



Board of Service to the Blind & Visually Impaired 2020 Annual Report



South Dakota
Department of Human Services
Division of Service to the Blind & Visually Impaired



Dear Governor Noem:

As Chair of the Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired, I am honored to present to you the 2020 Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) Annual Report. Board members advise the Division of SBVI and appreciate the close working relationship we have with the Division. We support a variety of activities including the annual Governor's Awards recognizing employers and people with disabilities, Disability Employment Awareness Month and White Cane Day. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your leadership and support of activities sponsored by the Board and Division of SBVI. Your leadership in promoting South Dakota and employment of citizens with disabilities is truly appreciated, especially in these unprecedented times.



This year has been challenging, but thanks to the commitment of SBVI staff and their innovative approaches to service delivery, citizens with vision loss have had access to services despite the pandemic. These services resulted in employment and independent living outcomes for South Dakotans who face barriers caused by vision loss. SBVI rehabilitation counselors and rehabilitation teachers stepped up to ensure that services were delivered using a variety of approaches that assured the safety of citizens and staff.

Members of the Board selflessly volunteer their time to ensure that South Dakotans have access to quality services. Their experience, both personal and professional results in optimal service delivery in South Dakota.

Respectfully Submitted,

Catherine Greseth

Catherine Greseth, Chair, Board of SBVI

CC: SBVI Board Members

Christyne Cavataio, Rehabilitation Services Administration State Liaison
Shawnie Rechtenbaugh, Secretary, Department of Human Services

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Board of SBVI Members	2
Board of SBVI Committees and Meetings	3
Board Activities	4
State Plan Goals and Strategies	6
Vocational Rehabilitation Program	8
Independent Living Program	21
Rehabilitation Center for the Blind	25
Business Enterprise Program	29
Success Stories	31
SBVI Office Locations and Contact Information	35

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To say that 2020 has been an interesting year would be an understatement. We started out with focusing on preparing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Unified State Plan for submission to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).



Gaye Mattke, SBVI Director

The Comprehensive Needs Assessment was developed with input and oversight of the Board of SBVI and goals and strategies that focus on improved provision of services were developed (page 10). Two public forums were held via video conference in February to offer the opportunity for public input into the plan. The state plan was submitted in February 2020 and approved in May by RSA.

Our last “in person” Board meeting was on March 13th in Pierre. Beginning on Monday, March 16th most employees in the Division of SBVI began working remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Board meetings have been held via Zoom since then and both the Board and Division of SBVI adapted to “a new normal”. We’ve learned that there are advantages to meeting virtually and appreciate the option to use technology to conduct business. Board members have expressed that they miss meeting in person, especially the December meeting which has traditionally been held in Pierre with the opportunity to tour Christmas at the Capitol.

SBVI staff have been innovative and resilient despite the impact of the pandemic. Although remote service delivery isn’t the preferred method of service provision, staff have demonstrated their commitment to assist citizens with vision loss using innovation and creativity. Satisfaction surveys reflect that clients are benefitting from remote service delivery and overall satisfaction levels are high.

Our programs are data driven for reporting and accountability. But satisfaction can best be measured from the feedback we receive from consumers of services. Comments from satisfaction surveys and success stories give true insight into how services impact lives. You can find these throughout this report. In fact, we have a new section with success stories at the end of the report.

Governor Noem appoints members to the Board and has been a champion for employment of citizens who are blind or visually impaired. Her support of the Governor’s awards recognizing employment of citizens with disabilities, White Cane Day and Disability Employment Awareness month is truly appreciated.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the members of the Board of SBVI who selflessly volunteer their time to advocate for optimum service delivery for citizens with vision loss. Their experience and insights are instrumental in improving service provision in the Division of SBVI.

Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired

The mission of the Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired is to promote independence, employment, and full inclusion for all citizens who are blind or visually impaired.

The Board, or State Rehabilitation Council as defined in the Rehabilitation Act as amended, is an advisory council appointed by the Governor. The Board advises the Division of SBVI on responsibilities related to effectiveness of programs and policy and procedures. The Board meets four times per year and at least 50% of members must be blind or visually impaired. All board meetings are open to the public.

Name	Hometown	Representation
Tami Francis	Sioux Falls	Business and Industry
Jill Kundtz – Member at Large	Rapid City	Business and Industry
Nichole Nelson	Aberdeen	Community Rehab. Program
Zay Norman	Hayes	Business and Industry
Cole Uecker	Pierre	Client Assistance Program
Gaye Mattke	Pierre	SBVI Director– Ex Officio
Jenny Anatra	Pierre	State Education Agency
*Connie Sullivan	Pierre	State Education Agency
Cheri Knispel	Rapid City	Disability Advocacy Group
Ryan Groeneweg	Sioux Falls	Business and Industry
Elaine Fritz	Baltic	Parent of Child with Disabilities
Burdette Clifford	Mission	American Indian VR Services
Tana Buresch	Sioux Falls	Parent Connection
Alan Vandenburg	Sioux Falls	Vocational Rehab. Counselor
Koni Sims – Vice Chair	Sioux Falls	Disability Advocacy Group
Catherine Greseth - Chair	Rapid City	Business and Industry/SILC
Marcia Hultman	Pierre	Workforce Dev. Council

*Denotes members whose terms expired during 2020

Board composition is defined in the Rehabilitation Act. Nominations for Board vacancies are solicited from organizations representing people with disabilities, including the South Dakota Association of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind of South Dakota. In addition, the Division seeks representation by current or former clients of the vocational rehabilitation program. The Board advises the Division of SBVI regarding performance on eligibility, the extent, scope and effectiveness of services provided, and functions performed by SBVI that affect or that potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities to achieve employment outcomes. The Board also assists with development of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Unified State Plan and evaluates the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation program including consumer satisfaction. Board members recommend the format for public forums and serve as facilitators of the forums which are held to obtain input for the state plan.

“Everyone who was involved in this process went above and beyond.”

Board Committees

Executive Committee – The Executive Committee consists of the Board Chair, Vice Chair, and Member at Large. The Executive Committee plans agendas for Board meetings and handles decisions between regularly scheduled meetings and other activities assigned by the Board.

Strategic Planning and Policy Development Committee – This committee provides input on strategic planning and policy development and evaluates state plan updates, consumer satisfaction surveys, and SBVI policy revisions. Recommendations from the committee are brought to the full Board.

Public Relations Committee – The Public Relations Committee recommends activities to promote the programs and services offered by SBVI and assists SBVI in designing and conducting outreach activities.

Assistive Technology Advisory Committee (ATAC) – ATAC is comprised of individuals who are knowledgeable about the latest innovations in assistive technology. Members advise SBVI in matters concerning assistive technology.

Board Meetings

The Board meets at least four times per year. Meetings during the report period were held on the following dates and locations:

December 6, 2019, Pierre, SD

March 13, 2020, Fort Pierre, SD

June 5, 2020, Video Conference

September 25, 2020, Video Conference

Due to the pandemic meetings were held via Zoom beginning in June 2020. In addition to allowing members to follow CDC guidelines, this format was also convenient for the public to attend either via video conference or phone. Meetings are open to the public and held at accessible locations or via Zoom video/audio conferences. Meetings are announced through the State of South Dakota news website and the Board Portal. Meeting dates are determined by the Board; agendas and minutes are posted on the Open Government Board Portal at:

<http://boardsandcommissions.sd.gov>

Board members
& staff.



Board Activities

Governor's Awards for Employment of People with Disabilities

Governor Noem recognized individuals and employers for their contributions to the rehabilitation and employment of South Dakotans with disabilities on September 15, 2020 in the Capitol Rotunda. The following award recipients were recognized:

- Kendra Gottsleben, Sioux Falls - Outstanding Individual with a Disability
- Chris Peterson, Fort Pierre - Outstanding Employee with a Disability
- The Fox Stop, Yankton - Outstanding Private Employer (Small Employer)
- Boyd's Gunstock Industries, Mitchell - Outstanding Private Employer (Large Employer)
- Mitchell School District, Food Service Department - Outstanding Employer (Other)
- Karen Schmeiser, Aberdeen – Outstanding Transition Services
- Eugene "Gene" Murphy, Sioux Falls - Distinguished Service Award



The Governor's Awards ceremony is co-sponsored by the South Dakota Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Statewide Independent Living Council and the Department of Human Services.



NDEAM 2020 Poster

South Dakota Disability Employment Awareness Month

Governor Kristi Noem proclaimed October 2020, Disability Employment Awareness Month in South Dakota. Disability Employment Awareness Month aims to raise awareness about disability employment issues and to celebrate the contributions of workers with disabilities. The 2020 theme was "Increasing Access and Opportunity". The 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act was also celebrated.

The Board joined a host of South Dakota agencies and organizations to sponsor virtual presentations in October to promote awareness and to help foster a disability-friendly culture in the workplace.

Public Forums

Two public forums were held via video conference in 2020 to provide the opportunity for public comment on the state plan. The Board recommend that a public forum be held to specifically address the SBVI portion of the State Plan.

A public forum was held on February 3rd to obtain input on the SBVI portion of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Unified State Plan. Approximately 29 participants attended at four video conference sites across the state with a call-in option available for participants. Topics of discussion included the statewide needs assessment, goals and strategies, including the need to expand orientation and mobility and job placement services. Other topics included strengthening services for minorities in targeted areas of the state, provision of assistive technology training and resources available through SBVI.

The second public forum was held via video conference on February 6th in conjunction with other core partners, including the Department of Labor and Regulation and the Division of Rehabilitation Services. There were approximately 45 participants, mostly staff members, two Board members representing the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation and two participants representing Career Learning Centers (CLC). One CLC representative inquired about goals and strategies related to students.

White Cane Day

Governor Noem released a proclamation declaring October 15, 2020 White Cane Day in South Dakota recognizing the capabilities and aspirations of citizens who are blind or visually impaired. A press release and acknowledgements on the Department of Human Services web site also promoted White Cane Day. Due to the pandemic, activities including a white cane march, that have occurred in previous years were not held so Board support was not sought.



Students from the South Dakota School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Public Relations

Outreach activities are a focus of the Board of SBVI to educate the public about accessibility and capabilities of people with vision loss. The Board of SBVI sponsored a booth at Disability Awareness Day during the 2020 South Dakota Legislative Session in the capitol rotunda in Pierre. The South Dakota Association of the Blind and National Federation of the Blind of South Dakota members are invited to participate in this opportunity to educate lawmakers about issues related to blindness along with Board members.



Eric Rippentrop representing SDAB at Disability Awareness Day at the State Capitol.

State Plan Goals and Strategies

The Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired established goals and strategies to assist individuals with disabilities to obtain competitive jobs in the labor market, increase self-sufficiency, personal independence, and full inclusion into the community. The goals were developed as a result of the information compiled from the comprehensive statewide needs assessment, and strategies listed below are key steps in accomplishing these goals. Reports of progress are required with state plan updates and are addressed at Board meetings.

Goal 1: Improve earnings, benefits, and career advancement for clients served by SBVI.

Strategy 1.1: Increase utilization of South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind to improve skills of clients served, including alternative techniques and vocational services.

Strategy 1.2: Maintain and emphasize the quality of job development services to SBVI consumers by providing specialty training on blindness and visual impairments to providers.

