

— MINNESOTA —

State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

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State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

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Steve Jacobsen and Michael O'Day, Council Chairs
State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind
2200 University Avenue West, Suite 240
St. Paul, MN 55114
November 2015

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,

One of the pleasant tasks we have as the outgoing and incoming chairs of the State Rehabilitation Council – Blind (SRC-B) is to encapsulate, in a meaningful way, the progress we have made as blind, DeafBlind and visually impaired people during the past year, and the roles played by this council and State Services for the Blind (SSB) in that progress. In addition to the high points we discuss in this letter, the following pages detail the work done by this council and its committees and task forces in partnership with SSB.

As expressed in our Vision Statement, one of the key responsibilities of the SRC-B is 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." To fulfill this vision, Advisory councils must effectively play two roles. One of those roles is to applaud the efforts of State Services for the Blind that have been successful. The second is to do what we can to perpetuate and strengthen those efforts. We find a good deal to applaud during 2016.

The scope and variety of positions that the customers of SSB's Workforce Development Section have obtained is once again impressive. In 2016, blind, DeafBlind and visually impaired Minnesotans

found jobs as mechanics, nursing assistance, business operations specialists, recreation therapists, and educators, to name but a few. Altogether, there are some 90 different occupations listed, demonstrating once again, that working blind, DeafBlind and visually impaired Minnesotans contribute to all sectors of our economy.

In addition, the numbers below represent just some of the progress made by blind, DeafBlind, and visually impaired Minnesotans in the last year. Behind each of these numbers might be a fourth-grader in Crookston reading a geography book in braille, a senior in Red Wing, learning how to use the accessibility features on an iPad to send a text to a grandchild, or a young woman in Cloquet heading off to her first job. The council is proud to have provided support and guidance to the staff of SSB in making each story behind each number a story of success and empowerment.

- 140 successful closures representing 140 more blind, DeafBlind and visually impaired Minnesotans working across the state.
- \$16.75 Average hourly wage for full and part time work.
- \$19.75 Average hourly wage for fulltime work.
- \$14.31 Average hourly wage for part time work.
- 3,750 seniors served
- Just under 100,000 Print pages transcribed in to human-voiced audio or Accessible electronic text
- 825,000 braille pages produced or redistributed from other sources
- Almost 400,000 accesses of on-line newspapers and Radio Talking Book programs made available in part by State Services for the Blind.

Our second role is to provide input based upon our perspectives as partners and customers of State Services for the Blind. In that capacity, the SRC-B and its committees have participated in the development and refinement of SSB policies. We worked together to develop goals and priorities,

and a comprehensive needs assessment which are required by federal regulations. Our Committees on services to DeafBlind persons and our Minority Outreach Committee have assisted in the development of strategies to better serve more Minnesotans. In fact, each of our eight standing committees have worked effectively in partnership with agency staff to increase opportunities for blind students, senior citizens, and those of us dealing with the changing requirements of employment. We played what we believe to have been a constructive role in making required changes to policies that were necessary to balance the budget while minimizing the impact on customers. It is most fortunate that we are working with an agency that values and respects the opinions and ideas of its partners and customers, and we are glad to report that we have been heard.

One of the most exciting events during the year occurred on April 30th when over 90 high school age blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind students and family members met with roughly 30 successfully employed blind Minnesotans, including several SRCB members, to discuss career opportunities. The room was literally buzzing as students mingled with blind adults from many walks of life to discuss career plans and turning those plans into reality. The importance of successful role models within the blind and DeafBlind communities cannot be over emphasized. What better motivator for a blind high school student interested in high tech, for instance, than to meet blind professionals already working in the industry. Events such as these motivate and instill confidence in these young Minnesotans to aim high to reach career goals as they transition to postsecondary education or the workplace. Everyone wins when blind, DeafBlind, and visually impaired Minnesotans have a clear path to employment: The individual lives a more fulfilling and productive life, employers have a more skilled and diverse workforce and taxpayers receive a return on their investment.

On behalf of the Council, we wish to thank the staff of SSB, and the many dedicated volunteers, who helped make 2016 such a successful year at SSB. It is



Back Row: Scott Eggen, Sean Roy, Michael Colbrunn, Michael O'Day, Pat McGee Middle Row: Carol Pankow, Katy Kelley, Steve Jacobson, Michelle Dornan-Vickery, Ken Rodgers

Front Row: Betty Jean Kauffman, RoseAnn Faber, Gloria LaFriniere

a privilege to be a part of making Minnesota a great state for everyone, including people who are blind, DeafBlind, and visually impaired.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael O'Day
Steve Jacobson



Letter from Director Pankow

Blind, DeafBlind and visually impaired Minnesotans can be rightfully proud of the hard work undertaken on their behalf by the State Rehabilitation Council-Blind. Certainly, the work of State Services for the Blind has been strengthened because of the thoughtful and careful guidance provided by the council throughout this busy year. As SSB's Director, I have been especially appreciative of the commitment of time, energy and talent that the council and committee members have offered.

