South Dakota Board of Service to the Blind & Visually Impaired Annual Report

2015

Dear Governor Daugaard:

It is my pleasure to submit the 2015 Annual Report on behalf of the Board and Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI). I have had the distinct pleasure of interacting with the Division of SBVI not only as a Board member and Chair of the Board of SBVI, but have also been a recipient of services delivered by the Division. My experiences with overcoming the obstacles caused by vision loss have taught me the value of the services delivered by the dedicated staff of the Division of SBVI.

The annual report is just a snapshot of activities in the past year. The data is helpful for analyzing the programs and services delivered by SBVI. However, it is my belief that the success stories are the best measure of the impact of services on the lives of South Dakotans.

The mission of the Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired to provide individualized rehabilitation services that result in quality employment and independent living outcomes for citizens who are blind or visually impaired. Outcomes are best defined by the impact services have on the lives of citizens with vision loss.

The comprehensive statewide needs assessment, public forums and consumer satisfaction surveys are some examples of activities that help the Board and Division of SBVI to jointly develop goals and strategies to address the needs identified. In addition, Board members provide input and guidance on service delivery based on experience from a number of perspectives. With fifty percent of members who are citizens with vision loss, our experience is valued by the Division for planning and delivering quality services that lead to positive outcomes.

On behalf of the Board of SBVI, I would like to acknowledge your commitment to making South Dakota an even better place to live for all South Dakotans, including citizens who are blind or visually impaired.

Respectfully Submitted,

Eric Rippentrop

Chair, Board of SBVI

CC: Rimal Desai, Rehabilitation Services Administration State Liaison

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Executive Summary

The Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) Annual Report highlights activities and priorities the Board addressed in 2015. This report is required by the federal Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration and is prepared yearly to capture the impact services have on South Dakota citizens who are blind or visually impaired.

Members of the Board of SBVI bring their experiences and expertise to assist with planning optimal services that result in getting and keeping jobs and living independently. Many of the Board members are current or former recipients of services. They devote their time and talents as volunteers to participate in meetings and other Board sponsored events. Their collective knowledge and experience is a valuable resource for planning service delivery and evaluating current practices.

The Board and Division of SBVI encountered both obstacles and opportunities in 2015. Obstacles included trying to meet federal requirements mandated through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act with new timelines and no regulations. The law, while providing opportunity for a stronger workforce system, does not thoroughly address implementation of common performance indicators and how to operationalize mandates within the law. Opportunities included a number of activities that promoted the capabilities of South Dakota citizens with vision loss.

SBVI has consistently met or exceeded all performance measures and in fact, leads the nation compared to peers in other states in many of the federal standards and indicators. We also measure performance based on the individual stories of citizens who overcome obstacles through hard work and determination. Their stories are shared as a real measure of success throughout this report.

The commitment of the dedicated staff in SBVI to providing services and promoting the capabilities of citizens who are blind or visually impaired was integral to the information contained in this report. Quotes from those who benefitted from services throughout this report, are evidence of the level of services they provide.

Thanks to Governor Daugaard for his ongoing support of employment of citizens with disabilities. The opportunities created with the State of South Dakota serving as a model employer and taking the lead on promoting hiring people with disabilities sends a positive message about an inclusive workforce.

As 2015 comes to a close, we look forward to new opportunities and partnerships in 2016. The Board and Division will continue to look for innovative ways to improve services for South Dakotans who are blind or visually impaired.

Gaye Mattke, Director
SD Service to the Blind & Visually Impaired

Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired

The Board of SBVI is the State Rehabilitation Council for the Division of SBVI as defined in the Rehabilitation Act as amended. Board members advise the Division on services provided to citizens with vision loss. Members are appointed by the Governor of South Dakota for three year terms. The following Board members served in 2015.

Name	Hometown	Representation
Eric Rippentrop Chair	Dell Rapids	Disability Advocacy Group
*Marilyn Steffen Vice Chair	Yankton	Business and Industry
Dr. Lynda O'Connor–Ohayon Member at Large	Sioux Falls	Business and Industry
*Karla Bucknall	Rapid City	Business and Industry
*Linda Biffert	Volga	Disability Advocacy Group
Tim Neyhart	Pierre	Client Assistance Program
Gaye Mattke	Pierre	SBVI Director– Ex Officio
*Steve Kelsey	Aberdeen	VR Counselor– Ex Officio
Connie Sullivan	Pierre	State Education Agency
Ken Rollman	Rapid City	Disability Advocacy Group
Patrick Czerny	Piedmont	Community Rehab Program
Lyle Cook	Eagle Butte	Native American VR
*Bill Molseed	Pierre	Workforce Dev. Council
Bruce Micheel	Cavour	Business and Industry
Julie Briggs	Sioux Falls	Business and Industry
Teresa Nold	Sioux Falls	Parent Connection
Alan Vandenburg	Sioux Falls	VR Counselor – Ex Officio
Koni Sims	Sioux Falls	Disability Advocacy Group
Catherin Greseth	Rapid City	Business and Industry
Kay Miller	Mitchell	Business and Industry
Marcia Hultman	Pierre	Workforce Dev. Council

*Denotes members whose terms expired during 2015

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. At least 50% of Board Members are people who are blind or visually impaired as required by federal law. Many members of the Board are current or former recipient of services from SBVI. Board members serve on a volunteer basis and are reimbursed for expenses. Their knowledge and experience are a valuable resource for planning services that result in employment for citizens with vision loss.

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 also 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 as often as necessary (determined by the Chairperson in cooperation with the Director of SBVI), but at least four times per year. Meetings during the report period were held on the following dates and locations:

December 5, 2014, Pierre, SD
March 27, 2015, Pierre, SD
June 26, 2015, Pierre, SD
September 18, 2015, Pierre, SD

Meetings are open to the public and held at accessible locations. Meetings are announced via the SBVI website, in the VISIONS newsletter, on the State of South Dakota news website, and through a variety of publications throughout the state. Meeting dates are determined by the Board; agendas and minutes are posted on the SBVI website at: http://dhs.sd.gov/sbvi/boardsbvi.aspx

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

South Dakota Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) and the Board of SBVI addressed priorities contained in the WIOA and obtained input for the state plan through public forums. Implementation of Title IV of the WIOA was discussed at all meetings including pre-employment transition services, coordination and strategic planning with the Department of Labor and Regulation, subminimum wage, and services and collaboration with employers. In addition, implementing priorities of the WIOA was discussed at all quarterly Board meetings in 2015.

Governor's Awards for Employment of People with Disabilities

Lyle Cook and Teresa Nold were Board of SBVI representatives on a committee with the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation to help with the selection of recipients for Governor's awards recognizing employment of citizens with disabilities. The 2015 Governor's Awards ceremony was held on September 3rd in the Capitol Rotunda. The event is planned based on the Governor's schedule to ensure that he is available to present the awards.

White Cane Awareness Day

The Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired is a sponsor White Cane Awareness Day in October. On October 10, 2015 a march helped raise awareness about South Dakota law that addresses yielding to pedestrians who use white canes. Past and present students of the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, SBVI Board members and staff, along with family members and friends, participated in the 6 block march. The march concluded with a program and question and answer session at the Sioux Falls library. The Board of SBVI covered the costs of sign language interpreters for the event.