Strategy 1.3: Expand the use of Integrated Resource Teams to address the broad array of needs for those with significant disabilities.

Goal 2: Work with workforce programs and other partners so that referral sources, employers, and citizens who are blind or visually impaired are aware of the unique services provided by SBVI.

Strategy 2.1: Design and disseminate outreach materials and participate in activities that target employers to educate them on the capabilities of people who are blind or visually impaired.

Strategy 2.2: Annually conduct activities that promote services for citizens with vision loss including those from minority backgrounds.

Strategy 2.3: Annually review and update outreach materials and procedures that staff utilize to promote services to referral sources, employers and other entities.

Goal 3: Ensure that Vocational Rehabilitation consumers receive services that allow for informed choice and help them to improve their ability to communicate, interact, and perform to their potential in their community.

Strategy 3.1: Develop assistive technology training resources to improve accessibility for individuals who are blind or visually impaired, including those with the most significant disabilities.

Strategy 3.2: Collaborate with workforce programs and other partners to ensure essential life supports are in place so SBVI consumers have the skills necessary to obtain and maintain employment.

Strategy 3.3: Ensure access to specialized skills training by trained/certified providers.

Strategy 3.4: Improve access to peer supports and behavioral health supports to address life conditions of those with visual impairments and blindness.

Goal 4: Strengthen the agency’s ability to provide quality services to minority populations in South Dakota.

Strategy 4.1: Coordinate with the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation and workforce programs to plan educational activities on norms, beliefs and values of minority populations.

Strategy 4.2: Collaborate with Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs to ensure that all eligible individuals are served in an effective and efficient manner on reservations and tribal lands.

Strategy 4.3: Inform minority populations of vocational rehabilitation services and the role of SBVI to meet the needs of those who are blind or visually impaired in these populations.

Goal 5: Provide quality transition services to eligible students that facilitate their movement from school to post-secondary education and/or optimal employment outcomes.

Strategy 5.1: Continue transition activities and services, such as Project Skills, Project Search, Youth Leadership Forum, Catch the Wave, and SBVI Transition Week, which provide students with valuable experiences and skills development needed to move from school to employment.

Strategy 5.2: Develop strategies with the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Transition Specialist to provide statewide education to teachers, students and family members about services available to students through SBVI.

“I think SBVI is a wonderful service! My life is so much better now!”

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

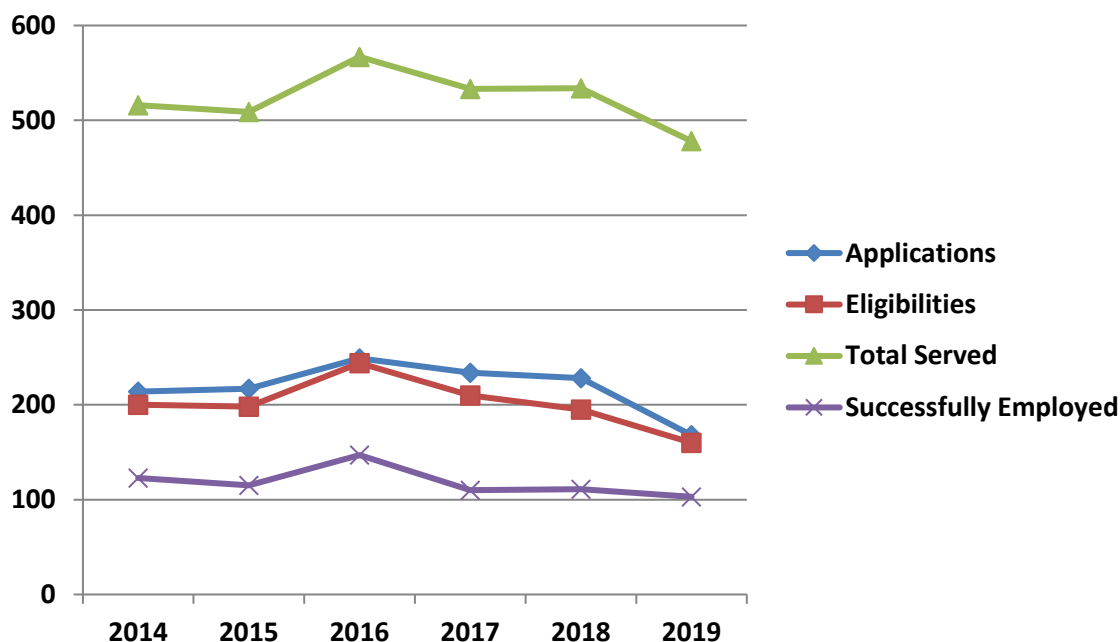
The Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program provides individualized rehabilitation services that result in optimal employment outcomes for citizens who are blind or visually impaired. Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors provide specialized services throughout the State of South Dakota. The VR program reporting below reflects data that the Rehabilitation Service Administration tracks based on a Program Year, July 1, 2019–June 30, 2020 (PY19), the same as the South Dakota state fiscal year.

Program Year Performance

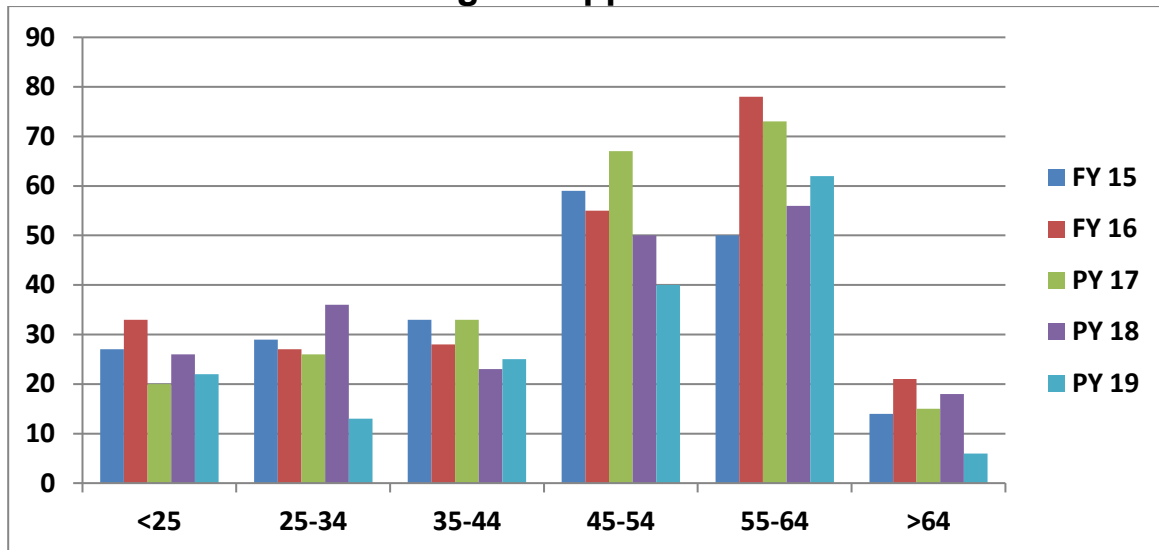
- 478 people were served through the SBVI VR Program in the most recent Program Year, compared to 534 people the previous year.
 - 103 people were successfully rehabilitated through the vocational rehabilitation program, compared to 111 the previous program year.
-

SBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Caseload Summary

The chart below illustrates the number of people who have applied for and received services from the SBVI Vocational Rehabilitation program over the past six years. SBVI counselors saw a decrease in the number of vocational rehabilitation cases in the most recent Program Year. There were 168 applications, 160 eligibilities, a total of 478 individuals served, and 103 clients were successfully employed. SBVI counselors served 534 individuals and there were 228 applicants the previous year.

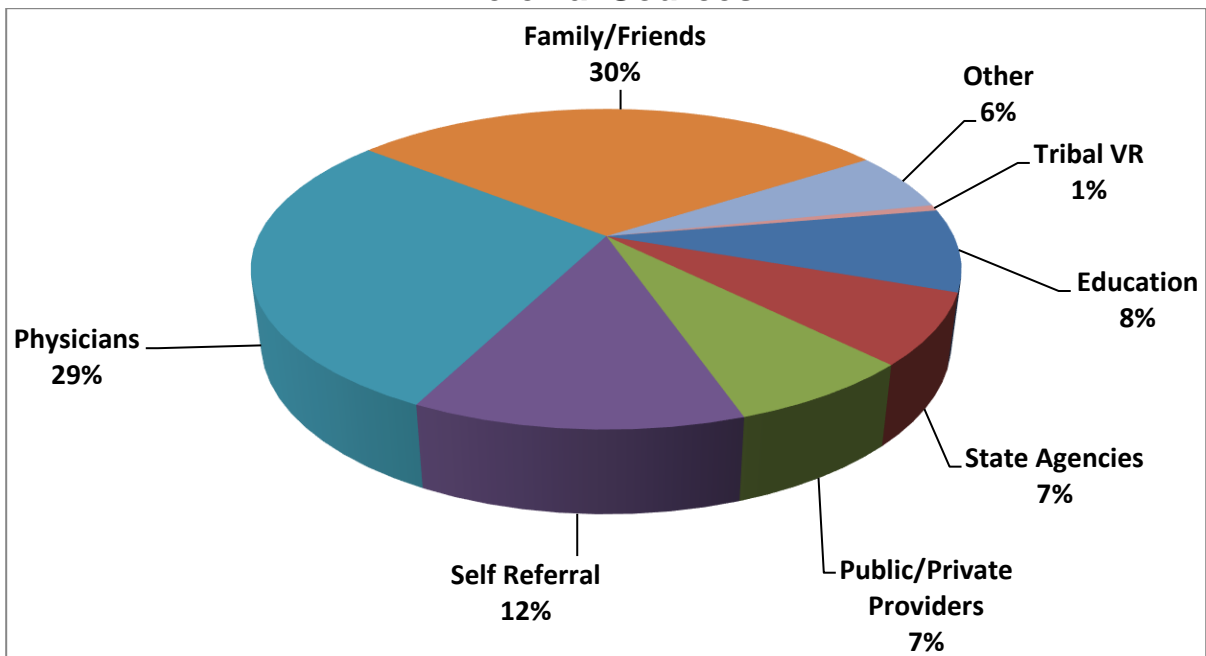


Age of Applicants



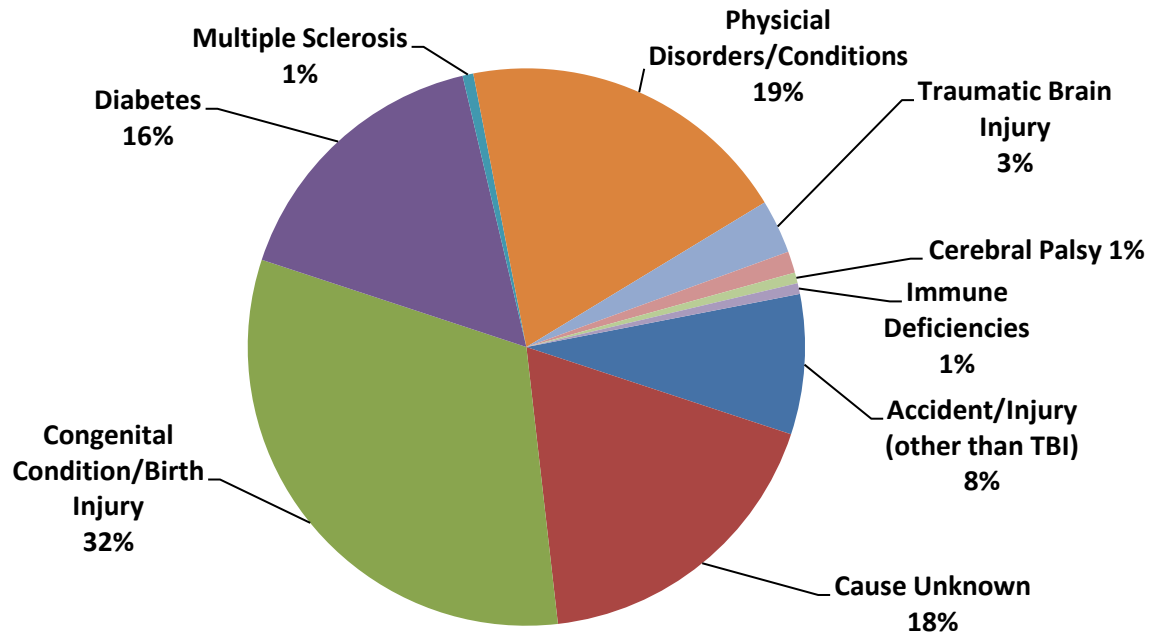
This graph illustrates the age groups of applicants for the VR program. Although SBVI takes applications from individuals starting at age fourteen, historically most applicants who apply for services are between the ages of 45-64 due to the progressive nature of their vision loss.