Keeping our Customers Front and Center

In 2014, the U.S. congress passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) which had significant implications for how we serve our customers. While our employment services were most directly impacted, the effects of WIOA were felt across SSB. Final regulations and guidelines were not available to us until June of 2016, making it difficult for the council to help set a course for our work. The council was diligent, however, in keeping abreast of all the policy and procedural changes brought about by WIOA. Most important, they kept the focus on understanding how this new legislation would impact customers.

When budgetary constraints related to WIOA necessitated changes to our fee schedules, council members helped us craft policies that were clear and fair. The council invested extra time and effort to insure that the state plan that we submitted to the Rehabilitation Services Administration fully met the requirements of WIOA and fully supported our commitment to excellent customer service.

Making Minnesota a Great Place to Work

Two years ago, you issued an Executive Order calling for an increase in the hiring of state employees with disabilities. This year, the council took on the challenge of helping to insure that qualified blind, DeafBlind and visually impaired Minnesotans had a full and fair shot at getting a job in state government. When issues on accessibility were flagged regarding the new state job search tool, the council sent a letter urging the state to insure that we honor our commitments and legal responsibilities for accessibility.

In a similar way, the council had fairness in employment in view when they sent a letter to the Veterans Administration in support of our work to open up a vending business opportunity at the VA under the stipulations of the Randolph-Sheppard Act.

Making Minnesota a Great Place to Live

Over the past several years, the council has offered important feedback to SSB as we've crafted a strategy to meet the demands of serving the increasing number of seniors with vision loss. Not only is the senior population growing, but, more and more, seniors with vision loss are interested in learning how to use assistive technology. This year the council wrote another letter to your office laying out the case for increasing our state's funding for training for seniors facing vision loss. The council knows firsthand that paying for training upfront can save our state money in the long term, and increase the quality of life and level of independence for our state's seniors. The legislation passed this year, and signed into law by your action, gives many more seniors a chance to get the training they need to remain independent and active in their communities.

As this report will show, the Council's committees also worked hard this year in support of our efforts to provide excellent customer service to any and every Minnesotan who would benefit from what we have to offer. The Minority Outreach committee was successful especially in connecting with East African Communities. Other highlights from committees included the DeafBlind Committee's efforts to provide guidance to DeafBlind transition-aged students, and the work of the Communication Center Advisory Committee in providing guidance as we refined and improved our services.

Outstanding Work

This year, the Council has had a lot on its plate, but at every point, council members proved they were up to the task. This is a council that knows how to show up, step up, and speak out. I am grateful to have their thoughtful input, and I am proud of the work we have accomplished together.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carol Pankow', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Carol Pankow

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.

In Memoriam, Frances Whetstone

Before losing her vision in her mid-seventies, Frances Whetstone was a go-getter – active in many organizations in her community. After losing her vision ... Frances Whetstone was still the same go-getter. The only difference was that after losing her vision, Frances added to her busy life involvement with organizations like State Services for the Blind.

“Sometimes if life gives you a bad experience, it may be a blessing,” Frances said, “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 members of the SRC-B and the staff of SSB were saddened by the news of Frances’ death in September of 2016. At age 99, Frances was still an active member of our council. She will very much be missed. The council extends our sincerest condolences to her family, and to all those whose lives she touched.

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.”

After her vision loss, Frances also became active in the United Blind of Minnesota, and served for many years as their Vice President. She was the representative of the United Blind on our council and also served on the Senior Services Committee. She was proud of her governor’s appointment to the council and would attend meetings via conference call at times when she could no longer attend in person.

In addition to her work with the United Blind of Minnesota and the SRC-B, Frances was active at her church, and with the Eastern Star of Richfield.



Frances Whetstone

Through these organizations and others, Frances organized fundraisers, planned lunches, and served in leadership roles. A true dynamo, in 2015 she was honored with the Outstanding Senior Award by the Edynamos Fellowship of Christ Presbyterian Church.

Frances remained an avid 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.”

COMMITTEE REPORTS

COMMUNICATION CENTER COMMITTEE REPORT

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 as well as a summary of the accomplishments of the past year. During FFY 2016 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 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 2016:

- **SUPPORTS THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN IN MINNESOTA SCHOOLS** –The Communication Center continues to provide braille and audio textbooks to blind students through a contract 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 one time materials common to multiple school districts. It also supports the increased attention on “transition-aged” students which is required by WIOA and its regulations. An increase in the contract with the Minnesota Department of Education was negotiated during this past year.
- **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. This process is now in its second year and continues to grow. During this past year, 25,267 print pages were converted to electronic text, and this number will doubtlessly continue to increase.

- **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, a division of the Library of Congress. This is the program best known to the general public as the Talking Book program. Over 6,070 NLS Talking Book players and accessories have been distributed by the Communication center this year, and 1,925 pieces of equipment have been repaired. In addition, the Communication Center and the Minnesota Braille and Talking Book Library in Faribault have many common customers. For some time, an effort has been underway to allow more efficient service delivery by using common software for tracking of customer and equipment information and by allowing the staff from either to handle incoming inquiries. After completing the implementation of a common phone number for customers and a common customer database last year, this work has paid off during the past year as staff has been able to handle calls and requests even more efficiently.
- **MODERNIZATION OF THE RADIO TALKING BOOK SERVICE** –In addition to making the operation of this service more efficient, new methods to get 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. During the past year, there has been continued growth in the use of these additional ways of accessing Radio Talking Book programs. In fact, the Engineering Section reports that there have been 18,391 accesses of the Radio Talking Book internet stream.