Americans with Disabilities Act 25th Anniversary

The Board supported activities to recognize the 25th Anniversary of the ADA. A one day conference with was held in Sioux Falls on July 13th. The Board contributed to costs associated with the conference and Board members attended the event.

"Your services greatly improved my vision. It was wonderful help! Kept my original employer – but am able to do a much better job because of your help!"

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) Activities

The theme for the 2015 NDEAM was **"My Disability Is One Part of Who I Am."** The Board of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR) and the Board of SBVI, along with the respective divisions in the Department of Human Services plan activities in communities across the state in October to increase awareness of the capabilities of citizens with disabilities to work. The Board of SBVI voted to contribute to the events in 2015 and an SBVI Board member served on the BVR committee that approved the activities and funding for the events. Thirteen events were held in communities across the state targeting employers and included recognition for employment of people with disabilities. Local human resource manager's organizations, Mayor's Committees and key representatives from Tribal Government were included in planning and participation in the events in many communities.

Public Forums

Public forums and disability summits are planned to share information and obtain input on services and needs of citizens with vison loss. Information obtained through public input, coordination with other entities including labor, education and consumer organizations is used to re-evaluate goals and strategies in the state plan. The Board of SBVI recommended sites and formats for the meetings as well as topics to be prioritized for discussion. Board members facilitated the meetings. Based on advice from the Board, consumer organizations host the meetings by circulating meeting announcements to constituents and providing local transportation to the meetings.

In accordance with the Board's recommendations public meetings were held in Rapid City (in conjunction with the National Federation of the Blind state convention), in Mission on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, and a videoconference with sites in Aberdeen, Pierre, and Sioux Falls. SBVI invited the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Statewide Independent Living Council, the Department of Human Services and other disability related organizations, including tribal organizations to participate in the gathering at Sinte Gleska University in Mission, SD. Board members served as facilitators at the public meetings and over 100 people attended in 2015. The Division will continue to seek opportunities for collaboration by sponsoring public events on an annual basis with input from the Board of SBVI.

Joint Board/Council Discussion

The Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DD Council) held a joint Board/Council meeting on July 15th to obtain input for their 5 year state plan. The purpose of the meeting was to address the following questions:

What are the purpose, priorities and/or goals for your board or council?
What are the trends or areas of concern for children, youth and adults with disabilities and their families?
What new initiatives would help people with disabilities have greater inclusion and integration in their communities?
What grant opportunities are needed?
How and around what goal or activity can collaboration happen between your organization and the Council?

SBVI Board members Tim Neyhart and Julie Briggs attended the meeting in Oacoma. The meeting was conducted using Person Center Thinking strategies which are becoming routine in the Department of Human Services service delivery system. Tim provided a report on the meeting which was shared with the Board. Notes were also provided by the DD Council regarding input at the meeting. This information will be considered as part of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment.

Board Support for Individuals/Organizations

The Board of SBVI sponsors events to promote employment of citizens with disabilities in conjunction with organizations of the blind and other entities. Procedures for accessing Board financial support were revised in 2015 with input from Board members.

Revised Timelines for Individualized Plans for Employment

The revised program guide addressing timelines for Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) was provided to members and discussed during a quarterly Board meeting. Due to changes in the Rehabilitation Act, the IPE must be completed within 90 days after eligibility determination or an extension must be agreed upon by the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor and the eligible individual. A general employment goal may be used for job exploration if an individual is not sure of a specific employment goal. If an extension is needed, it must be documented in the case management system. The Board supported the changes in policy pertaining to timelines for developing IPEs.

Future Priorities

In 2016 opportunities to strengthen partnerships to enhance services for citizens with vision loss will include employers and workforce partners in the Department of Labor and Regulation and the Department of Education. Promoting employment of citizens with significant vision loss and educating employers on the capabilities of citizens who are blind or have a significant visual impairment will continue to be a priority.

Information obtained through public input, coordination with other entities including labor, education and consumer organizations will be used to re-evaluate goals and strategies for service provision.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

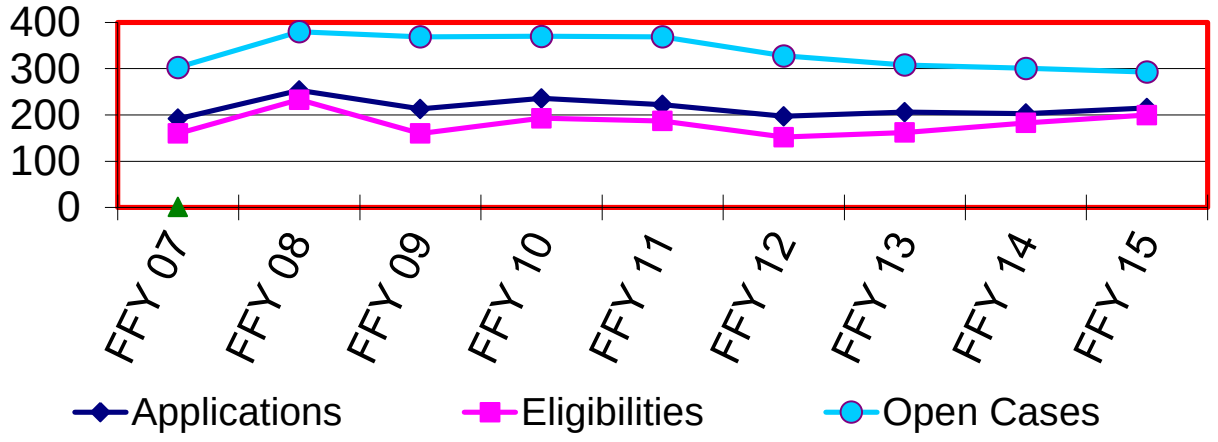
The Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program provides individualized rehabilitation services that result in optimal employment outcomes for citizens who are blind or visually impaired. Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors provide specialized services throughout the state of South Dakota.

Fiscal Year 2015 Performance

- 517 people were served through the SBVI VR Program during Federal Fiscal Year 2015 (FY 15) compared to 509 people in 2014 (FY 14).
- 123 people were successfully rehabilitated through the vocational rehabilitation program. Of the people who were closed successfully, 97% had significant disabilities.
- The average hourly wage was $12.89 for people who obtained and/or maintained employment through the vocational rehabilitation program.

SBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Caseload Summary

The chart below illustrates the number of people who have applied for and/or received services from the SBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Program over the past several years. There was a slight increase in applications in 2015, SBVI caseloads remain within the range when compared to prior 8 years. Counselors are increasing outreach efforts to schools and other public and private sectors in an effort to provide awareness of SBVI services and increase the number of people receiving services.



"I am glad for the services of SBVI. Now I can achieve all I've wanted in my life, family, community and employment!"

Federal Program Evaluation Standards

The Federal Government measures vocational rehabilitation agency performance in part by using six "Standard 1" performance indicators. SBVI's performance on each indicator is illustrated on the corresponding chart. SBVI has exceeded all six of the Standard 1 indicators for the past eleven years (FY 2004 thru FY 2015). These indicators are the Division's "report card". SBVI is the only vocational rehabilitation agency for the blind in the nation to meet or exceed all six Standard 1 indicators throughout this time span.