Referral Sources

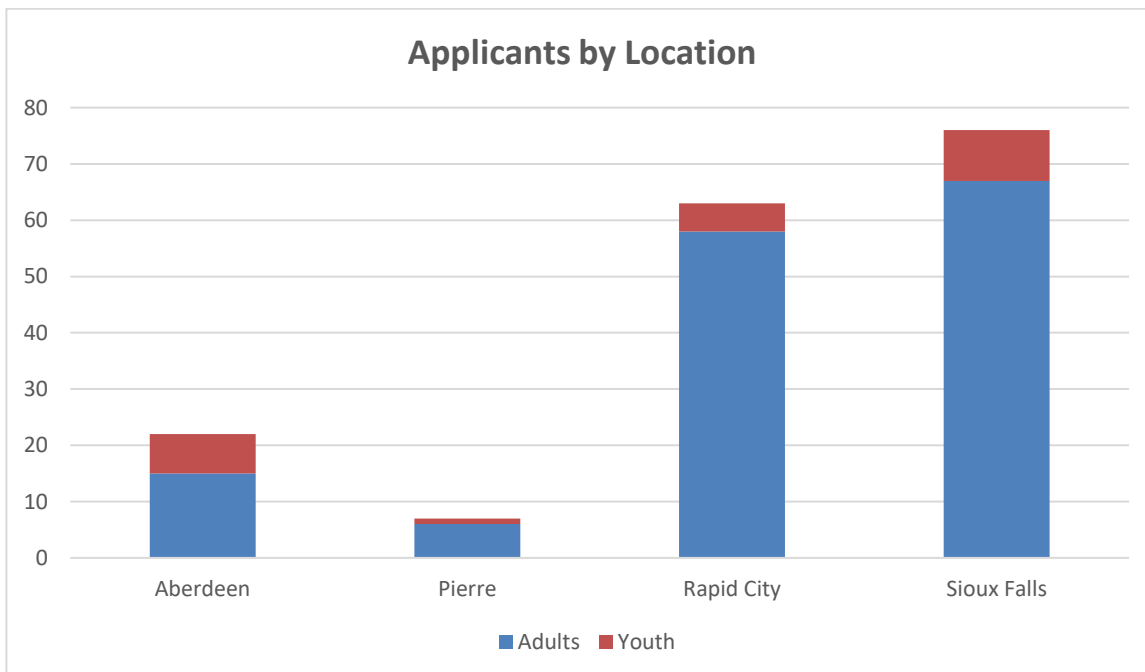


Referrals from family and friends have increased this year, with referrals from physicians as the second highest percentage of referrals. With a focus on transition services to students, SBVI staff will continue to increase outreach efforts to school personnel and parents to inform them of the availability of transition services for students with vision loss.

Causes of Impairments



For VR clients determined eligible for the program, the cause of visual impairment for most of them was due to a congenital condition/birth injury (32%), a physical disorder/condition or diabetes (35%).



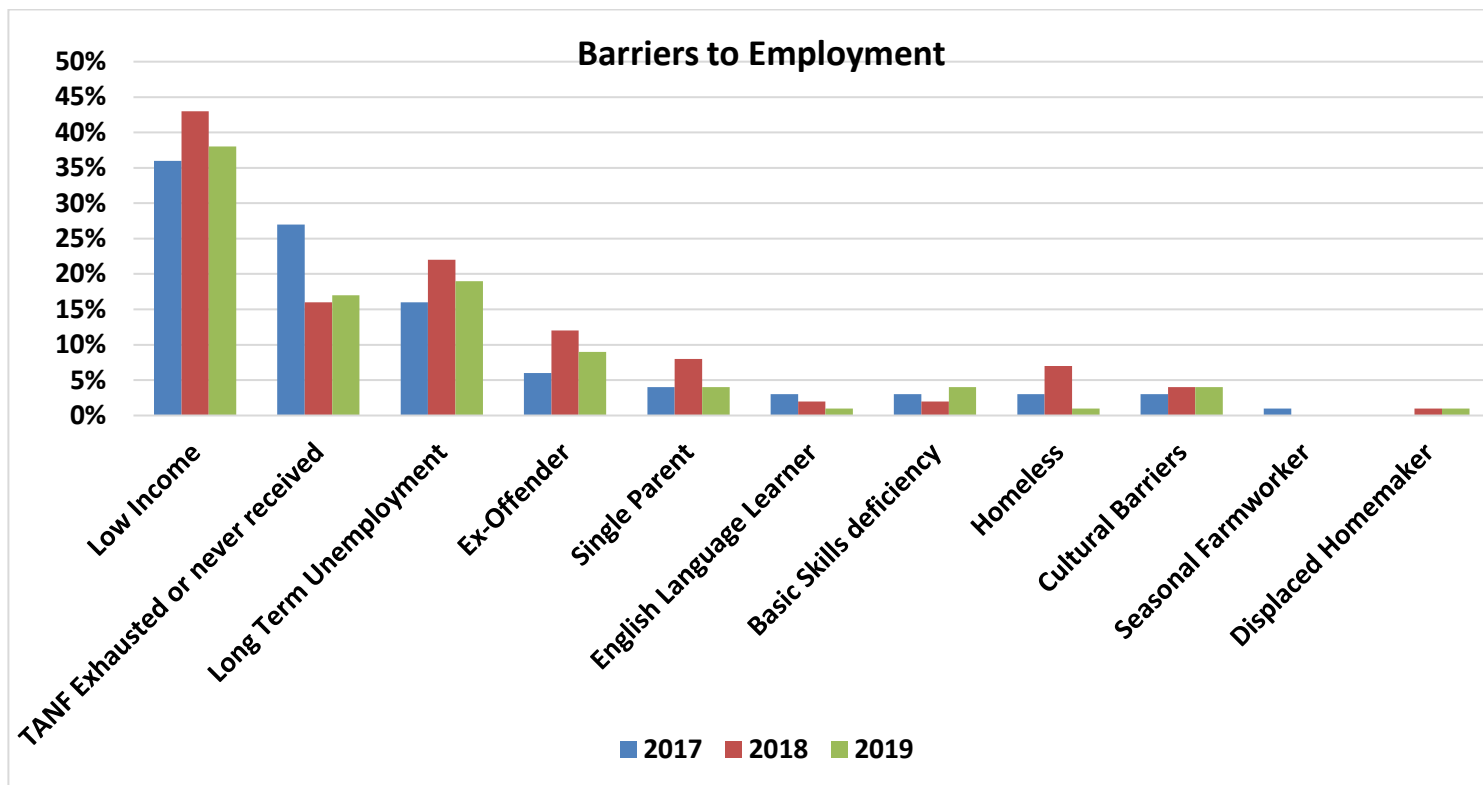
SBVI saw a total of 146 new applications from adults and 22 applications from students and youth. Youth is defined as individuals in the vocational rehabilitation program under the age of 25. Average age of youth that applied for services was 17 years old. Average age of adults that applied was 51 years old.

Impacts to Employment

SBVI assisted 103 clients to successfully obtain employment. Those clients had a visual impairment as their primary disability, but fifty-seven percent of them were also diagnosed with a secondary disability, which also impacts their ability to work.

It is common for SBVI Counselors to work with clients who have multiple disabilities that affect more than their vision. SBVI increasingly works with clients with multiple disabilities as reflected in the following table.

Secondary Impairment	Closed Cases
Diabetes Mellitus	16
Physical Disorders/Conditions	7
Depressive and Mood Disorders	7
Congenital Conditions/Birth Injury	4
Accident/Injury (other than TBI or SCI)	4
Anxiety Disorders	3
Cardiac and other Conditions	3
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)	2
Specific Learning Disabilities	2
Arthritis and Rheumatism	2
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	1
Intellectual Disability IQ ≤ 70	1
Multiple Sclerosis	1
Respiratory Disorders other than Cystic	1
Blood Disorders	1
Polio	1
End-Stage Renal Disease and other	1
Immune Deficiencies excluding HIV/AIDS	1
Personality Disorders	1
Stroke	1