- **BRILLE PRODUCTION** –Huge numbers of print pages were converted to braille and audio to support Minnesota students in K-12 and in post-secondary institutions. Approximately 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.
- **AUDIO PRODUCTION** –Even with new technology, creating human recordings of books is still very important. The Audio Section of the Communication Center converted 73,941 print pages into audio recordings for students and others.
- **SPECIAL PROJECTS** –During this past year, several projects were of interest to this committee. Unified English Braille (UEB) is now the braille standard in the United States. Four workshops were held during the past year to assist with training. At one of our meetings, we learned about Tactile Graphics libraries and discussed how this might be useful in providing support to children in educational settings. We also explored further how 3D printing might play a role in producing tactile graphics and even educational models.
- **INCREASING THE COMMUNICATION CENTER'S CUSTOMER BASE** –During the past year, a great deal of thought and effort has been directed toward making the services of the Communication Center known to those with reading disabilities who are not blind. Examples of such people are those who cannot hold a book or turn a page, and those with other reading disabilities that impede their ability to recognize words. At our most recent meeting, we saw a new brochure intended to reach additional customers that uses the "tag line" of "Minnesota's Accessible Reading Source."
- **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 in addition to the telephone. Blind persons with an electronic braille display can now 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. The importance and the success of these programs can be measured by the 378,752 times that these services were accessed during the past year.

- **FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES** –The communication Center has an active fundraising program to augment other funding sources for many services which 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 volunteer recognition events to applaud the work of nearly 700 volunteers that make possible much of the work of the Communication Center. This year, an effort was made to reward volunteers throughout Minnesota by holding several events around the state. These events are sponsored 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, and he completed his term during the past year. In addition, the Communication Center has received national recognition by having 175 of their audio recordings included in the collection of the National Library Service for national distribution.

Respectfully Submitted,

Steve Jacobson, Chair

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Elizabeth Bruber, Mark Dahlberg, Catherine Durivage, Steve Jacobson, Ezra Kesler, Kristin Oien, Carla Steinbring, Ryan Strunk.

STAFF: David Andrews, Gwen Bighley, Angela Bodensteiner, Brianna Holeman, Stuart Holland, Jay Maruska, Annette Toews.

DEAFBLIND COMMITTEE REPORT

Overview

This committee exists to support and advise State Services for the Blind (SSB) regarding its services to individuals who are both deaf/hard of hearing and blind/have low vision. This committee provides input to the Customer Satisfaction & Goals and Priorities Committee of the full 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.

- The DeafBlind Community & SRC-B Open House in FY 2014-2015, was a success! Not only were we able to increase awareness of SSBs employment services to the DeafBlind community, but also find Molly Wezel-Peterson to fill the empty seat as DeafBlind Representative on the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B).

In 2016, we also:

- Had a presentation from Sheila Koenig, with SSB's Transition Student Program
- And another presentation from Sara Kreling, DeafBlind Services Specialist with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services
- Helped establish relationship with Minnesota Dept. Of Human Services, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division and SSB to partner in specialized equipment demonstration for DeafBlind individuals to eliminate duplicative effort and effectively use resources.
- Started the drafting of Transition Aged DeafBlind framework for teachers and parents to know what to think about and do to prepare transition aged youth.
- Members attended and presented at different events such as the Career Fair held at Minneapolis Community & Technical College to raise awareness of DeafBlind Committee and SSB services to the DeafBlind community.

As you can see 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,

Jamie Taylor

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Jamie Taylor – Chair, Molly Wezel-Peterson, Cathy Lyle, Paul Deeming, Chris Marble, and Marlene Moulton Janssen (new 2015)

SSB STAFF – Lindsey Hanson, Natasha Jerde, Linda Lingen and Katy Kelley

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

Committee Charge

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.

FY 2016 Meeting Dates

The Employment Committee met on the following dates during FY 2016: 10/20/15, 11/12/15, 12/18/15, 3/11/16 and 4/18/16.

Review of Past Projects

At the October 2015 meeting, new members to the committee were updated on items the committee has been working on over the past year. Items included; strengthening client education on employment-related issues specific to persons with disabilities, developing a mentoring program for transition age youth, examining the reasons that might impact SSB's non-closure rate, and reviewing the reorganization within the WDU.

WDU Reorganization

During the October meeting there was continued discussion about work the WDU is undertaking regarding the team approach to working with clients. The plan is to have counselors, a VR tech, assistive tech professional and employment specialist meet monthly as a team to provide

holistic support for the client's employment related goals.

Another initiative discussed at the October meeting was WDU's plan to have one person responsible for metro area intakes. The hope is that this will provide a more streamlined approach to meeting the needs of the client by having one person responsible for all metro area intakes creating a consistent message for those seeking services from SSB. In the past, the intake function was spread out among many staff members making it difficult to provide a consistent message on services available to potential clients.