Standard 1: Employment Outcomes

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

1.2 The percentage of individuals exiting the program during the performance period who have achieved an employment outcome after receiving services.

1.3 The percentage of consumers who exit the SBVI VR Program in competitive employment at or above the state minimum wage.

1.4 The percentage of individuals who have significant disabilities who obtain competitive employment at or above the state minimum wage.

1.5 The ratio of average hourly earnings of all individuals successfully closed to the average hourly earnings of all employed individuals in the state.

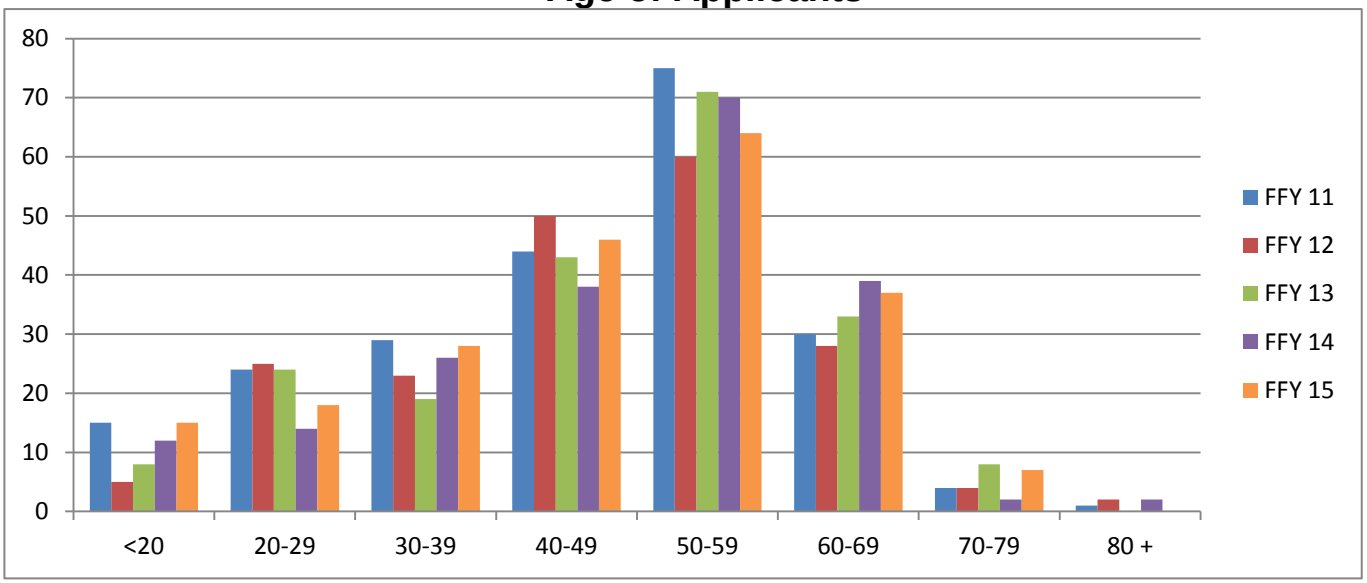
1.6 The difference in the percentage of individuals at application versus closure who reported their income as the largest single source of support.

FFY15 SBVI Performance on Standard 1 Performance Indicators

Indicator	Minimum Requirement	Division Performance
Standard 1: Employment Outcomes	Meet 4 of the 6 Indicators	6 of the 6 Indicators Were Met
Indicator 1.1	242	244
Indicator 1.2	68.90%	73.65%
Indicator 1.3	35.40%	99.19%
Indicator 1.4	89.00%	91.8%
Indicator 1.5	$9.57	$12.89
Indicator 1.6	30.40%	36.89%

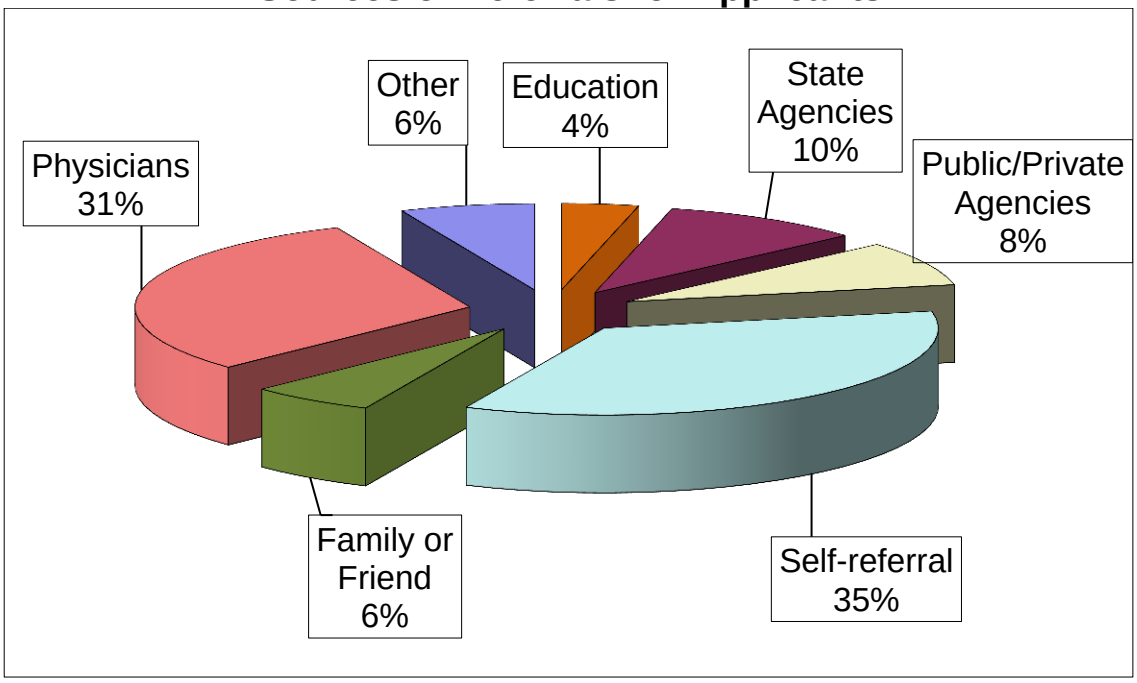
- SBVI Performance in case closures have consistently exceeded national and/or peer averages in employment outcomes, average hours worked, and integrated supported employment.