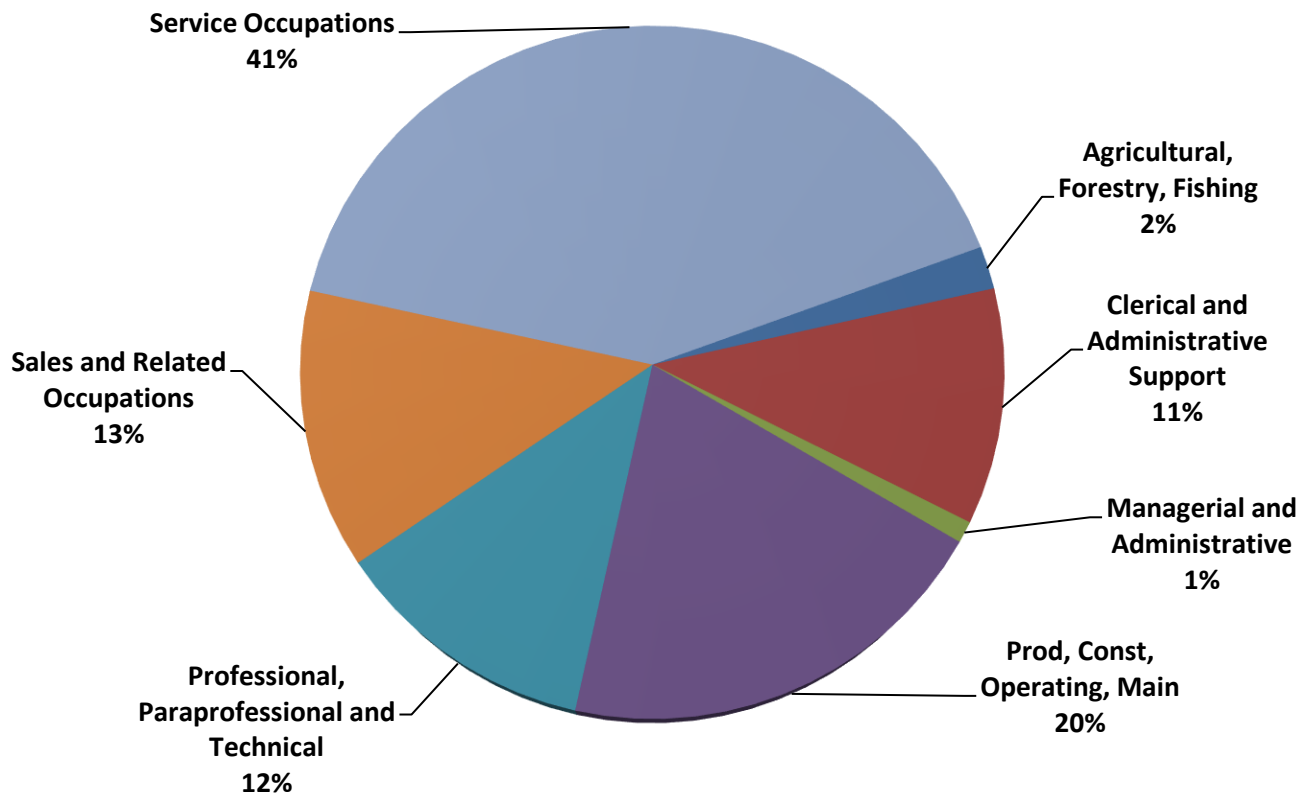
SBVI identifies barriers clients are experiencing that impact their ability to obtain work without assistance. The above chart shows the percentage of clients who are experiencing these barriers when SBVI first develops a plan of services with them. This year, there were 136 initial plans created with clients. Low income, TANF being exhausted and long-term unemployment are the top barriers to individuals obtaining employment.

Employment Data at Closure

Employment Category	Total Cases	Average Weekly Hours	Average Weekly Wage	Average Hourly Wage
All Employment	103	31	\$454.96	\$14.59
Competitive Integrated Employment	94	31	\$398.44	\$12.76
Self-Employment	8	31	\$1,108.96	\$36.06

SBVI clients average a 31-hour work week, with an average hourly wage of \$14.59. Those in competitive integrated employment saw an average hourly wage of \$12.76 per hour. There were a few self-employment cases that were very successful in their business, particularly Business Enterprise Program vendors, that impacted the average hourly wage for those who are self-employed up to \$36.06 per hour.

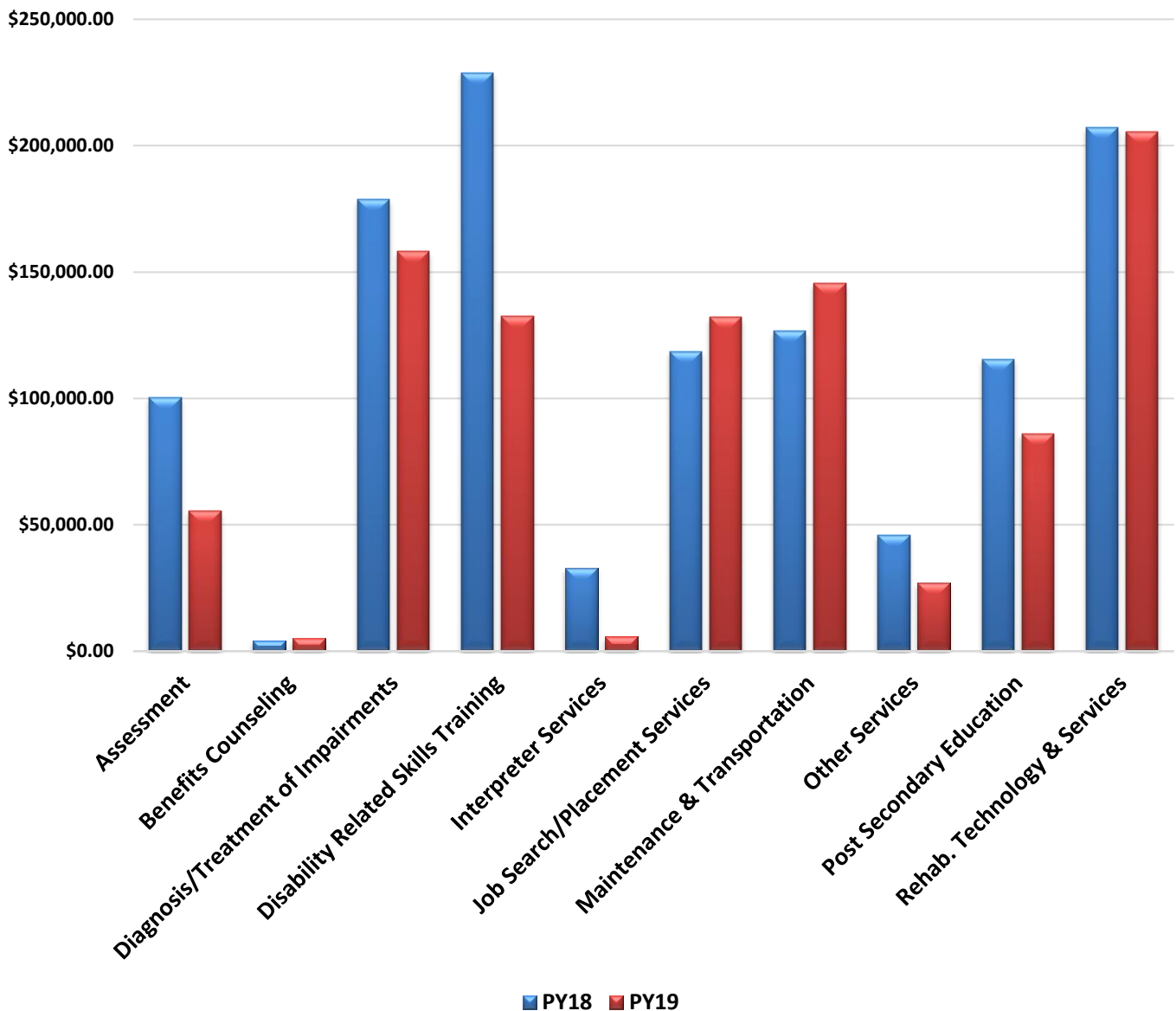
Occupations of Individuals Successfully Employed



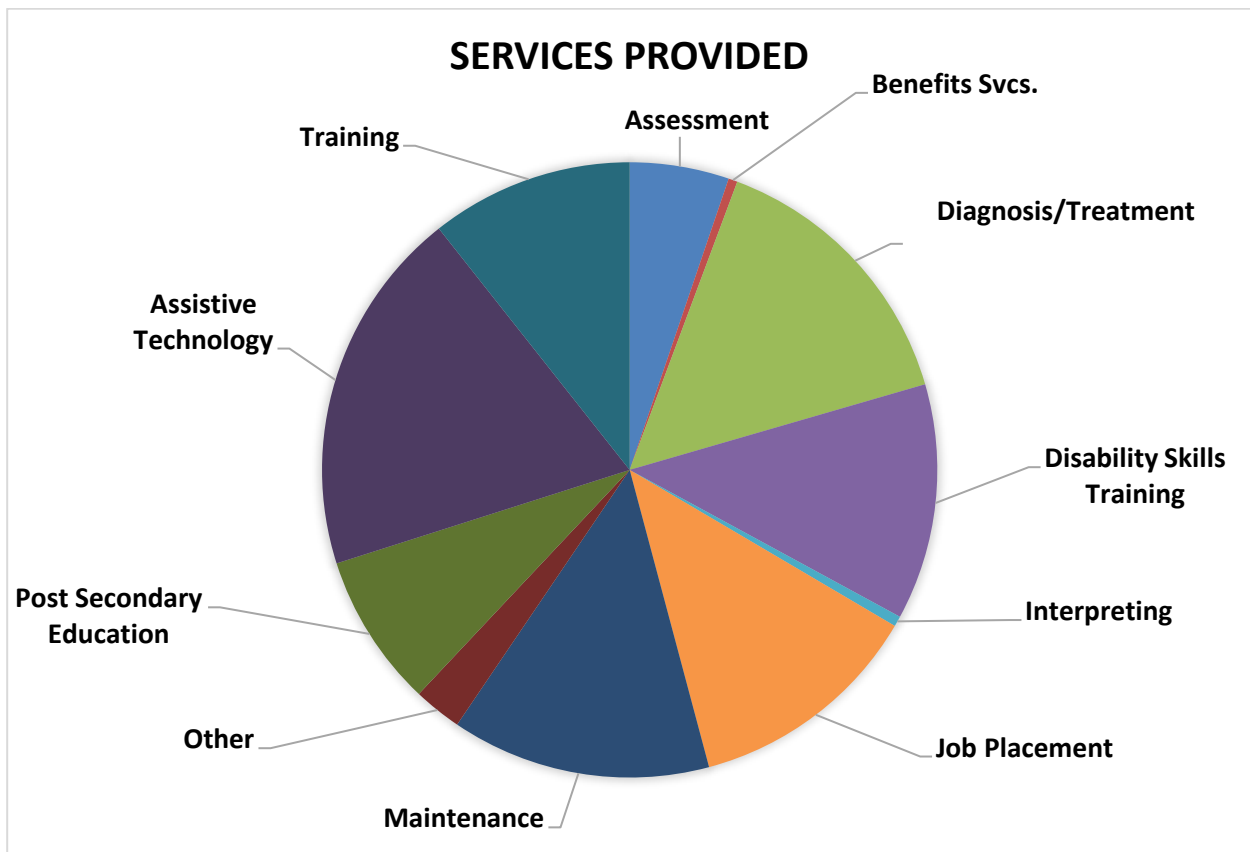
The Vocational Rehabilitation program helped 103 people to achieve their employment goals. This chart reflects the occupations of people successfully employed, with over 41 percent of the jobs in service occupations, 20 percent in production, construction or maintenance, and 13 percent is sales and related occupations.

“Taylor was awesome and very helpful. She checked up on me and had a lot of good ideas.”