State of Minnesota Employment of Individuals with Disabilities

The Employment Subcommittee decided to pursue strategies to help the State meet its mandated goal of having 7 percent of its workforce be comprised of persons with disabilities. The committee sees this mandate as an opportunity for SSB to be a preferred partner in assisting State agencies in meeting this new goal. Some issues discussed by the committee related to this objective include the following:

MOU—There were extensive Committee discussions of a Memorandum of Understanding that allows all qualified persons with disabilities to receive an interview for open positions with the State. SSB is aware of and is making use of the current MOU, which covers the DNR. At the December meeting, it was discussed that it is possible there will be a directive from the Governor's Office that will expand the MOU to include all State agencies, rather than developing individual MOUs between each State agency and VRS. At the March Meeting, it was reported that the larger MOU is apparently on hold.

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT – There was also a discussion of the Supported Employment Program, which allows persons with significant disabilities to work for the State doing basic work tasks under the supervision of a job coach.

One of the problems discussed was how to disseminate information about the program to those who actually do the hiring for the State. HR isn't necessarily involved in the day-to-day needs of the operation, so the word about the Supported Employment Program needs to get to the actual

managers and supervisors that know what work needs to be accomplished.

Affirmative Action Officers have responsibilities related to the Supported Worker Program and 700 Hour Program within their agencies, but they don't have the infrastructure to actually implement the program. It was also reported that managers also do not have the resources to properly manage the program. This means there needs to be a discussion about how to actually implement the program in practice.

CONNECT 700 HOUR PROGRAM – Discussion about the Supported Employment Program led to a discussion about the redesigned Connect 700 Hour Program, which apparently is being redeveloped from the old 700 Hour Program. The purpose of the program is to improve the hiring and retention of persons with disabilities within State government. The program is in the draft stage at this point and likely will not be finalized for quite some time.

In its current draft form, the applicant applies for an open position and must meet the minimum qualifications to be considered for the position. The State agency is required to have "a conversation" with that person. If the agency agrees, the person can then be placed on the Connect 700 program. At the end of the program, they can be hired directly.

In order to qualify, the applicant must: 1) have a disability, and 2) the disability must be severe enough so that the individual is not able to go through the standard application process. SSB personnel stated that an individual that is blind with no other disabilities may not qualify for the program, given the rather restrictive definition of who can participate.

ONLINE ACCESSIBILITY OF STATE OF MN WEBSITE – Committee members raised concerns about online accessibility of the State application process that currently impedes visually impaired applicants when they apply for State of Minnesota jobs. SSB was brought into the project early on to ensure accessibility, but SSB acknowledges that it is a complex project and that bugs need to be worked out of the system. SSB is working with Oracle on improving the accessibility of the State of

Minnesota's new employment website. There have been many complaints related to accessibility of the site. The SRC-B drafted a letter to the Governor's Office to try and move this project forward.

ACCOMMODATIONS TRAINING FOR STATE OF MINNESOTA MANAGERS – It was reported at the March meeting that SSB and VRS provided training to managers within the State on employing individuals with disabilities and the services that SSB and VRS provides as part of the State's manager training program. Going forward, this training will occur quarterly for new managers.

STUDENT INTERNSHIPS WITH STATE AGENCIES – Transition age students will have the opportunity to have an internship with a State agency this summer. This is a great opportunity for high school and college age students to gain needed work experience. The internship would pay 1500 dollars for the summer in two equal payments.

Career Expo

At the November meeting, the SSB Transition Specialist provided an update on the youth transition program. She used a bridge as a metaphor to visualize how transition age youth move from education to employment. In order to make a successful transition, youth need to have the basic skills needed to successfully transition to employment. Such skills include knowledge and use of technology and mobility skills, among others.

During the November meeting the Transition Specialist said she is planning a Career Expo in the spring of 2016 where transition age youth will meet with successfully employed blind individuals. In that way, young people will have a better understanding of the wide range of career options available to them. Students will also gain confidence knowing that blind people already hold jobs in the profession that they are interested in pursuing. She encouraged Committee members to submit names of blind role models to participate in the Expo.

At the December meeting the Transition Specialist provided a further update. There will be an exhibit hall style format with concurrent sessions. By April, twenty-eight exhibitors who are successfully employed people who are blind or have vision

loss signed up to participate. Over 90 students and families registered to attend the Career Expo. Participants will interact with the exhibitors and ask questions by moving from table to table in a career fair type format.

There will also be three breakout sessions for the students to attend during this period. Topics for breakout sessions include a session on labor market trends, a panel discussion of college life, and a session on adaptive technology.

The Expo was held on April 30th, and by all accounts was a great success.

Update on SSB Public Hearings

At the March meeting, the Committee Chair provided a brief update on SSB's hearings regarding changes to tuition and maintenance reimbursement policies. Most of the changes made as a result of feedback received during the hearings were related to clarifications to the draft document. In particular, revisions were made to when SSB will pay for students attending conventions and when SSB will pay for moving costs. It was generally agreed that the hearings went well and that it was a collaborative process.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael O'Day, Chair

COMMITTEE CHAIR: Michael O'Day.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Rob Hobson, Ken Rogers, Chris Marble, Dick Davis and Rochelle Chen.

SSB STAFF MEMBERS: Natasha Jerde, Andy Olson and Pam Gowan.