Age of Applicants

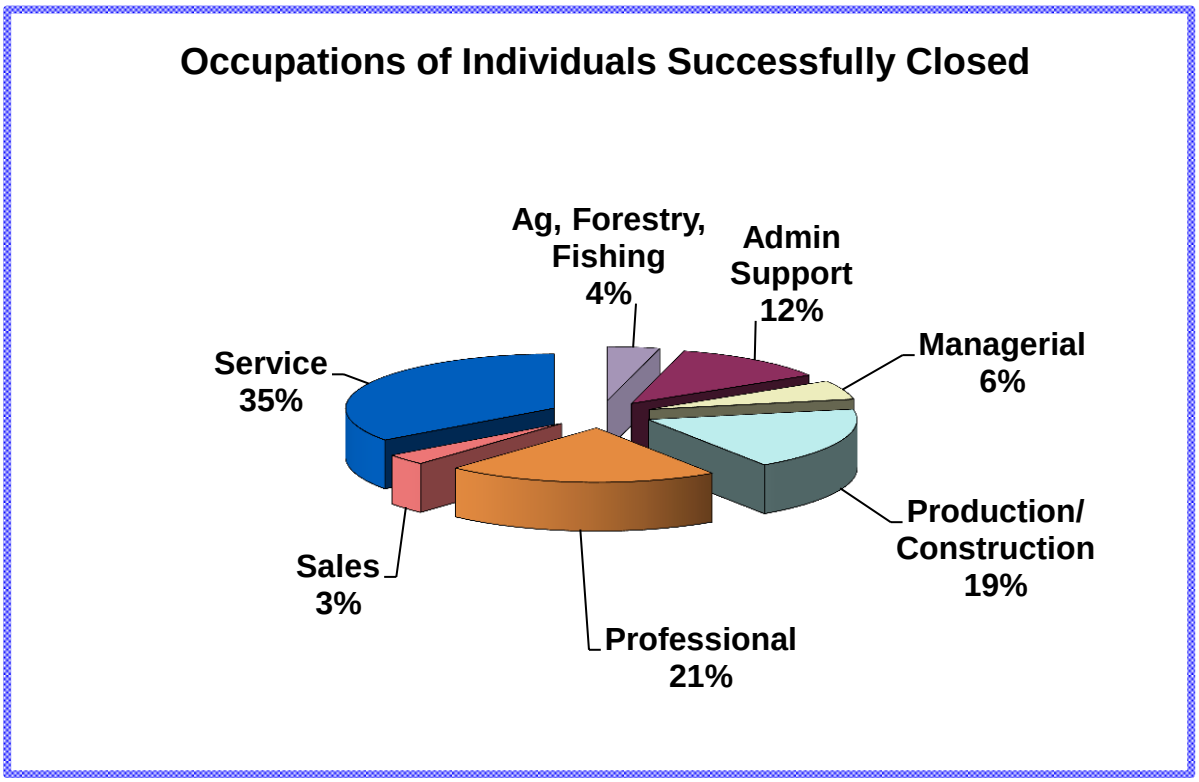


This graph illustrates the age groups of applicants for the VR program. Although SBVI takes applications from individuals from age 14 on, historically the majority of applicants who apply for services are between the ages of 50 to 59 due to the progressive nature of vision loss. In 2015 there was an increase in applicants from those younger than fifty years of age.

Sources of Referrals for Applicants



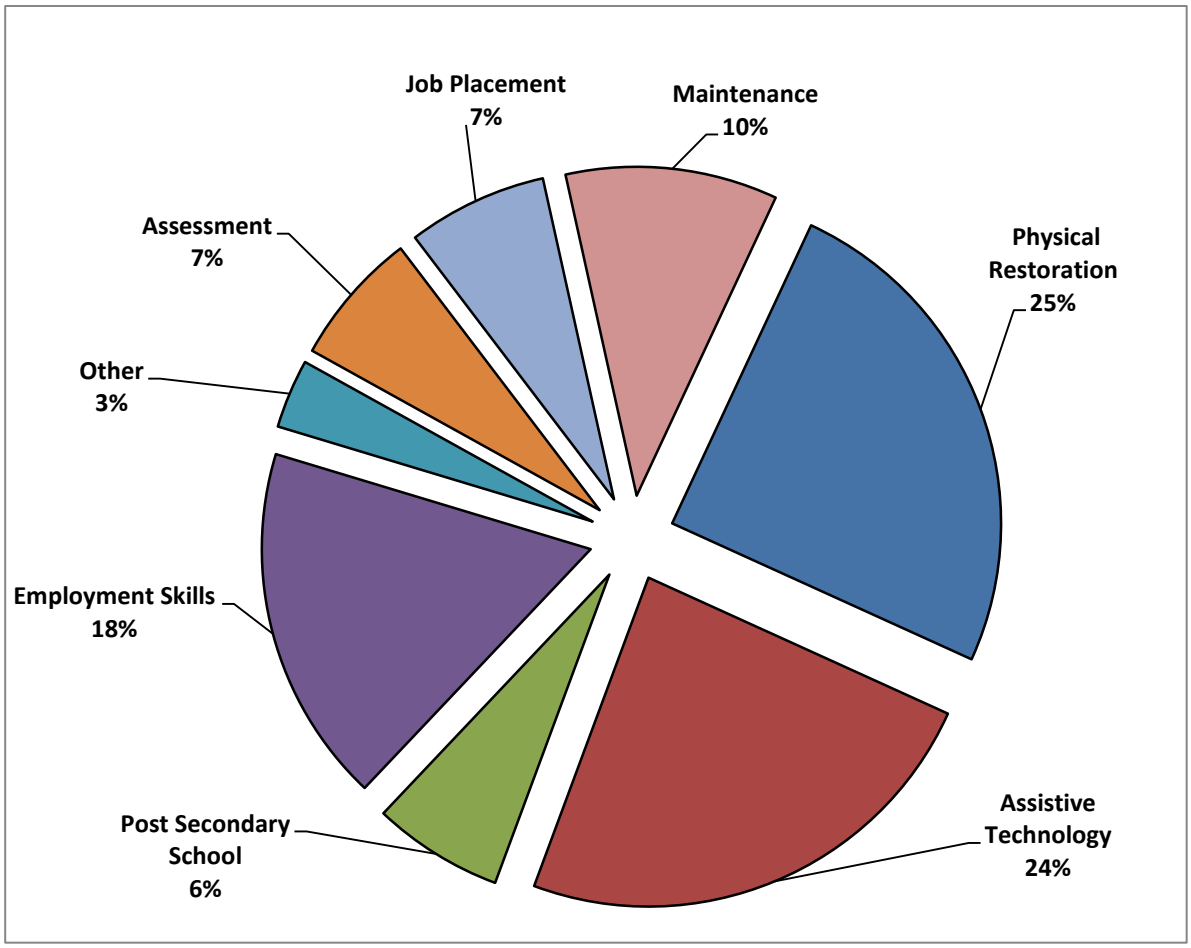
This chart demonstrates physicians and self-referrals make up two-thirds of the referrals to the SBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Program; in contrast only 4% of the referrals came from high school or post-secondary education. SBVI staff will continue to increase outreach efforts to school personnel and parents to inform them of the availability of transition services for students with vision loss.



The Vocational Rehabilitation program helped 123 people to achieve their employment goals. This chart reflects the occupations of people who were successfully employed with a majority of jobs in Service, Professional and Production/Construction (75%). The occupations of professional and managerial increased by 14% compared to FY 2014.

"I am so thankful for SBVI and their assistance. If it wasn't for this program always making suggestions for ways of improvement, I probably wouldn't be where I am today!"

