reading “*Freakonomics*” and “*Think Like a Freak*” have stoked an interest in economics and market theory.

Rakeb is one of many students across Minnesota who use textbooks produced in braille by SSB. Earlier this year, KARE11 News ran a story on how South teachers used the school’s 3D printer to create tactile representations of the moon for her astronomy class. It’s one more way in which Rakeb draws on new and old technologies to pursue her ambitious goals.

In Focus: Hailey Roering

"If you want the rainbow, you've got to wait out the rain."

Hailey is a student intern for SSB's "Aging Eyes" Initiative. One of her job duties is to put together the low vision kits used by our community partners. The kits contain more than 30 items that our partners can provide to seniors losing vision.

Outside of SSB, Hailey works at a movie theater in Champlin. She enjoys dance classes, reading, Harry Potter, and "everything Broadway."



Hailey Roering



Lisan Hasnain

In Focus: Lisan Hasnain

"Confidence is the key to unlocking the door of success."

Lisan is a student intern in our Communication Center. He is assisting us in creating an online catalogue of our braille and audio books. The catalogue will be available for customers to access later in 2017.

Outside of SSB, Lisan enjoys spending time with family and friends. He loves exploring technology and apps, and is a self-described "big Nintendo guy." When he's not playing Pokémon, Zelda, or Super Smash Bros, Lisan is likely constructing arguments and rebuttals for his high school's Lincoln Douglas debate team.

BY THE NUMBERS

Business Enterprise Program — 2016 in Numbers

SSB's Business Enterprise Program (BEP) provides profitable vending business opportunities to qualified licensed legally blind Minnesotans. Thirty-six business owners manage more than 180 locations across Minnesota. You've probably come across one of our vending sites in a state or federal office building, a rest area, or on a state college or university campus. In 2016:

14	BEP business owners exceeded \$40,000 in annual net profit
3	BEP business owners exceeded \$100,000 in net profit
1	BEP vendor set a record for net profit making nearly \$134,000
\$42,376	is the average annual net profit for a BEP vendor
58 & 15	BEP business owners employed 58 Minnesotans, 15 with a disability
\$6,333,410	total program sales
\$413,000	sales taxes paid by BEP business owners



Josh Xiong

In Focus: Josh Xiong

"Put yourself out there and get out into the community!"

Josh works as an intern at The Eagle Eye, a convenience store owned by Eric Harms in St. Paul's Centennial Building. Harms is a small business owner in SSB's Business Enterprise Program (BEP). At the store, Josh does stocking, cashiering, and other jobs. It's giving him a chance to learn what's involved in running a business. He likes moving around a lot rather than sitting, and he says of his work, there's "nothing that I don't like!"

Josh is "all about fitness." He roller skis, runs, and plays beep baseball. In fact, his team played in the world series in Ames, Iowa this year.

Senior Services by the Numbers

Our Senior Services team provides tools, training and support to help Minnesota seniors who are experiencing vision loss remain active, independent, and connected to community.

450 seniors were visited by one of our Community Partners in the Aging Eyes Initiative program.

3,750 MN Seniors were served this year.

2 training specialists joined our SSB Senior Services staff. As we support seniors in their goal of living well at home, our training staff teaches technology skills, as well as skills for cooking, getting around, and managing a household using non-visual techniques.

Communication Center by the Numbers

Serving more than 13,000 customers, our Communication Center is Minnesota's Accessible Reading Source.

Audio - Custom Transcriptions **73,941 pages were transcribed into audio**, with an additional **52,143 pages** previously transcribed and sent out to customers in 2016.

BARD The Braille and Audio Reading Download service from the National Library Service makes available many titles produced by regional affiliates like our Communication Center. In 2016 **135 titles** from the Communication Center were posted on BARD, and they were **downloaded 15,173 times**.

Braille **825,000 braille pages** in the hands of customers. **1,105 braille books or materials sent out** to students and consumers.

E-text **28,216 pages** were converted into accessible electronic text for customers to read on a computer, tablet, or smartphone.

Equipment **1,853 pieces of equipment**, such as digital book players were repaired. 6,076 radios, digital book players and accessories came and went through our mailroom.

News **378,752** is the number of times our two automated news services, Dial-in News and NFB-NEWSLINE were accessed by customers.

Radio Talking Book **258 books were recorded and broadcast** on air in 2016, in addition to news and articles from more than 300 publications.

Podcasts **173 podcasts were produced** by the Radio Talking Book and our partners at BlindAbilities. **Listeners downloaded these podcasts 91,000 times**.