MINORITY OUTREACH COMMITTEE REPORT

The role of this committee is to provide recommendations on specific strategies that would increase and improve services to individuals from minority backgrounds. This committee is also responsible to provide input to the full council, and to the Customer Satisfaction and the Goals and priorities committee for the development of the

annual goals and priorities in conjunction with State Services for the Blind.

During the year of 2016, the minority outreach committee met five times. The committee focused on two areas: to explore strategies to make recommendations to SSB and to reach out to minority groups and organizations that work with people from a Minority background.

After several discussions at all of the meetings, the committee decided that it will be important to expand and improve training on how counselors can interact with different minority groups. This is important because the last training was held in 2005 and there has been a lot of turnover in ten years. Therefore the committee recommends that SSB sponsor training on cultural competency for counselors in order to understand how to best work with their customers. It was also suggested to add cultural training on working with the Karens since there have been more Karen refugees coming into Minnesota. The committee also recommends that in addition to Adjustment to Blindness Training, cultural competency training should be added to the New Employee Orientation for counselors. These recommendations are important because when professionals are knowledgeable about individuals with different cultural backgrounds, they establish positive working relationships and improve the quality of services they provide.

Throughout the year, all of the committee members were actively involved in reaching out to minority groups and organizations that work with people from Minority backgrounds to seek out customers who would benefit from receiving SSB's services.

Below is a list of some of the organizations and groups the committee connected with:

- **RAJOQAB FOUNDATION.** Rajoqab is a Somali foundation that contacted the Minnesota State Council on Disability who then sent a letter to Commissioner Katie Clark-Seiben. The committee contacted the Rajoqab foundation on behalf of SSB and received one referral.
- **METRO REFUGEE TASKFORCE.** The Metro Refugee Task Force is a group of health professionals, social service workers, and others who are

interested in refugee health issues. The group meets the first Tuesday of each month to discussed refugee health issues and network. Members of the Minority Outreach Committee have also been attending their monthly meetings to learn about the service they provide and network with other organizations and groups.

Other organizations and groups the committee has connected with are:

- International Institute of Minnesota
- New American Project
- Minnesota Council of Churches
- Wellstone International High School
- Organization of Liberians in Minnesota
- The Hmong American Partnership

Since most of this committee's work Centered around outreach, the committee discussed and decided to host an open house at SSB for groups and organizations that work with people with Minority backgrounds so they can learn about the services SSB offers.

The date of the Open House was tentatively set for March of 2017 and a budget of \$3000 is requested to cover the cost which includes interpreting service, outreach, and food.

To that end, the committee recommends that SSB sponsor an open house for minority groups and organizations that work with people with Minority background; to be hosted by the Minority Outreach Committee.

Submitted by Kotumu Kamara

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Kotumu Kamara—Chair, Gloria LaFriniere, Muzamil Ibrahim, Michael Colbrunn, Meredith Larson, Lisa Larges, Alana Strickler

SSB STAFF: Jon Benson, Samantha Fischer

SENIOR SERVICES COMMITTEE REPORT

The Senior Services committee assists the Senior Services Unit by providing insight, advice and ideas.

For 2016 Fiscal year, the meetings focused on advocacy for additional legislative funding, program guidance, product exploration and feedback on active programming.

Regular meetings consist of a report from Ed Lecher, who is the Director of the Senior Services Unit, follow-up on previous agenda items and discussion and planning for current activities.

During the Director update the committee offers feedback on projects and service delivery. Throughout the spring, the committee followed the progress of legislative proposals and offered their support through written recommendations delivered to the SRC-B and forwarded through them to the legislature.

One particular focus for 2016 was to explore the wide variety of phone options that are functional and usable for seniors, especially seniors with vision loss. Each of the committee members were given a set of products to explore in terms of cost and usability. The research also included a focus on built-in accessibility tools for each product. In all, members researched about a dozen different products. The final result, was that there are several good, inexpensive options for lower tech phones that have voice feedback. The consensus on higher tech smart phones is that the iPhone is the best option currently.

To round out the meeting year, the committee welcomed new members and said good bye to several others. Most notably and sadly, long-time committee member Francis Whetstone passed away. She had been a very active member of the committee and will be missed.

In the coming year, the committee will focus on helping the Senior Services Unit implement the mandate to provide customer training at a higher level. The committee will be looking at the methodology for encouraging training and the

various ways in which we deliver training to our consumers.

MEMBERS: Pat Barrett, RoseAnn Faber, Bob Raisbeck, Judy Sanders, Frances Whetstone, Emily Zitek

STAFF: Sue Crancer, Ed Lecher

TRANSITION COMMITTEE REPORT

CHARGE: 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 2016:

10-09-15 / 11-18-15 / 01-15-16 / 03-28-16 / 04-08-16 / 06-03-16 / 10-07-16

The following is a report on the 2 Priorities and Strategies that Transition Committee identified as relevant to their committee and the actions taken to support these goals.

Review of the Federal Fiscal Year 2015 (FFY15)

Goals & Priorities

SECTION #1: Jobs, More Jobs, Better Jobs

PRIORITY #1.3: Implement the workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS). (This new priority is a result of WIOA becoming law this past July and the emphasis on youth with disabilities who are transition students to better prepare for the world of work through a variety of activities.)