Vocational Rehabilitation Purchased Services Analysis



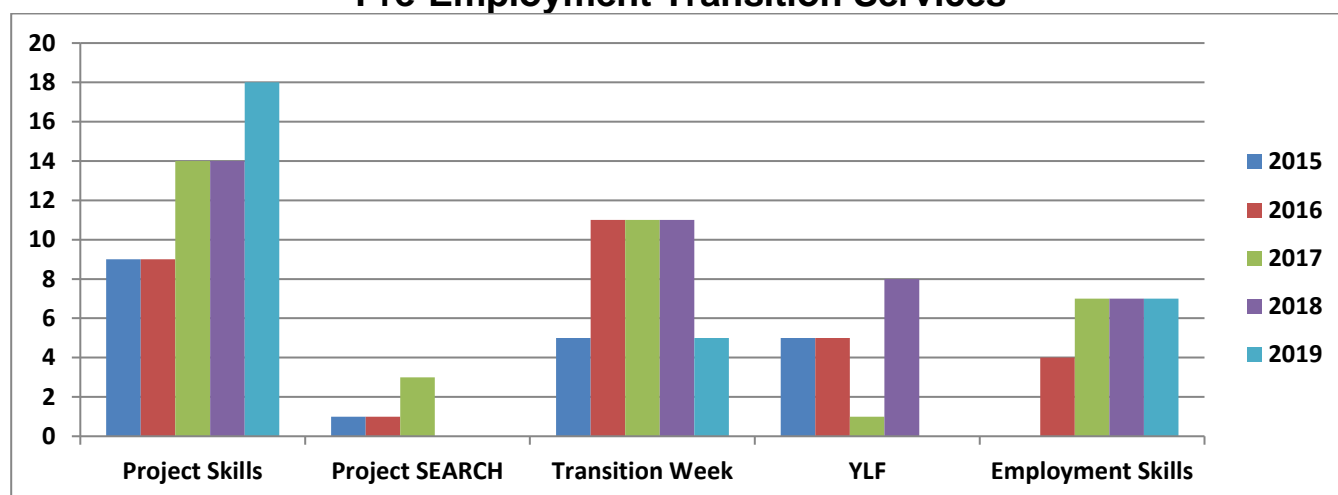
SBVI spent \$1,067,108.32 on client services for VR participants, a decrease of \$203,925, or 16% less than the previous year. SBVI saw a 44% decrease in assessment services, and a 42% decrease in disability related skills training this past year. Disability related skills training is primarily skills of blindness training, including how to use assistive technology, orientation and mobility training, communication, employment skills training, home management classes, and peer support. Training results in greater independence and increased skills to return to work. Assistive technology services and devices are an integral service for accessing information in a wide variety of occupations, as well as for post-secondary education. SBVI provided a comparable level of assistive technology devices and services compared to last year.



The above chart reflects the wide variety of services SBVI provides to assist clients to obtain or maintain employment. SBVI assists clients to overcome their vision-related impediments to employment by providing diagnostic and treatment services to improve their vision, disability skills training and assistive technology devices and services to overcome their employment barriers and increase independence. Vocational training, education and job placement services result in clients obtaining competitive integrated employment in their community.



Pre-Employment Transition Services



The activities shown in this graph illustrate services provided to youth by SBVI including job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary options, workplace readiness training and self-advocacy training. The Youth Leadership Forum was cancelled this past summer due to COVID-19 concerns, but Transition Week at SDRC was able to move forward with a small number of local students who followed CDC guidelines during the training activities.

Most Common Planned Services for Youth	Percent of Plans
Counseling and Guidance	83%
Transportation	26%
Project Skills	22%
Assistive Technology Services	20%
Room & Board	18%
Assistive Technology Devices	17%
Job Placement & Follow Along Services	13%
Job Coaching	12%
Employment Services	11%
Tuition & Fees; 4 yr. College	11%

Rehabilitation Counselors focus on counseling and guidance with youth and work closely with them to provide pre-employment transition services including determining ways to overcome their barriers to employment. The counselor and the student agree on an employment goal based on the student's interests, skills and abilities and plan services to help obtain their employment goal. Of the 89 plans developed and 344 total services included in the plans for youth, counseling and guidance is the most common service provided at 83 percent, followed by transportation to attend pre-employment transition activities at 26 percent, then Project Skills at 22 percent. Counselors have been participating in Individual Education Plans with the local school districts through Zoom due to Covid-19 concerns. This option has worked very well.

South Dakota School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Transition Specialist

SBVI contracts with the SD School for the Blind & Visually Impaired for a Transition

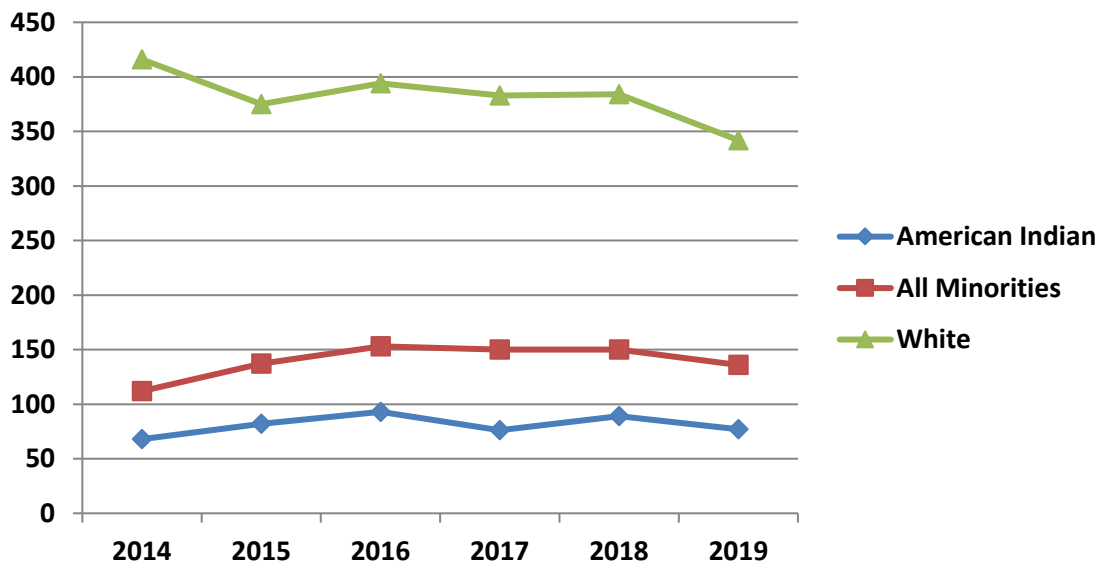


Specialist position. The Transition Specialist provides statewide transition services and outreach to schools and students with vision loss and blindness. This year SBVI scheduled an All Staff Training to be held in Aberdeen July 28-30, 2020. The agenda included a tour of the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and introductions of the new superintendent. Due to the pandemic, the face to face meeting was cancelled. As an alternative, SBVI and SD School for the Blind scheduled a “Meet & Greet” using Zoom. SBVI Rehabilitation Counselors, the Director and Assistant Director met virtually with SD School for the Blind Superintendent Dan

Trefz, Transition Specialist Nichole Nelson, and their Outreach Consultants who are located around the state. Dan began his duties with the SD School for the Blind in June 2020 and the School recently hired a new Outreach Consultant to cover the Pierre area. SBVI has also seen an extensive turnover in staff, so the goal of the Meet & Greet was to introduce staff, familiarize them with each program to increase and strengthen relationships, raise awareness of available services, and better collaborate at local levels.

Services to Minorities

According to the 2010 census, South Dakota’s minority (non-white) population was 14.1 percent. The largest minority group in South Dakota involves American Indians from nine South Dakota Tribes making up 8.8 percent of the state’s total population. This year, 16 percent of individuals served by SBVI were of American Indian descent, and 28 percent of all individuals served reported coming from a minority background. In the past five years, SBVI has increased services to minority individuals by 21.4 percent, and has experienced a decrease of services to non-minorities (white) by 17.8 percent.



The Board and Division of SBVI work to address culturally relevant services for minority populations through numerous initiatives. The Director of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe Vocational Rehabilitation Program is a member of the Board of SBVI. The Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate' program was approved for their American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Program grant during the last federal grant cycle. Denise Red Horse, the Program Director was hired in Spring 2020 and is in the process of getting policies in place and has hired a VR Counselor who will begin her duties January 2021. The state VR and Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate' programs will begin working together on a Memorandum of Understanding. There are now six American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation programs in South Dakota.

This year was particularly challenging to collaborate with the Tribal VR programs as we typically do each year. With the pandemic closing state offices in March 2020, the Tribal VR agencies also closed their offices. The borders of some of the reservations were closed due to vulnerabilities of their people in an attempt to keep the pandemic at bay on the reservation. The Tribal vocational rehabilitation programs continued to be closed throughout 2020 and travel was limited in an attempt to honor CDC guidelines and contain spread of the virus.

Vocational Rehabilitation Program Client Satisfaction Survey Analysis

SBVI partners with the Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired to conduct an annual client satisfaction survey, which consists of eight core questions that contribute to a composite satisfaction scale; the Client Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ-8), Larsen, Attkisson, Hargreaves, and Nguyen (1979). An additional seven questions were developed with the help of the Board of SBVI, and consumers rated their satisfaction level from 1 (Poor) to 4 (Excellent). This is the 11th year that SBVI has conducted this annual survey.

Between October 1, 2019 and September 30, 2020, the survey was mailed out to 138 individuals who received services and were closed from the SBVI vocational rehabilitation program during the past federal fiscal year. This is a 25.4 percent decrease in the number of surveys mailed out this year compared to 185 surveys mailed last year. Of the 138 questionnaires mailed, 54 questionnaires were returned, which is a 39 percent response rate. This information is analyzed by Dr. Alan Davis, Professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Development at South Dakota State University, and results are presented in a comprehensive report to SBVI. This data gets shared with the Board of SBVI on an annual basis. Along with the survey ratings, previous clients have an opportunity to provide comments and feedback. Many of those comments are found throughout the Board's annual report.

Comparison with previous year results show an increase in satisfaction over time, with the strongest levels of satisfaction in timeliness, help adjusting to blindness, more independence, and satisfactory employment.

“You have been very helpful. Thank you for all you did for me.”

Satisfaction Survey Questions	Average Rating
1. How would you rate the quality of service you received?	3.63
2. Did you get the kind of service you wanted?	3.59
3. To what extent has our program met your needs?	3.48
4. If a friend were in need of similar help, would you recommend our program to him/her?	3.74
5. How satisfied are you with the amount of help you received?	3.50
6. Have the services you received helped you to deal more effectively with your problems?	3.64
7. In an overall, general sense, how satisfied are you with the service you received?	3.66
8. If you were to seek help again, would you come back to our program?	3.72
9. Were you a full partner in the process to determine your employment goal and services to be provided?	3.66
10. Do you feel that the services provided by your counselor were necessary to obtain or keep your employment?	3.62
11. Were information and services provided to you in a timely manner?	3.65
12. Were information and services provided to you in a courteous manner?	3.77
13. Did the services help you adjust to your visual impairment?	3.31
14. How beneficial were services in assisting you in achieving more independence?	3.53
15. How satisfied are you with the employment that you obtained as a result of Vocational Rehabilitation Services?	3.37

“Was very satisfied with services!”

Finding Her Dream Job

“Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired has helped me obtain a position that is an almost perfect match to what I feel is my personal ‘dream job’. With the many pieces of assistance that SBVI provides, I also have the tools and resources I need to do my best work,” says Lanette Schnepf.

Lanette has experienced the barriers of a visual impairment due to proliferative diabetic retinopathy with vitreous hemorrhage in both eyes. Lanette worked with Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired, who assisted her with medical restoration services, transportation, training, assistive technology, and vocational guidance and counseling. Luckily, Lanette’s vision has improved enough after having three vitrectomies that she has regained her confidence to re-enter the workforce.