Vocational Rehabilitation Purchased Services Analysis



In FFY 2015 SBVI spent over $945,000 on client services for vocational rehabilitation. Physical restoration and assistive technology services and devices constituted close to half of the case service expenditures. Physical restoration services are often necessary to prevent further deterioration of vison resulting in options for maximizing use of residual vision. Assistive technology services and devices are integral for accessing information in a wide variety of occupations and for postsecondary education.

- ***"SBVI shows a higher than peer average in proportion of investments in services directly to clients verses administration and support services to the system."***
  From the 2015 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment

Services to Minorities

According to the 2010 census, South Dakota's minority (non-white) population was 14.1%. The largest minority group in South Dakota involves American Indians from nine South Dakota Tribes making up approximately 9% (8.8% - 2010 U.S. Census) of the state's total population. In FY 2015, 12% of SBVI closures were comprised of individuals of American Indian descent, and 19% of all closures reported coming from a minority background, which exceeds census data for minorities in the population of the state.

The Board and Division of SBVI work to address culturally relevant services for minority populations through a number of initiatives. The director of the Oun'iyekiyapi (defined as "finds their place") Vocational Rehabilitation Tribal VR Program is a member of the Board of SBVI. Strategies from the state plan attachment 4.11(d) specifically address strengthening SBVI's ability to provide quality services to minority populations through the following activities:

- Maintain regular contact with minority service agencies to increase awareness of services that are available.
- Collaborate with Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation and other programs to ensure all services are provided in an effective and efficient manner while addressing cultural diversity.
- Provide SBVI staff with resources and training so they are able to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of diverse populations

A radio ad promoting SBVI services in Lakota for Native Americans on the state's Tribal lands is distributed to support outreach. In addition, biannual State and Tribal VR meetings are conducted for information sharing and to identify and address specific needs and concerns. Staff also participated in National Disabilities Awareness month activities in Eagle Butte in October.

SBVI VR Program – Satisfaction Survey Analysis

FFY 2015 marks the seventh year that SBVI has partnered with the Board of SBVI to conduct a consumer satisfaction survey using the SBVI Client Satisfaction Questionaire-8 (CSQ-8) survey. The survey consists of eight core questions and an additional seven questions that were developed with the help of the Board of SBVI.

The survey was sent to 168 people who received services and were closed from the SBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Program during the past year. Seventy-one surveys were returned for a response rate of 42% which represents a decrease from a 51% response rate in FFY 2014. The overall consumer satisfaction mean was very high at 29.54 out of a possible 32, with a standard deviation of 4.1. Survey participants were asked directly "In an overall, general sense, how satisfied are you with the service you received?" 94% of survey participants indicated they were very satisfied with the service they received from SBVI. Responses from the survey illustrate that SBVI improved substantially from past years by providing services to people that were perceived as positive, effective and satisfying.

Demographics of the survey questionnaires indicated the respondents were predominately Caucasian, almost evenly divided between males than females, and mostly over the age of 55 years of age. This finding indicates that SBVI has successfully addressed the gender imbalance observed in FFY 2013. As noted in previous reports, it may be worthwhile for SBVI to consider additional staff training in the area of service to people over the age of 50. Following is a summary of the responses from the survey which indicate that the majority of the people are pleased with the services they receive from SBVI.

1. How would you rate the quality of service you received?
94% of respondents answered "excellent" or "good".

2. Did you get the kind of service you wanted?
96% answered "yes, definitely" or "yes, generally".

3. To what extent has our program met your needs?
96% answered "almost all" or "most" of their needs had been met.

4. If a friend were in need of similar help, would you recommend our program to him/her?
99% answered "yes, definitely" or "yes, I think so".

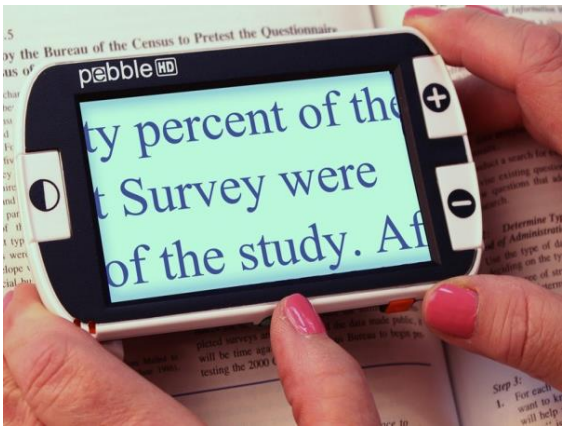
5. How satisfied are you with the amount of help you received?
93% answered "very satisfied" or "mostly satisfied".

6. Have the services you received helped you to deal more effectively with your problems?
94% answered "yes, they helped a great deal" or "yes, they helped somewhat".

7. In an overall, general sense, how satisfied are you with the service you received?
97% answered "very satisfied" or "mostly satisfied".

8. If you were to seek help again, would you come back to our program?
97% answered "yes, definitely" or "yes, I think so".

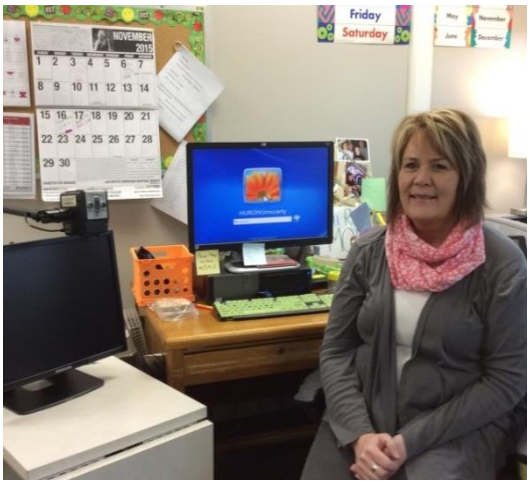
To understand the impact of vocational rehabilitation, it is important to not only look at the program's performance in terms of data, but also to see the comments people share. These are some quotes received from the consumer satisfaction surveys:



- "Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I don't know what I would've done without your help. My counselor went way beyond. Thank you Gary Frentz!"
- "My counselor, Julaine was a great inspiration to me. Not only was she well-versed in her duties, she provided much needed encouragement to me in my difficulties. Thank you so much for all you've done to improve my life!"
- "Julaine has been the most helpful person I know. She always goes above and beyond. She is a rock star in my book!"
- "Without you I couldn't do my job! Because SBVI let me attain my visual aids without involving my employer, I could use them at home for work too. This was very important!"
- "Because of the help of my counselors, Steve Kelsey and Mike Webb, I would not be able to do my job! So thankful for you coming right away when I needed help!"
- "Anything I could put into words about my appreciation of Dorthy Adams would be understated!"
- "Kellie did a fantastic job! Helped me keep my employment and have made it easier to complete my work."
- "I am always independent, try to adjust to my impairment. The services of SBVI help me great deal in my life to live as normal as I can."

Additional comments from the survey can be found throughout this report.