Strategies:

1. PROPOSED: Identify and communicate with all transition aged students who are blind, visually

impaired, and DeafBlind who are not currently engaged with SSB so they are informed of services available.

Transition Committee actions and activities that took place for FFY16:

- a. **TRANSITION NEWSLETTER** – Continuation of newsletter on a quarterly basis. The newsletter is made available online via the SSB Website as well as the teacher list-serve. Efforts will be made to continue to send out hard copies and alternative formats to students and parents.
- b. **STP PROGRAM (JUNE 2015) & SUMMER PAID WORK EXPERIENCE**
 - i. STP was held for 12 days in June, 2016. The students spent a full day at SSB and met with SSB staff and placement team members. The students participated in mock interviews with SSB staff.
 - ii. There was a total of 13 students that started and completed the program.
 - iii. Several students had work experience during the STP Program and job shadows.
 - iv. Students were supported by SSB for paid-work experiences after the program. (July – August, 2016)
- c. **TRANSITION SERVICES STATE GRANT FUNDING (2015-2016)** – Blind, Inc located in Minneapolis, and the Duluth Lighthouse for the Blind, located in Duluth, continued their second year of a two-year state grant to fund the following:
 - i. Year-round Transition Services for Blind, Low Vision and DeafBlind students.
 - ii. Statewide outreach efforts in providing informational seminars to professionals, teachers, parents and students.
 - iii. Summer Transition & Employment Program Services.
 - iv. Peer Mentoring Program.

- d. **SSB ASSISTANT TRANSITION COORDINATOR POSITION (SUMMER OF 2016)** – SSB created a new Assistant Transition Coordinator position and hired Tou Yang for this role. His role will serve to assist the Transition Coordinator and serve as a “Navigator” by coordinating and setting up work experiences for Transition Students out in the community.
- e. **SSB TRANSITION COORDINATOR.** Sheila Koenig, who was hired for this position in 2015 continues to focus on the areas listed below:
 - i. Keeping in contact with current and new SSB Transition students.
 - ii. Attending IEP meetings, building relationships with all the team players, meeting with all SSB Counselors.
 - iii. Attending various conferences throughout the State (BVI, Council Meetings, etc.)
 - iv. Coordinating and attending outreach activities that also include a variety of media formats and outlets.

SECTION #2: SSB-Your Resource Within Reach

PRIORITY #2: All Blind, Visually Impaired, and DeafBlind Minnesotans are aware of and have access to information about SSB.

Strategies:

- 3. Develop and implement marketing and outreach plan targeting Regional Low Incidence Facilitators and Special Education directions.

Transition Committee actions and activities that took place for FFY16:

- a. **CAREER EXPO, MINNEAPOLIS COMMUNITY TECHNICAL COLLEGE – MAY 2016**
 - i. About 100 people in attendance.
 - ii. Panels consisting of Blind, Low Vision and DeafBlind college students or currently employed were available to share their experiences and to answer any questions that students may have.
 - iii. This event was very well received.

b. CHARTING THE C'S, ALEXANDRIA, MN – APRIL 2016

- i. SSB had a booth present at the Charting the C's conference, an annual statewide teachers conference for students with disabilities. Sheila also was one of the presenters at the conference speaking on Transition for Blind and Low Vision youth.

c. TRANSITION VIDEOS

- i. SSB along with Blind Inc and the Lighthouse for the Blind produced videos for Transition Students and their parents to learn more about the Transition process. The video contains parents and students sharing their experiences.

d. OTHER OUTREACH ACTIVITIES – Sheila Koenig, the SSB Transition Coordinator has several outreach activities underway and planned for FFY16 that also include a variety of media formats and outlets.

Respectfully Submitted,

Wendy DeVore

COMMITTEE CHAIR: Wendy DeVore. Committee Members: Elizabeth Bruber, Kristin Oien, Diane Dohnalik, Rebecca Kragness, Dan Wenzel, Betty Jean Kaufmann

SSB REPRESENTATIVES: Mike Newman, Sheila Koenig, Linda Lingen

VENDOR OUTCOMES COMMITTEE REPORT

During FFY2016, the Vender outcome and Measures committee continued to evaluate the Survey results. Rather than continue to have Quarterly result evaluations, we decided to accumulate the data once a year, thus adding together all of the results at one time. This was done to ensure all venders had the most accurate results. Several venders did not receive a 70% response rate, thus taking that vender off the public record.

The survey is designed to reflect the very different training programs provided for Senior Services and Workforce Development customers. The survey results are collected 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 meeting the minimum statistical requirements for meaningful results. Both of these reports 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. There are still improvements to be made with the survey including working out some data collection bugs and posting the results of the survey.

During FFY2017, The committee will begin to take part in evaluating the Vender monitor review results. More to come next year.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert P. Hobson

MEMBERS: Jan Bailey, Michelle Dornan, Cori Giles, Mary Junnila

STAFF: Jennifer Beilke

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND GOALS AND PRIORITIES COMMITTEE

Part 1 — Overview

This committee exists to carry out specific duties contained in federal regulations 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, 2016. Five survey items were analyzed to compare the results for years ending 3/31/13, 3/31/14, 3/31/15, and 3/31/2016. While there has been some fluctuation in results, no significant changes have taken place from year to year.