Volunteers **657 dedicated, talented volunteers** help to make all of this possible. Their in-kind contributions represent **\$2,000,000**.

OUR VOLUNTEERS

Our Multi-Talented Volunteers

The 657 volunteers in our Communication Center bring an impressive array of diverse talents to their work, from repairing digital equipment, to creating tactile diagrams, to describing complex charts, to knowing the correct pronunciation of technical terms. On behalf of the 13,000 customers who use the services of the Communication Center each year, the staff of SSB wishes to thank the following volunteers who reached a notable milestone with us in 2016.

5 Year Volunteers

- Leon Anderson—RTB
- Mahjabeen Anees—Braille
- Julie Bolton—RTB
- Jean Bowman—RTB
- Bradley Craig—Audio
- Cathy Fogale—RTB
- Morris Hartman—Audio
- Roger Hendrickson—RTB
- Arlene Holdeman—Audio
- Mary Junnila—RTB
- Mitzi Lewellen—RTB
- Vivian Markley—RTB
- Bryan Morlock—RTB
- Jack Pearson—RTB
- Julie Raiche—RTB
- Tom Raiche—RTB
- Deborah Sampson—Audio
- Theresa Shimizu—Audio
- Lily Strickler—Braille
- Holly Sylvester—RTB
- Sandy Winklesky—RTB
- Nikki Wunderlich—Audio

10 Year Volunteers

- Sally Abrams—Audio
- Jeanne Adamski—RTB
- William Del Adamson—RTB

- Judy Lynn Anderson—RTB
- Linda Barshaw—RTB
- George Beattie—RTB
- Patricia Bresser—RTB
- Christopher Colestock—RTB
- John Foley—RTB
- Ann Hoedeman—RTB
- Barbara Johnson—RTB
- Flo Kirsch—Braille
- Judy Kopperude—RTB
- Patty Lewandowski—RTB
- Connaught Lindquist—RTB
- Val Lundby—RTB
- Kimerly Miller—RTB
- Mark Miller, Sr.—RTB
- Randi Nulty—Braille
- Tom Ochocki—RTB
- Duane Rose—RTB
- Bonnie Stevens—RTB
- Licia Swanson—RTB
- Nila Venzke—RTB
- Dick Warren—RTB
- Rita Woeste—RTB

15 Year Volunteers

- Jan Akervik—RTB
- Clarice Anderson—RTB
- Jerry Begley—RTB

- Karen Cossman—Braille
- Catherine Durivage—General
- Blake Hambrick—RTB
- Isla Hejny—RTB
- Pamela Johnson—RTB
- Karen Kennelly—Audio
- Marge Laudenbach—RTB
- S. S. Nagaraju—Braille
- Peter Panzer—RTB
- Pixie Peterson—RTB
- Colleen Raskob—RTB
- Liz Spicer—Braille
- Argene Whalen—Audio
- Gregory Wright—Audio

20 Year Volunteers

- John Derosier—RTB
- Wayne Leverkus—Audio
- Art Hyhus—Audio
- Audray Rees—RTB
- Jeffrey Weihe—RTB

25 Year Volunteers

- Patricia Keith—RTB

30 Year Volunteers

- Jill Keen—Audio
- Karen Mateer—Audio

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

- If you, or someone you know, has trouble reading standard print, contact us. We'll keep you reading in a way that works for you.
- If there's a senior in your life who has macular degeneration, glaucoma, or is losing vision due to some other cause, let them know that we're here for them.
- When you visit your ophthalmologist or optometrist, ask if they know that SSB has the knowledge, services and resources to make sure that their patients with significant vision loss can live well after diagnosis.
- If you are an employer, talk with our business relations team about finding the candidate who could be your next great hire.
- If you know someone with hiring authority, please let them know that State Services for the Blind has a pool of job seekers with the skills and experience to fill a diverse range of positions.
- If you love the written word, check out the range of volunteer positions by visiting us at **www.MNSSB.org**
- Our Communication Center is funded through a public and private partnering. We could not continue the work we do as Minnesota's Accessible Reading Source without our volunteers and the financial support of our generous donors.

**We now are on GiveMN,
and you can get to
that page by visiting
mn.gov/deed/ssbdonate**

About this Report

In this report we highlight our young adult customers. Whether participating in summer programs, taking advantage of internships and other work opportunities, reading a class assignment on their phone through an e-text file created by our Audio Services team, or studying a textbook produced by our braille team, blind, DeafBlind and visually impaired young adults are finding what they need to succeed through SSB services. Thanks for reading!



EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

STATE SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

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

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www.MNSSB.org

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