Teaching Success



Lisa is an elementary school teacher for the Huron School District. She continues to do her job despite ongoing vision loss caused by longstanding rod-cone dystrophy resulting in statutory blindness. In addition to working with students, Lisa's job has evolved and she works as a mentor for other elementary teachers in her school. She conducts research and provides instruction which was impacted by her vision loss. She uses a variety of assistive technology devices to make it possible to perform tasks as efficiently as possible. Lisa uses the screen enlargement software, Learning Alley, KNFB reader, an Acrobat (video magnification) and other devices that allow her to continue working. Lisa went through Skills of Blindness training at the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind to assist her in honing the skills she needs to be successful. Lisa's truly is a success story!

South Dakotan Overcomes Obstacles

Aaron Ready is a celebrity of sorts after his story appeared in a number of South Dakota newspapers as well as the Washington Times with a headline of **"South Dakota Making Strides in Inclusion Hiring Practices"**. Aaron Ready is described by his counselor as a self-motivated, determined person with a strong work ethic. He also has a desire to support himself and his family and be a part of the community. Aaron broke the barrier in a tough blue collar work environment. When he took a job two years ago in a California auto-body shop, Aaron Ready, was an accomplished collision repairman despite his visual and hearing impairments, he was hoping he would be assigned meaningful work. Instead, he was told to sit in a corner and do less than challenging tasks. Disappointed, he returned to Rapid City and called his former employer, Rick's Body Shop, who had earlier trained and hired him as a part time employee. The Murner's, owners of Rick's Body Shop, said "We had hired Aaron before, and we had seen that he worked harder than anyone else. He has done some of the most difficult collision repair work with perfect ease. His skills blew us away, so we hired him again because he deserves it. I don't think we could have hired anyone any better," Butch Murner said.

Independent Living Blind Program (ILB)

The American Foundation for the Blind reports that every seven minutes someone in America becomes blind or visually impaired. Some eye diseases produce an impact over time and the vision loss is a gradual process occurring over many years. For others, the vision loss is very sudden and the experience is dramatic leaving the individual shocked and concerned over what will happen to them or their loved ones. Whether the vision loss was gradual or sudden and without warning, the bottom line is that any significant sight loss can be traumatic and life altering.

South Dakota Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired believes individuals confronting vision loss need to be given the opportunity to learn new, creative ways of doing things. Routine daily activities and simple tasks that most of us take for granted, such as reading the mail, preparing a meal, eating out in a restaurant or reading medication labels, can prove overwhelming for someone experiencing vision loss and lead to isolation and depression.

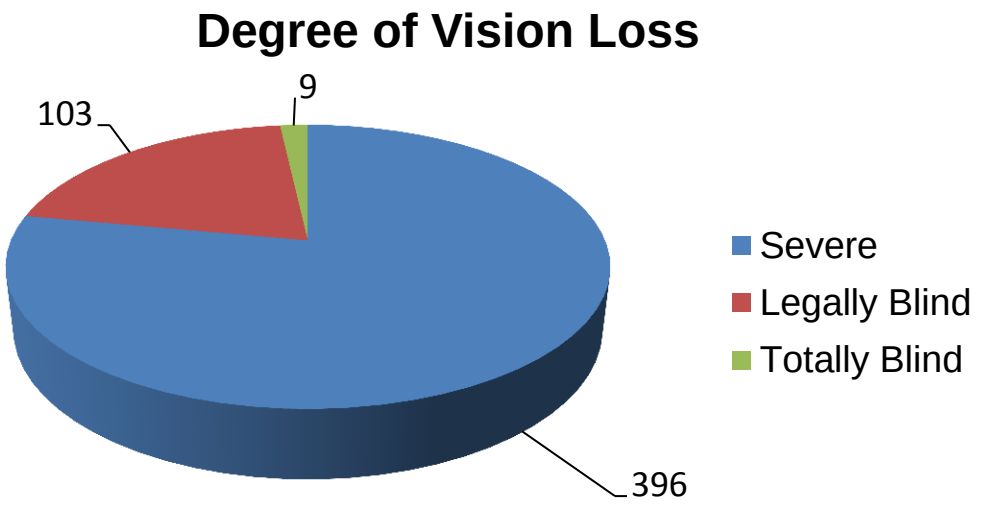
In addition to the experiencing the challenge of loss of vision, these individuals need to become aware of and gain access to the resources, technology and training that can empower them to continue living active and independent lives. The types of services provided to them are determined based on the personal goals they establish with the Rehabilitation Teacher.

- In FY 2015, the ILB program provided services to 508 older blind individuals compared to 452 in FY 2014. Staff successfully closed 314 individual cases compared to 258 individuals in FY 2014.
- In addition to providing services to older citizens who have severe vision loss, the ILB program provided services to 12 individuals under the age of 55 who required independent-living-skills training due to their vision loss.

Services Provided

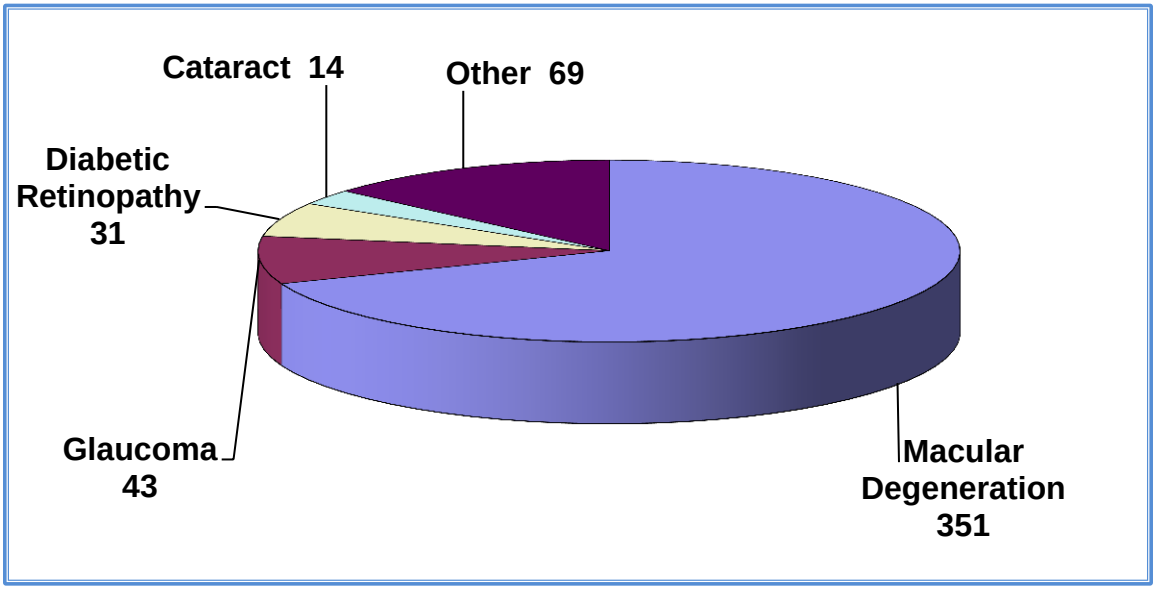
Services provided by SBVI Rehabilitation Teachers help citizens make the most of their remaining vision, which strengthens their confidence as they learn techniques to perform tasks with vision loss. Low vision skills taught to individuals help them continue to experience quality of life in their home environment. The services listed below define the training areas provided to those eligible for the Independent Living Blind (IL
B) program and include the number of individuals who participated in each service in FFY 2015.