Summary	YE 3/31/2013	YE 3/31/2014	YE 3/31/2015	YE 3/31/2016
Q1 (was Q5): How satisfied are you with the time it usually took to get your answer	79%	79%	88%	85%
Q2 (was Q4): Satisfied that counselor (staff) understood customer's needs	83%	85%	88%	88%
Q3 (was QVR1): Satisfied that customer given enough info to make good choices on employment plan	79%	83%	89%	85%
Q4 (was QVR2): Satisfied that customer had an active role in decisions about services	85%	89%	94%	92%
Q11 (was Q1): Overall satisfaction with services provided	84%	82%	88%	84%
Q12 (was Q2): Extent to which services have met expectations	77%	73%	83%	81%
Q13 (was Q3): Comparison with "ideal" set of services	80%	77%	85%	81%

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 11, 12, and 13 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 14 – Mar 15	Jul 14 – Jun 15	Oct 14 – Sept 15	Jan 15 – Dec 15	Apr 15 – Mar 16
Average MnCSI Scores	75.8	77.7	77.9	76.4	76.5
N size	217	204	201	204	210

The committee continued to track the questions about assistive technology that were asked on the survey in the year ending 2015. The data for the years ending March 2015 and March 2016 are as follows:

Q6 Have you received any Assistive Technology from State Services for the Blind? This could be hardware or software.

Responses	2015 4 Quarters	2016 4 Quarters
Yes	72%	66%
No	25%	31%
Unsure	3%	3%
DK/Refused	<1%	0%
N Size	223	216

Q7 Think about when you first received your Assistive Technology. How prepared did you feel to use the technology when you first go it? Did you feel very well prepared, somewhat prepared, not very well prepared, or not at all prepared?

Responses	2015 4 Quarters	2016 4 Quarters
Very prepared	46%	37%
Somewhat prepared	37%	42%
Not very well prepared	12%	8%
Not at all prepared	4%	11%
DK/Refused	1%	2%
N Size	161	142

Q8 How useful do you think the Assistive Technology equipment that you received will be/was in helping you meet your vocational plan goals? Do you think it will be very useful, somewhat useful, not very useful, or not at all useful? (NEW)

Responses	2015 4 Quarters	2016 4 Quarters
Very useful	75%	76%
Somewhat useful	22%	16%
Not very useful	1%	2%
Not at all useful	2%	4%
DK/Refused	1%	1%
N Size	161	142

The members of the committee read the verbatim comments elicited by the following two survey questions to determine if trends or issues specific to SSB were apparent. No significant trends were identified from this data.

Q9 In your opinion, what is/was the most important part of the services you received from SSB?

Q10 If you could change one thing about the services you received, what would you change?

*For the complete Customer Satisfaction Survey results see:

http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/About_Us/Customer_Satisfaction/Job_Seeker_Satisfaction/Results_by_Program_5.aspx

Part III — Progress on FFY16 Goals and Priorities

Some of the strategies jointly developed and worked on by the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B) and SSB over the past several years have become integral pieces of the SSB culture. The activities listed below will continue to be monitored by SSB and reported to the SRC-B on a regular basis, but will not be part of the Goals, Priorities and Activities listed in the State Plan.

- All new Workforce Development Unit (WDU) staff will successfully complete Introduction to Blindness Phase 1. In addition to vocational rehabilitation counselors, select WDU staff who regularly interact directly with customers will successfully complete Phase 2 training on the essential aspects of blindness and visual impairment. For counselors, this training will occur within three months of hire and before any caseload activity is assigned.
- Customer satisfaction surveys will be administered on a quarterly basis by an external organization to approximately 70 SSB WDU customers as part of the Department of Employment and Economic Development customer satisfaction initiative. The analysis of the results of the survey will be reviewed and shared with the SRC-B and the Customer Satisfaction & Goals & Priorities Committee on a regular basis to determine if the results provide information to make positive programmatic changes.
- 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.
- All new WDU 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 WDU staff will receive an annual review of the communication methods at their October staff meeting.

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

PRIORITY #1.1: Employment Outcomes—Increase employment outcomes by 3% from the previous year to meet SSB's Olmstead Plan commitment. (This priority is included as the Olmstead Plan is a significant law that Minnesota must comply with in order to ensure people with disabilities live and work in the least restrictive environments.)

Strategies:

1. PROPOSED: The WDU will develop an annual employment outcome goal for each federal fiscal year. The goal will be reviewed mid-year and revised to reflect current case information together with the increase specified in the priority.

OUTCOME: 140 successful employment outcomes were achieved for FFY16 of which 6 were homemakers making it 134 people in competitive integrated work. In FFY15 there were 143 successful employment outcomes of which 11 were homemakers making it 132 people in competitive integrated work. The percent increase was %1.5 and SSB did not meet the target of 3%.

PRIORITY #1.2: SUCCESS RATE--- Increase the percentage of eligible individuals achieving employment outcomes from 55% to 70%. (We have not yet achieved this priority so it remains)

Strategies:

1. PROPOSED: Based on findings from FFY 15, by April 1, 2016, SSB will implement and evaluate new processes to improve the percentage of successful employment outcomes.