Before starting the employment process, Lanette attended the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind in Sioux Falls for training. While there, Lanette completed Skills of Blindness Training, where she mastered skills in Home Management, Orientation and Mobility, Assistive Technology, and Communications. Lanette also completed Employment Skills Training at the vocational unit of the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. This is where she learned specific computer programs that are used in the workplace, how to create and work with various types of office equipment and documents, as well as how to use different types of assistive technology, such as the Acrobat CCTV, Jaws and ZoomText.



Before working with Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired, Lanette worked as a Customer Service Specialist in multiple retail environments. She is now working full-time for the Department of Human Services as a secretary; entering data, greeting people, and answering and directing phone calls. Since starting, Lanette has worked with Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired to assist her with finding appropriate adaptive devices to use while working, such as the Acrobat CCTV, yellow lenses in oversized sunglasses to reduce glare, and a talking/large view calculator to name a few.

Despite her barriers, Lanette has shown determination and a strong work ethic to overcome these barriers to employment caused by her vision loss. Lanette says, *“My latest journey may be just beginning, but it has been a huge success already! I am so blessed to have the practical assistance and the support of my SBVI counselor and staff at the Sioux Falls office.”*

INDEPENDENT LIVING BLIND PROGRAM (ILB)

The co-occurrence of low vision or blindness, along with another age-related health conditions, can have a significant impact on the physical and mental well-being of an individual. People who have impaired vision are often less able to perform their activities of daily living, tend to be less mobile, and often experience isolation.

The services from the Independent Living Blind Program are provided by rehabilitation teachers and are based on the obstacles created by individual's low vision and independent living needs. Through these services, the individual can develop skills to utilize remaining vision to increase their level of independence leading to an improvement to their quality of life.

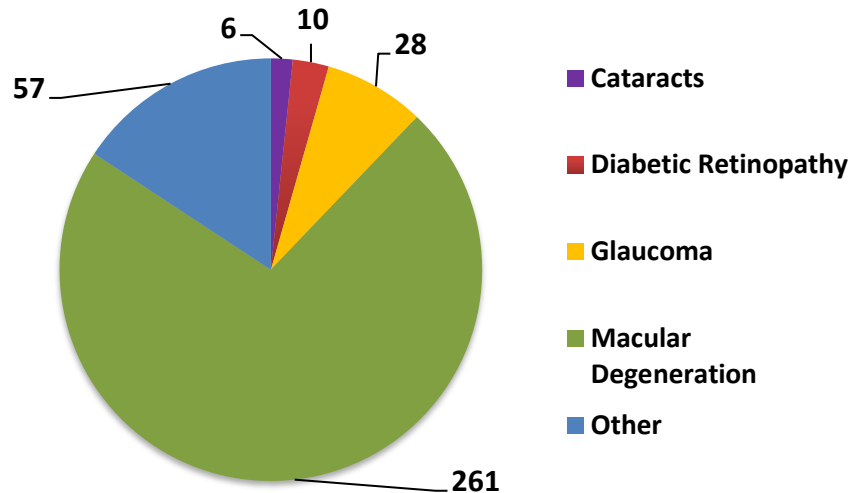
In FY 2020, the ILB program provided one or more of the services listed below to 362 older individuals with vision loss compared to 423 in FY 2019. Staff successfully closed 150 cases compared to 266 in FY 2019.

Type of Service and Description	Number of People
Communication Skills -training in the use of the telephone, handwriting guides, telling time, reading or writing Braille, etc.	264
Daily Living Skills -training in the use of adaptive aids and assistive technology for daily living.	270
Low Vision Device Training -services related to the use of optical aids and devices.	343
Low Vision Aids -may include items such as magnifiers, video magnifiers (CCTVs) canes, insulin gauges, talking equipment, adaptive cooking items, etc.	340
Counseling -Peer, individual, or group counseling to assist with adjustment to visual impairment and blindness	195
Low Vision Exams -Evaluations to identify strategies and devices for enhancing visual performance.	145
Advocacy Training -Participation in advocacy training activities such as consumer organization meetings and peer support groups.	14
Referral to Other Agencies -Referral to other service providers, programs, and agencies.	235
Orientation and Mobility -Travel training and learning to access public or private transportation to travel safely and independently.	49

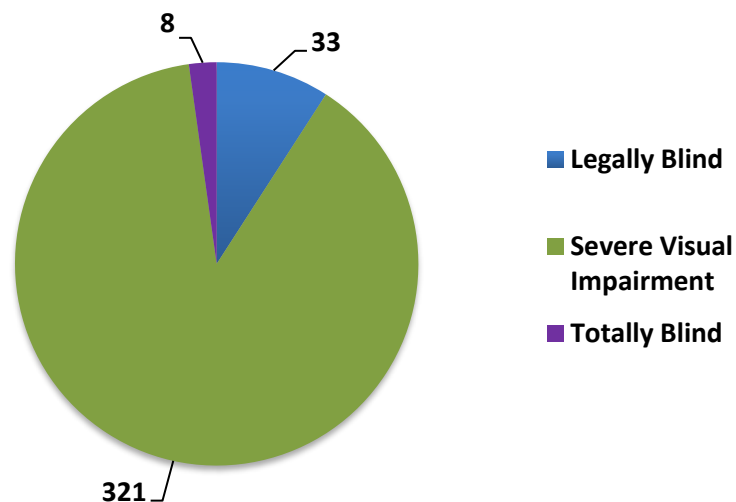
“Everyone has been very helpful & nice to me. Thank you very much.”

Primary Types of Eye Diseases for People Served

Macular Degeneration was the primary cause of vision loss in 261 (78%) of the 362 individuals who received services in 2020, as reflected in the chart below. Age-Related Macular Degeneration is the most common eye disease. This condition results in blurring of the sharp, central vision needed for straight-ahead activities such as seeing faces, driving, reading, and sewing. It affects an individual's ability to see fine detail but causes no pain so it can be undetected for a period of time.

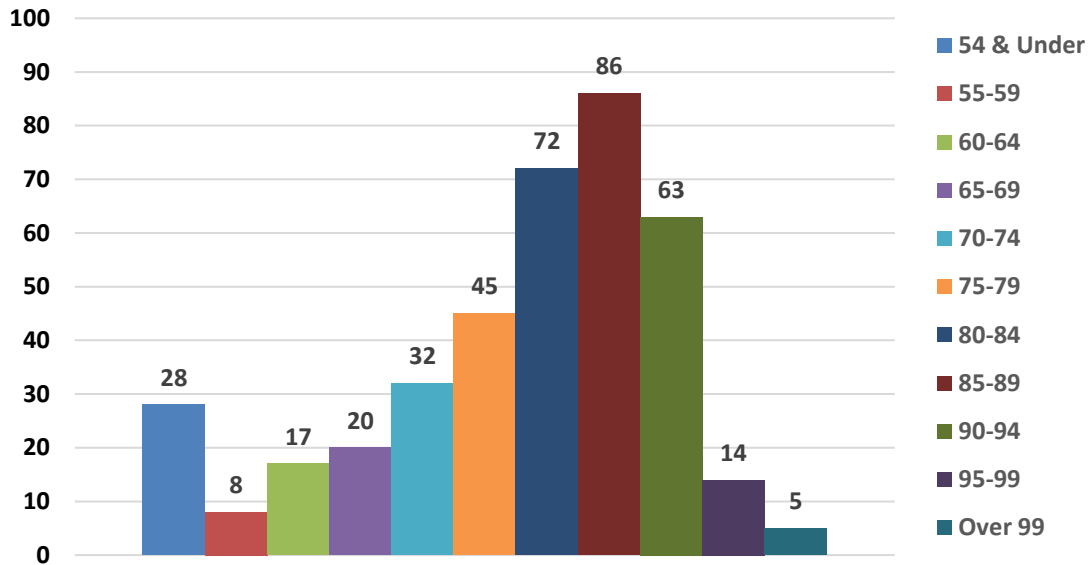


Degree of Vision Loss



People who experience uncorrectable vision loss often fear total blindness with little or no light perception. Of the 362 older people served in 2020, only 8 (2%) of them experienced total blindness. Individuals who have some remaining vision that can be used to complete activities of daily living are often experiencing severe visual impairment, which makes up 321 or 89% of the people served. The chart above explains the degree of vision loss experienced by the 362 people served in 2020.

Age Range of ILB Individuals Served in FY 2020



The target population for the ILB program is individuals over the age of 55; however, Rehabilitation Teachers also served 28 individuals under age 55 who are experiencing vision loss. As reflected in this chart, 240 or 66% percent were over the age of 80, with five people over the age of 100.

Satisfaction with Independent Living Services

Citizens who receive services from the ILB program can provide feedback through a satisfaction survey which is sent to them a few weeks after the end of their services. Survey responses assist SBVI to assess whether services are effective in assisting citizens to maintain or regain their independence. One hundred thirty-six surveys were sent out to those who achieved their independent living goals. Seventy-two people responded to the survey, which is a 52% response rate. SBVI encourages individuals to use the survey to provide feedback about their services. Here is a comment from one respondent:

"I was nourished and encouraged by everyone. They all helped me "stand up" on days that I was "low". Their techniques and vibrant, loving personalities helped give me more hope and confidence. They made it a pleasure to learn, grow and accept more easily the low vision I am learning to cope with. I commend your staff and even though there were days they stretched me and challenged me; I enjoyed every minute."

"Heather was very helpful & professional. Explained things in a way I understood. Very pleased & appreciate services."

Electronic Video Magnification (CCTV) Lease/Loan Program

SBVI created the CCTV Lease/Loan program in 2004 with memorial funds donated specifically for providing devices for older citizens, which could not be purchased using the limited Older Blind grant funds. The CCTV program began with 24 units as a start-up to determine if we could address a need for older program participants who could not acquire the devices using insurance or Medicaid. The need for the



tabletop magnification systems was immediately apparent, and the demand for units demonstrated that the program could be expanded. Since then, SBVI has purchased over 200 units and monitored the trends in technology, which resulted in purchasing styles that were lightweight with high definition (HD) monitors for providing a magnified image that is of substantially higher resolution for individuals whose lifestyles were more mobile.

In 2016, SBVI expanded the selection to include four text to speech units that not only magnify but provide auditory output of the printed information. Any of these CCTV units may be leased for \$30 per month or loaned at no cost for those who meet economic need criteria. The CCTV Lease/Loan program has 219 units available for older citizens with vision loss. There are 114 units loaned and 85 leased, which requires a minimal monthly fee. Forty-four new referrals for CCTVs from the Lease/Loan program were made in the past year, which results in a total of 1,079 older citizens with low vision receiving CCTVs and training through this program since 2004.

The Right Magnification Can Make A Difference

Jane is a 95-year-old lady that has Fuchs' dystrophy and then developed macular degeneration later in life. Her main goal when I first met her was to remain in her apartment and continue to manage her personal business without having her family take over. The SBVI Independent Living Program has worked with Jane several times over the past years as her vision loss has progressed. She had congestive heart failure and needed to maintain her weight, so she was given a talking scale and uses it every day. She utilized stand and hand-held magnifiers learning to change the strength with the progression of loss. She finally decided it was time for a CCTV when she was having more problems reading her bank statement and medicine bottles. She received a Merlin CCTV through the State Lease/Loan program, and in her words, "what a God send"! She is so happy to continue to read all her mail and correspondence, newspaper, financial information, and medications. She received a talking low vision watch and clock to tell time and stay on task. She said she was forced to love the Minnesota Twins and waits for the large print schedule to keep track of when to tune in. She feels without the services she has received, her independence would have turned to dependence, so is truly grateful for the services she received.