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.	467
Daily Living Skills – Training in the use of adaptive aids and assistive technology for daily living.	428
Low Vision Device Training – Services related to the use of optical aids and devices.	419
Low Vision Aids – May include items such as canes, insulin gauges, CCTVs, magnifiers, adaptive cooking items, etc.	400
Counseling – Peer, individual, or group counseling to assist with adjustment to visual impairment and blindness.	393
Low Vision Exams – Evaluations to identify strategies and devices for enhancing visual performance.	306
Advocacy Training – Participation in advocacy training activities such as consumer organization meetings and peer support groups.	103
Referral to Other Agencies – Referral to other service providers, programs, and agencies.	370
Orientation and Mobility – Travel training and learning to access public or private transportation to travel safely and independently.	133

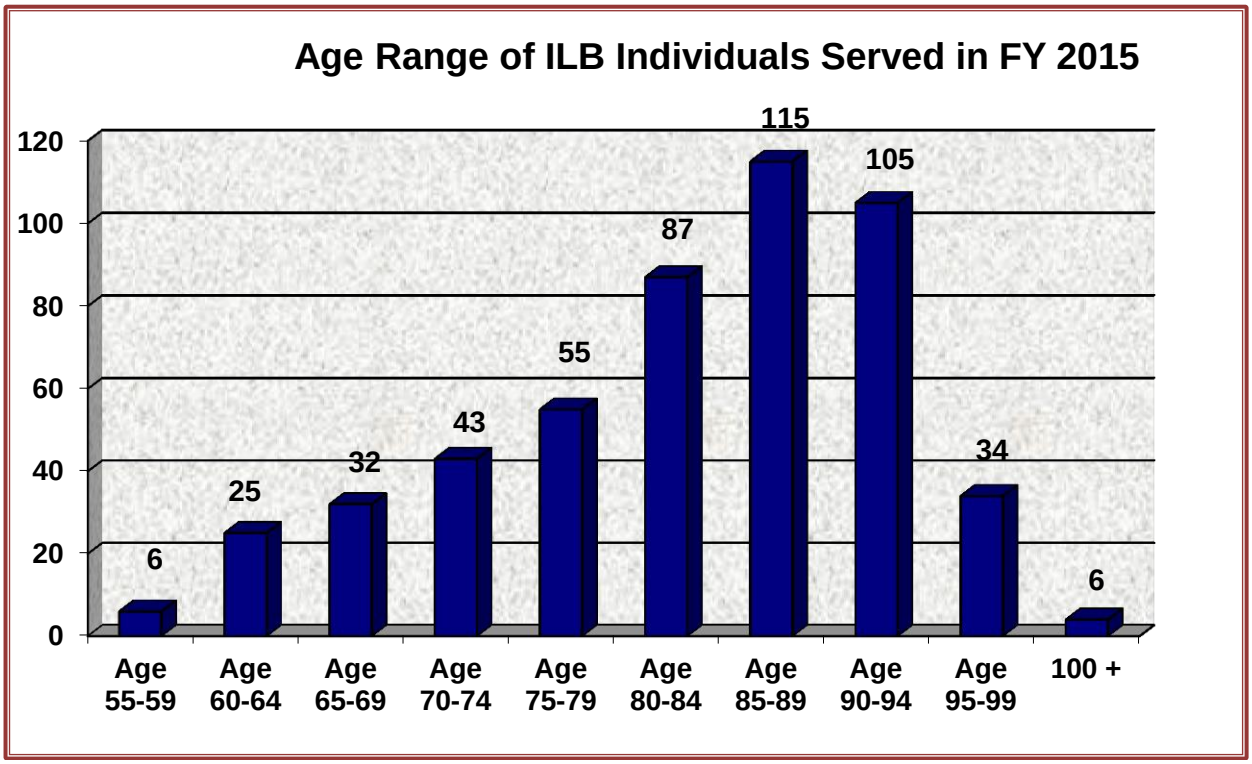


People experiencing vision loss through eye disease often fear total blindness. However the majority of people with eye disease have some level of useable vision remaining which can be utilized to do activities of daily living. This chart demonstrates the number of people served in 2015 and the degree of vision loss they experienced.

Primary Types of Eye Disease for People Served



Macular Degeneration was the major cause of vision loss in 351 of the 508 individuals who received services in 2015 as reflected in this chart. According to Prevent Blindness America, South Dakota has an estimated 7,300 individuals with macular degeneration.



The target population for the Independent Living Blind program is individuals over the age of 55. As reflected in this chart, in 2015, 68% (347 individuals) of the 508 people served were over the age of 80, with 6 people over the age of 100.

Satisfaction with Independent Living Services

Citizens who receive services from the ILB program have the opportunity to provide feedback through a satisfaction survey which is sent out quarterly throughout the year. Two hundred and sixty surveys were sent to individuals whose records were closed successfully. One hundred thirty six (136) individuals responded to the survey which demonstrates a 52% response rate. Survey responses assist SBVI to assess whether services are effective in assisting citizens to maintain or regain their independence. Frequently the survey responses include statements expressing gratitude for services. Following are some comments received from those completing the surveys:

- The loaned equipment and evaluation provided by the eye doctor without being a financial concern has helped. Everyone has been kind and a pleasure to work with.
- Grateful for the services. Love the clock. Grateful for how kind and informative Mary was. If you start a low vision support group, I'd be interested.
- Amanda explained everything so well. Talking books opened a whole new world for me. Thank you all so much.
- Thank you for services. Nancy was so helpful and I enjoyed her help.
- The staff was helpful in obtaining magnifying glasses, a lamp, cane & getting talking book started. Thank you for the help and equipment.
- Staff that visited were pleasant and helpful in explaining things to help us & other services available to us. We continue to enjoy living on our ranch with some help.

A majority of the survey respondents agreed that as a result of Independent Living Services, they regained or improved their independence; they remained involved in activities in their home and community, gained skills or maintained their ability to walk safely around their home, and feel more confident because of the services they received.

A key question was whether they would have considered moving into a facility with a higher level of care without services from the ILB program. Fifty-seven individuals (42%) who responded to the survey stated that they had considered moving to a facility, but were able to remain in their home because of services from SBVI.

Satisfaction with services is sometimes best expressed through the heartfelt correspondence sent by those who have benefitted from training. The following statements are two examples from 2015:

"Thank you for the lamp and the large print calendar and everything else you have helped me with. I can embroider now and am able to see better in order to read. Thank you!"

"You have been very kind and I appreciate the use of your magnifier. Thank you and all those who work with you. God's blessings to each and every one of you."

Assistive Technology Access Project

The Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired recognized that people with vision loss are often at a disadvantage when accessing information through their personal computers and handheld cellular devices.

In October 2014, SBVI partnered with DakotaLink to create the Assistive Technology Access Project to provide instruction to use built-in accessibility options in personal computing devices. Adults and high school students with low vision or who are blind are eligible for the free individualized training with up to five hours of instruction per program participant. The project provides training to help people with vision loss maximize their ability to use their mobile devices, iPads and computers.