OUTCOME: Achieved. The team model approach to case work was implemented fully during FFY2016. Teams are made up of the counselor and their Vocational Rehabilitation Technician, Placement Specialist, Assistive Technology Specialist, and Supervisor. The team is able to maintain focus, work coordination, and strategize monthly to address ongoing efforts and changing needs to the individual's placement process.

2. PROPOSED: By April 1, 2016, SSB will develop an electronic method of tracking minority and nonminority referrals and disseminate information in a bi-monthly report to the Minority Outcomes committee of the Council.

PRIORITY #1.3: Implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS). (This new priority is a result of WIOA becoming law this past July and the emphasis on youth with disabilities who are transition students to better prepare for the world of work through a variety of activities.)

Strategies:

1. PROPOSED: Identify and communicate with all transition aged students who are blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind who are not currently engaged with SSB so they are informed of services available.

OUTCOME: Partially Achieve. SSB works with the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to identify through the MDE unduplicated child count the number of students not known to SSB. SSB then follows up with messages to schools and educators to request that information be passed on to students and families who may not be aware of SSB. Recently it has been determined that MDE may be able to provide SSB with actual student name and contact information which will greatly improve this process.

2. PROPOSED: By October 31st, 2015, identify all engaged transition students that are college bound in the fall of 2016. By December 31st, 2015, complete a technology assessment and O and M assessment if not completed. By June 1, 2016, complete all technology and O and M training as indicated by the assessment.

OUTCOME: 12 students were identified for graduation in FFY2016 and all who were planning to attend post-secondary education were taken through this process.

SECTION #2: SSB-Your Resource Within Reach.

PRIORITY #2: All Blind, Visually Impaired, and DeafBlind Minnesotans are aware of and have access to information about SSB.

Strategies:

1. Develop and implement an outreach and marketing strategy targeted towards eye care professionals so they meet their legal obligations to refer individuals to SSB.

OUTCOME: Achieved. Two emails sent to eye care professionals explaining employment services, services for seniors and independent living, and accessing print in alternative formats. Networking with eye care and medical professionals through the Foundation Fighting Blindness. Networking with low vision specialists through the Gerontological Society of Minnesota.

2. Network with leaders of five minority communities (Russian, Hmong, Native Americans, Hispanic and East African) in Minnesota to jointly develop marketing and outreach plans.

OUTCOME: Achieved. Outreach to MN refugee communities, immigrants and new Americans through the World Refugee Fair, meeting with the staff of the International Institute of MN, and presentations to and networking with the Metro Refugee Health Task Force. Outreach to Chinese Seniors through presentations to the Chinese Senior lunch program. Outreach to Hmong community through participation on the Hmong Resource planning committee and exhibit tables at the celebration of Hmong Day at the State Fair, and the Hmong Resource Fair. Outreach to Thai seniors through presentation to Thai Senior Day program. Outreach to Somali and East African Communities through sponsorship of the annual Somali American Community Appreciation Dinner, presentations to African Community Services, and the Rajoqab Foundation. Outreach to the African American community through information tables at Rondo Days, St. Paul, and the East Side Neighborhood Association in Minneapolis. Networking with

community professionals through Health Equity Conference, and Conference for Public Health Workers of MN. Media outreach through KARE11 News (Twin Cities) the Mary Hanson Show (Public Television and also public access TV) and Disabled and Proud radio.

3. Develop and implement a marketing and outreach plan targeting Regional Low Incidence Facilitators and Special Education Directors.

OUTCOME: Achieved. SSB's Deputy Director of Program Services attended and presented to MDE Special Education Directors in fall 2016 with information about SSB's transition and Pre-employment services and how to access these services.

4. Develop a collaborative opportunity for SSB, VRS, Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Services of the Department of Human Services (DHHS, DHS) and teachers of the blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind to market and provide information to people throughout Minnesota.

OUTCOME: Achieved. SSB staff serve on the Steering Committee for the Collaboration Plan until MNCDHH. A Collaborative Conference for Professional who serve students who are deaf/hard of hearing was held at Breezy Point March 31, 2016. SSB facilitated a small group discussion with VR professionals discussing WIOA and ways to improve working together. The SSB Transition Coordinator also presented at several conferences including Charting the C's this past year.

SECTION #3: SSB – A Great Place to Work.

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

Strategies:

1. PROPOSED: By December 31, 2015, implement a team oriented model of customer service.

OUTCOME: Achieved.

2. PROPOSED: By December 31, 2015, implement accepted assistive technology workgroup recommendations for providing ongoing customer support and training.

OUTCOME: Achieved: Two Assistive Technology Specialists have been assigned to provide direct AT training to VR customers. This training is specific to certain products and specialized customer needs.

3. PROPOSED: Continue hiring practices that reflect the customer base served.

OUTCOME: During FFY2016 three new staff have been hired who are blind or visually impaired and two individuals from minority groups. These staff include two counselors, a training coordinator, a work opportunity navigator, and an assistive technology specialist.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Dunnam

FY2016 COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Jennifer Dunnam—Chair, Steve Jacobson, Ken Rodgers, Pat McGee, Margaret Klein.

SSB STAFF: Jon Benson, Jennifer Beilke, Carol Pankow.



STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND

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DECEMBER 2016

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