REHABILITATION CENTER FOR THE BLIND

The SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind (SDRC) is in Sioux Falls, SD, and provides services to citizens of South Dakota who are blind or visually impaired, to help them learn adaptive skills of blindness to gain independence and employment. SD Vocational Resources is a specialized employment program within the Center that assists people who are challenged with disabilities to obtain job skills. Together the two programs provide the tools, training, and technology to help individuals overcome challenges they face because of vision loss or a disability impacting their ability to work and live independently.

Adaptive Skills of Blindness

The Rehabilitation Center for the Blind provides classes daily to teach adaptive skills of blindness. During 2020, there were 19 men and 28 women who attended training at the Center.



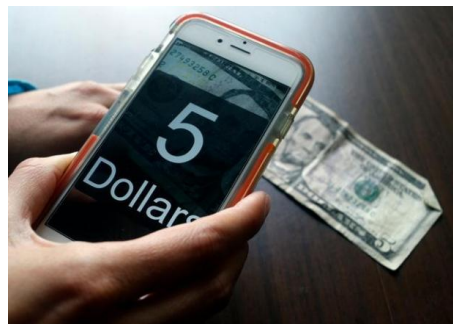
The Rehabilitation Center for the Blind made a quick adjustment March 16, 2020, to remote training due to COVID-19. Fortunately, all teaching staff had laptops and were equipped with video software. Students who were staying in the training apartments returned home for remote training until July 20, 2020. Therefore, the number of people served during FY2020 was much lower, serving 34 people in adaptive

skills of blindness classes. In addition, 5 high school transition-age students attended Transition Week. Turnover, due to retirements, and a promotion among Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) staff, increased the number of SBVI staff with training needs. Five newly hired staff received both remote and in-person training at the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind; the only training facility in South Dakota with qualified staff in the adaptive skills of blindness. The Center is an important resource for staff to increase their knowledge of blindness, a ready resource for questions, and a local organization for clients to attend and gain independence and confidence.

The demographics of the students attending training were 59 percent women compared to 41 percent men, with an average age of 41 years. Twenty-four percent were blind, 44 percent were legally blind, and 32 percent were visually impaired. Secondary disabilities affecting students included diabetes, learning, disabilities, mental health, brain injury, and other conditions. People were referred from all district offices. The greatest number of referrals came from the Sioux Falls office with 62 percent of referrals. The Aberdeen office referred 14 percent, Rapid City 6 percent, and finally the Pierre office with 3 percent of the referrals. Professional staff and interns accounted for 15 percent of trainees.

Assistive Technology First Friday Clinics

Computers using assistive technology are vital to assist people with visual impairments. This became more apparent in 2020 as more people started using technology for communication with family and friends. The ability to stay connected was more important than ever because of isolation issues related to the pandemic. Assistive technology training helped people to use devices to stay connected. When the pandemic closed the Rehabilitation Center to walk-in services, clinics and First Friday classes were cancelled. The result was a drop in the number of people participating in person, but a significant number of people received services through remote contacts from the assistive technology specialist. In 2020, 150 people participated in several different options for assistive technology training including First Friday classes, walk-in clinics, telephone, FaceTime, email, or Skype. This assistance allowed people to get technical help when in-person training options for computer and assistive technology support weren't available.



Low Vision Clinics



Low vision services with Dr. Nick Wenande are held the second Wednesday of each month. In 2020, there were 6 clinics serving 23 people. This was a big reduction of low vision examinations from 2019, due to a turnover in low vision providers and the pandemic. Dr. Wenande, a Mitchell Optometrist, began providing low vision examinations for SBVI clients in December of 2019.

Transition Week 2020

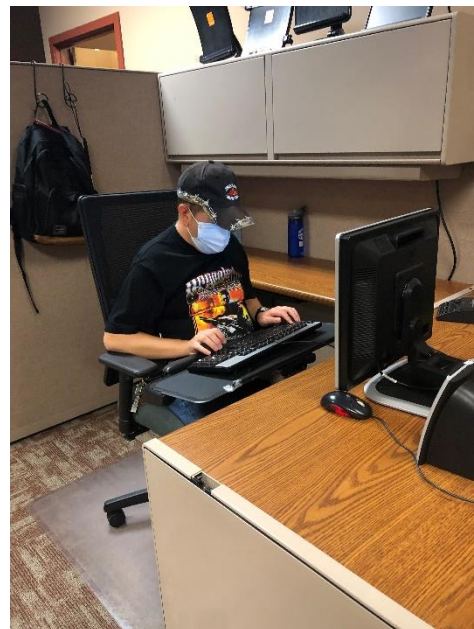
Transition Week was altered to a day camp format for 5 students, July 13th–16th, to ensure safety of staff and students due to the pandemic. Students participated in Skills of Blindness classes, Employment Skills Training, experienced mock job interviews, and learned about the importance of communication skills and soft skills for maintaining employment. The final session was a tour of a self-sufficient farmstead. The students heard how the owner, a member of the Board of SBVI, started a business manufacturing jackets. She lives on a self-sufficient farmstead raising and growing most of their food. The students were treated to goat milk ice cream and a wonderful day outside of the city. Building social interactions with peers is important, so a backyard grill-out and games were hosted by SDRC staff.



South Dakota Vocational Resources

Employment Skills Training (EST) helped 38 individuals in 2020, compared to 68 in 2019. The decrease of people participating in services was largely due to the move to remote services because of the pandemic. Beginning on March 16, 2020, all staff and students were forced to work and receive training remotely. Distance training was difficult for most people attending EST because of the lack of internet and computer equipment to access instruction.

When in-person training changed to remote training, the employment skills instructor helped clients continue training through telephone calls and sending assignments through the mail and email. When it was an option, she used video platforms such as Teams and Zoom. On July 20, 2020, Employment Skills Training opened again to a limited number of clients for in-person instruction.



Job placement services were provided to 26 individuals in 2020, which was a decrease of 6 people from 2019. The pandemic impacted businesses resulting in layoffs and a slowdown in hiring. There also was a lower number of referrals for job placement services for those at higher risk due to concerns about the safety of certain workplaces and their risk of infection because of underlying health conditions.

Summary of Services

SDRC Service	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
Transition Students	11	11	11	5
Low Vision Patients	94	85	59	23
Employment Specialist	27	26	32	26
Skills of Blindness	37	45	54	34
Employment Skills Training	93	90	68	38
O&M On-site	10	27	13	0
AT Walk-in Clinic & First Friday Classes	51	105	45	150
Total	323	389	282	275

Satisfaction Survey Responses

Participants in the adaptive Skills of Blindness program are asked to complete a survey regarding their satisfaction with services. There was a 37% return rate of surveys. The overall rating was 3.7 on a 4.0 scale, which falls between the ratings of (3) Agree and (4) Strongly Agree to questions about the quality of services. Comments often included praise by participants about an environment where students are encouraged and helped to build their confidence.

Responses received for the question, "What did you like best about the program?" "I liked that every day I got to do something different". "I learned how to walk properly with my cane, which made me more independent. They told me what to do, and then actually showed me how to do it and what I was doing right/wrong".

The Employment Skills Training (EST) area uses a similar format of questions and narrative responses to obtain information about the quality of services. The return rate for EST surveys was 47%. The overall rating was a 3.5 on a 4.0 scale, which falls between the ratings of (3) Agreed and (4) Strongly Agreed.

Responses received for the question, "What did you like best about the program?" included: "Mary and Ron were so helpful and patient. Couldn't have asked for better support and training", "Interview practice and questions", "World of Work class"; "Being motivated, working with hands, moving around".

Warren Heyer - World War II Veteran & Olympian

At 96, Warren Heyer is not letting vision loss slow him down from learning new things. He developed macular degeneration in his left eye in 2008 and had a blood clot in his right eye in 2012, causing him to lose the vision in that eye. Determined



not to let his vision slow him down, he attended Hines Veteran's Administration (VA) Blind Rehabilitation Center. In 2015, he received help from SD Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired, who encouraged him to attend the South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind for computer training. He learned to use programs such as Dolphin Guide, an iPhone

and a notetaker. Warren loved attending First Friday walk-in clinics at the Rehabilitation Center so he could stay up to date on new technology.

Warren isn't only interested in technology; he's participated in the Senior Olympics in Omaha (2016), and Alaska (2019), earning 2 gold medals, 3 silver medals, and 1 bronze medal. He has also participated in blind skiing activities with the VA. To see Warren in action, check out his video titled, WWII Veteran Warren Heyer Conquers the Slope 2019: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyVzRa57HT8>. Warren also loves woodworking and makes beautiful bowls, baskets, bird houses, and many other things. He has a zest for life and doesn't let his vision loss slow him down.

Business Enterprise Program



The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) provides individuals who are blind the opportunity for self-employment in food service including operating cafeterias, coffee shops, and vending routes. The Randolph-Sheppard Act authorizes State licensing agencies to recruit, train, license, and place individuals who are blind as operators of cafeterias and vending facilities located on federal and other properties. The act authorizes a blind individual, licensed by the state licensing agency, to conduct specified activities in facilities through permits or contracts. In South Dakota, SBVI is the state licensing agency.

SBVI has permits for food and vending services at the following locations:

- Earth Resources Observation and Science (EROS) Center, Garretson;
- General Services Administration in Federal Buildings in Sioux Falls, Aberdeen, and Huron;
- US Postal Service facilities in Sioux Falls, Huron, and Pierre;
- SBVI also has an interagency agreement with the South Dakota Bureau of Administration for vending machines in multiple State buildings in Pierre.

Three vendors were licensed with the Business Enterprise Program in January 2020. Celeste Centenaro manages the café at the Federal Building in Aberdeen along with vending in federal properties. Dan Munce manages a vending route with machines in various locations in Huron. Jeff Nelson manages the café at the Earth Resource Observation and Science Center in Garretson, SD.

The annual vendor's meeting was held in November 2020 through teleconference. Celeste Centenaro is the Chair of the Vendor Committee; Jeff Nelson is the Vice Chair and Dan Munce is the Member at Large.

Interstate Rest Area Vending



Through an agreement with the SD Department of Transportation, the BEP is responsible for vending at the South Dakota rest areas along Interstates 29 and 90.

The SD Departments of Transportation and Tourism developed a Revitalization Plan for the rest areas. In 2020, the Valley Springs rest area, on the Minnesota border, reopened to the public. The Belvidere west bound location also underwent renovations.

Current contracts with third-party vendors for designated rest areas began in June of 2019, contracts were awarded to the vendors who bid to contribute the highest percentage of commission from sales to the BEP. Current commissions paid to the BEP range from 53 to 68 percent.

Income from rest area commissions for June 1, 2019, to May 31, 2020, was \$52,537 for I-90 rest areas and \$11,730 for I-29 rest areas, totaling \$64,266.

The overall total from the rest areas decreased from the previous year. I-29 experienced the most income growth compared to the prior year. The new commission rates and the reopening of rest areas have stabilized rest area income. Also, tourism numbers began to rise in 2020 during the pandemic.

The rest area commissions are utilized to support the BEP program. Funds are used to purchase and repair equipment, and assist with other expenses such as insurance, bookkeeping, and initial inventory for the vendors.



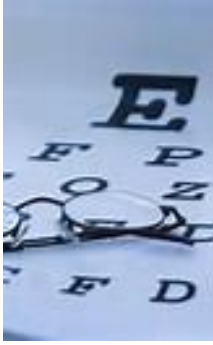
Vendor Financials

Following is a breakdown of sales and net profits earned by BEP vendor operators.

Earnings and Expenses					
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Gross Sales (Total Income)	\$449,385	\$368,890	\$432,909	\$350,259	\$251,625
Merchandise Purchases	\$246,962	\$200,472	\$240,724	\$182,530	\$109,779
Gross Profit	\$202,422	\$168,418	\$192,185	\$168,108	\$129,638
Total Operating Expenses	\$137,624	\$101,416	\$115,735	\$137,289	\$89,628
Net Proceeds	\$ 75,060	\$ 79,138	\$ 65,921	\$30,819	\$43,515
Levied Set Aside Funds	\$ 12,130	\$ 11,361	\$ 11,034	\$7,785	\$6,104
Net Profit to Vendors	\$ 62,929	\$ 67,778	\$ 54,887	\$31,187	\$36,798

Gross profits declined for BEP vendors during 2020. The impact of the pandemic contributed to the loss of income. Total operating expenses declined compared to 2019 due to businesses moving to remote work in facilities with cafeterias and vending routes. Due to a suspension of set aside contributions for February through July, net profits to vendors increased. The program purchased two new vending machines during FFY 2020 prior to the pandemic.

Services Lead to Hope and Independence



Thank you SBVI team! After 4 years of eye troubles, the feeling of isolation had crept in and enveloped my life. For two years, I had to give up driving, reading, and no cooking. Because I was in an electric chair, my options to get out in the fresh air, socialize and feel the sunshine were rare. Plus, in the past 8 months, I had to under- go 3 serious surgeries. Now, I realized I was actually a shut-in like I had heard about when I attended the university. I had simply given up when SBVI sent a person to try and help me. Thank the Lord my doctor was aware of them and sent them a referral to help.

The first person to approach me was someone who knew about books on tape. I had recently separated from my husband and was in a new apartment and knew few people here. I was so lonely. The books on tape helped to take my mind off my troubles. Recently I had had my large toe amputated and could hardly take care of my service pup of 8 months, much less myself. It was awful. I really didn't think I would qualify, but within a week, I had received the tape recorder and 10 tapes. The books on tape helped me sleep, removed myself from surgical flashbacks, and helped me pass the time. I felt truly blessed to have such luck. Not only did I receive those items, but also a magnifier so I could read my mail. I did not like letting my ex-husband read my mail and bank statements for 2 years. They were so thoughtful.

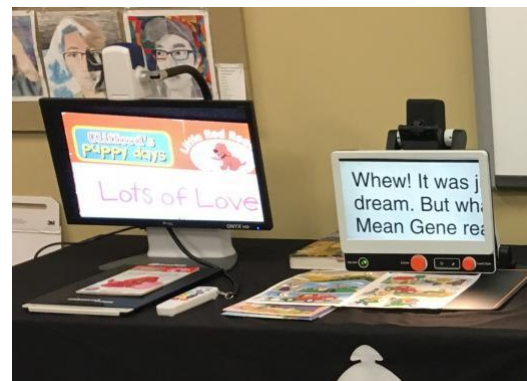
When the Rehabilitation Teacher called me on the phone and suggested that I have a low vision evaluation, I flatly refused. "No, I don't want any kind of evaluation. They can't help me. I already understand what they will do. After all, I have a degree in "Communication Disorders" I rudely said to Trisha Flemmer, the Rehabilitation Teacher from SBVI. But, Bless her heart! She & her boss Sandy didn't give up on me.

Due to having so many surgeries and treatments within 8 months... you tend to lose energy and the will to help yourself. That was where I was at. I was simply exhausted. Yet that didn't stop them. Laughing to myself, I am ever so grateful that they didn't. Within a month, they encouraged me have a low vision evaluation at the Rehabilitation Center. I would meet their eye specialist and see what he could do to help. At that point, I couldn't read at all, couldn't see faces nor watch TV. That little magnifier gave me hope, but it was just too small to read the mail.

Wow, the tools in the doctor's bag of tricks were amazing. And, he knew how to use them all and knew what I needed to try. When I left the evaluation, I was so very hopeful! I will never be able to express my thanks to those who helped me. I am currently finishing a book I was writing, training my service dog, and enjoying my husband's company again. My eyes aren't perfect, but I am good. Please do not ignore their assistance. It will open up your life and let you hope for the future. Thank You, Julia Tyler

Tackling Low Vision Through the Years

I developed macular degeneration while we lived in Arizona. At that time, they were using the laser treatment, which they did on my right eye. My left eye was still okay then. The laser ruptured a blood vessel in my eye, and I had to have surgery to clear it, leaving me with only peripheral vision. My left eye started to go bad after we moved to S.D. in 2020. Since it is dry macular, there's not a thing to be done, but each year there seems to be a bit more deterioration. It was hard to give up all my crafty things I enjoyed, but when I finally had to give up the keys to my car and depend on someone else, that was really hard. However, I have much to be thankful for! I have the Talking Books, the big reading machine, and my son-in-law bought this beautiful big screen monitor for my computer, and though I don't always see all the dust bunnies, I am still able to take care of my house. And I'm grateful for Dr. Slingsby's care!



I learned about Service to the Blind, mostly from Dr. Slingsby. He gave me literature on who to call. I received my first reading machine from a friend. It had been her mothers. It was old, one of the first ones developed, and its use was very limited. It was helpful at first, but as my vision faded, it was harder and harder to use. Dr. Slingsby had given me some material to call for help. I called and Siera Johnson who helped me get this big beautiful machine. I'd like to say that the services gave me back the keys to my care and the ability to do needlework again (and I did try the needlework ... it didn't work), but I know that's not a reality, and I am just very thankful to have the reader especially since I do all our bookkeeping and correspondence. That has always been my job all these 71 years of wedded bliss.

As for the quality of my life, I will tell you that it was a lot more fun being 19 than it is being 91, especially now with all that is going on in the world, but I am thankful for each new day that I can get out of the bed and take care of myself and Saylor. I thank the Good Lord for his favors. I must also mention my daughter Linda and her husband Randy. They are the BEST!

Mastering Technology Opens Doors

When Nick was 14, he applied to SBVI for vocational rehabilitation services. He was assigned a rehabilitation counselor who helped him find the services needed to increase his independence, leading him to college and eventually a job. Nick's services included training in skills of blindness at the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, college assistance, assistive technology services, counseling, and job placement services.



After college, Nick worked as a customer service representative. He was able to do this job because of computer software that changed text into speech. When Nick's company changed direction and utilized a new database that wasn't compatible with the speech software, Nick was let go. Determined to find a new job, Nick worked very hard completing applications and interviewing. The greatest difficulty was finding a customer service job using the speech software that was compatible with a company's database. With the assistance of the SDRC employment specialist, Nick was eventually hired by Valentus, Inc. as a customer support specialist. The employment specialist at SDRC had built a connection with Valentus, Inc. and introduced Nick to them. They learned how speech software would allow Nick access to their database of customers so he could work for them. Nick's supervisor, Chris, is impressed by how quickly Nick learned the job, his great customer service skills, and ability to navigate the computer. Nick is a positive upbeat person with a contagious smile. He's faced adversities in his life, but that's never held him back. Nick said if he gave any advice to someone it would be, "don't ever give up with whatever you are doing in life, because there is always a way if you have the will". Nick's case was closed successfully in October of 2019. Nick has continued to work for Valentus, Inc. increasing his responsibilities and duties.

Sergio – Overcoming Obstacles

Sergio was struggling because he was losing his vision due to a progressive eye condition called diabetic retinopathy. He needed to work but required assistance to find employment with limited vision, significant health issues, and he was non-English speaking. He applied for services with SBVI in June of 2016. Sergio had a long history as a roofer, but that job was not feasible with poor eyesight and health issues. Sergio worked with a rehabilitation counselor, who referred him to SDRC for Skills of Blindness training. While attending classes, Sergio learned to cook, use a white cane to get around, and to use adaptive devices for independence. Training in skills of blindness increased his independence and confidence.



Sergio also participated in Employment Skills Training. He worked with an employment specialist to find his current employment at Auntie Annie's in the Empire Mall. Job coaching was provided to help him learn his initial job task of handing out samples. However, as his skills improved, he was given more responsibilities. Sergio uses the "Say Hi" app on his iPhone to help him communicate with others. Sergio also worked with a benefit specialist to help him fully understand how his benefits may be affected by his employment.

Sergio received assistance for medical restoration, low vision services, an interpreter during training, English tutoring, dental services, and assistive technology devices. SBVI helped connect Sergio with additional resources, including Long Term

Supports and Services, Independent Living Choices, Benefit Specialist, Department of Social Services, DakotaLink, Sutran (transportation), etc. With the help of SBVI and other agencies, Sergio moved into his own apartment and is living independently and working.

Determination and Training Lead to Success

When Little Dove began services with SBVI in January 2020, she wasn't sure what to expect. Her vision loss experience began when she realized she had night blindness and was later diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa. Losing her vision meant that she had to rely on others, but people would say they were going to help her and then not follow through. Her confidence was low, and she struggled with trusting others. She never wanted to see herself as dependent on others and wanted to take care of herself but didn't know how to do this. She seemed to keep falling through the cracks.

After learning about Service to the Blind & Visually Impaired, Little Dove referred herself and met with Heather Prince, Rehabilitation Teacher.

Little Dove started by setting some personal goals, and Heather began providing training and low vision aids to help her reach them. After a short amount of time, she became much more confident. This confidence made her feel strong enough that she wanted to attend the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind in Sioux Falls for more intense training. Because the COVID pandemic limited her ability to attend the Rehabilitation Center in person, she started working with the Rehab Center teachers virtually. She studied daily and learned Braille in a short amount of time. Her current Braille goals have expanded to include mastering punctuation, the number of signs, and contractions, which will help her reading skills improve. The Braille teacher made study cards for her, which has helped her a lot. Little Dove works on braille skills through virtual lessons on the computer Monday through Friday. She reports having regular contact with her teachers has helped her gain confidence and skills.

Little Dove is extremely determined, and in only six months, has achieved so much. She is now able to do her own shopping and cooking, read the alphabet in Braille, and because of special modifications, she can use her computer, which has helped attend virtual class sessions. She is very dedicated to learning skills so she can grow in her independence. She states without help from Heather and the teachers at the Rehabilitation Center, and she wouldn't be where she is today. Within a short amount of time, she has accomplished a lot and has set bigger goals for herself. She will eventually get a guide dog and read and write more complex Braille, which are achievable goals that will help her be more independent.

“I was nourished & encouraged by everyone. They helped me when I was low. Techniques and personalities helped give me hope and confidence. Made it a pleasure to learn, grow & accept more easily the low vision.”

SERVICE TO THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED OFFICES

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For more information go to the SBVI web site at: <http://dhs.sd.gov/servicetotheblind>

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