Fifty-six program participants have benefited by learning to utilize features already available on their computers or hand held devices. Individuals referred to the Assistive Technology Access Project received direct contact with DakotaLink technicians who provided training and support in the individuals' homes. Follow up contacts were provided by the technicians to ensure the individuals were managing the newly acquired skills. A brief survey to assess the satisfaction of the trainees has been completed and survey results revealed positive comments regarding the impact of the project in meeting their needs. SBVI did not purchase any equipment for individual use during the course of this project. Many of the individuals received free or low cost software or made independent and informed purchases which helped them utilize their devices to maximum capacity.

Information and Referral

Rehabilitation Teachers provide information and referral services to the people of South Dakota by attending events in communities including the South Dakota State Fair, community health fairs, employee in-service events and other public forums. An example of this is the Annual Community Connections Partners Meeting which was held on Thursday, April 16th at the Journey Museum in Rapid City.

In addition to these events, staff responded to individual calls and office visits in a timely manner to ensure people obtain the information they need to access Independent Living and other services. In 2015, Rehabilitation Teachers provided information and referral services to 625 people and participated in 129 local events or presentations across the state. Participating in local events and providing SBVI information to potential applicants has paid off significantly in the past year as 264 or 51% of the people served in 2015 were new program participants.

South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind

The South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind (SDRC) served 45 people in the Skills of Blindness program in 2015. This included five professional interns, four USD School of Medicine medical students, and two individuals receiving Orientation and Mobility outreach services. In total, there were 26 men and 19 women in the program. The average age of the men attending training was 42 years and the average age of women was 46 years. Although there was a decrease in the number of people attending the Skills of Blindness classes in 2015, the overall number of people receiving services at SDRC remains stable.

To increase services to South Dakota citizens with vision loss, SDRC started offering assistive technology classes in 2014. The idea originated with monthly Saturday classes, but due to the lack of participation, classes were rescheduled to the first Friday of each month. This schedule was found to better meet the needs of people seeking assistive technology instruction. The “First Friday” sessions occur in two parts, with a walk-in clinic held in the morning to help answer individual questions, followed by a three hour afternoon class offering training on specific assistive technology topics. The most popular topic thus far has been how to set-up and use the Voiceover features on an iPhone and iPad. Through these sessions, SDRC served 46 people in 2015. In addition to the Friday classes, the assistive technology instructor also willingly assists people through phone calls, email, Facetime, or Skype, any time during the week, which resulted in technical assistance to an additional 22 people with assistive technology questions.

Low Vision Services

Dr. Paul Greenfield conducts low vision clinics two days per month at the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. After an extensive examination, patients are prescribed a variety of magnifying devices or electronics to assist them with their low vision in order to read, write, pay bills, work, or enjoy leisure activities. Patients are taught how to improve the use of their remaining vision through special techniques and eccentric viewing. Low vision exams take into consideration how contrast, sensitivity, glare, and visual acuity all impact how an individual sees. Patients are referred to low vision clinics by SBVI Rehabilitation Teachers and Counselors. In FY 2015, 19 clinics were held with a total of 105 people attending, an increase of 23 over FY 2014.

Program Participation			
SDRC Services	FY 2015	FY 2014	FY 2013
Skills of Blindness	45	62	54
Assistive Technology Training and Technical Assistance	68	44	
Transition Students	7	5	4
Low Vision Exams	105	82	95
Employment Specialists	19	23	27
Employment Skills Training	84	85	79
Total Served	327	296	259

Youth Transition Services

Six boys and one girl took part in this year's Transition Week, held at SDRC June 14-18. Kick off events included a presentation by Joe Strechay, Program Manager of CareerConnect with the American Foundation of the Blind (AFB). He spoke to the students about having confidence, marketing one's skills, and setting and achieving goals. Students attended Skills of Blindness classes and learned about the latest in assistive technology, adaptive sports and recreation, prepared a meal, and completed a project in home mechanics. Students also participated in a community service activity and made "Dipped Bones" to donate to the Sioux Falls Humane Society. They gained independent living skills throughout the week by managing money for food and activities, staying in the dorms at Augustana University, and using public transportation. There was plenty of time for play during the week as well, with students taking trips to the local waterpark, eating at restaurants, learning how to tie knots and throwing tomahawks with a local Boy Scout troop, and watching descriptive movies all while having fun with their peers. Transition Week concluded with students participating in a Person Centered Thinking activity of developing their one page profiles. They shared their profiles with SBVI Board members and staff during a breakfast at the end of the week.

Casey Underberg – Overcoming Obstacles

In March of 2014, Casey Underberg, 34, started to notice his vision was decreasing. He made an appointment with an eye doctor and received a prescription for new glasses, which became insufficient shortly thereafter. By July, Casey was no longer able to see to drive. He returned to the eye doctor and was referred on to an ophthalmologist, who noted his optic nerve was changing and gave Casey a presumptive diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis. Then, in mid-October, Casey received the news he had Leber's Disease.

Leber Hereditary Optic Neuropathy (LHON) is a genetic disease which causes rapid central vision loss in early adulthood. By the time he received his diagnosis, Casey's vision had decreased to the point that he could only see light and dark and shapes. This changed Casey's life significantly. He loved coaching and playing sports, but found he could no longer do these things. His parents took the news hard, and his friends didn't call as much or know how to help. The General Manager at Chesterman Coke was very supportive and his co-workers set up fundraising events to help his family with emotional and financial support, but Casey began to feel less than adequate. He was unable to work at the job he loved, fix things around the house, help his kids with homework, or do simple chores. His wife had to take on all of the household responsibilities, with six children and another one the way, the stress was mounting.

When Casey heard about the South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, he was very skeptical at first. He felt there was no way he could get the help he needed. He didn't want to go but eventually made the call and was referred to a Rehabilitation Counselor through Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired. Casey's counselor encouraged him to go to the Rehabilitation Center to learn how he could overcome obstacles and regain his independence. Casey agreed and began classes in September of 2014 and attended part-time until March 2015. Gradually, he learned new skills and started to gain back his self-confidence. Casey stated he was enormously impressed by the skills and confidence of the instructors, especially those who were blind or visually impaired themselves. He said everyone was encouraging and showed him that his vision loss was not the end of the world, only a change. He felt the talent and experience of the staff gave him an opportunity to make the changes in his life he needed and allowed him to be himself again. Casey kept his job, reacquainted himself with his friends, and even joined a bowling league with his wife to enjoy sports again. Casey attributes his success and his new positive attitude to the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. He says when he came to the Center he felt like he was a lost person, but when he left, he felt like he was ready to take on the world.

South Dakota Vocational Resources

Employment Skills Training (EST) is a program offered through South Dakota Vocational Resources, located at SDRC, where individuals can attend training in an office-like setting to learn skills to help them return to work. People with a variety of disabilities are referred to EST by their Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor from the Divisions of Rehabilitation Services and Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired for assessment and training. Typically, an individual attends a six week program either full or part-time. While attending training, participants learn important computer skills such as Microsoft Office programs, how to find jobs, write a resume, interview for jobs, try workplace accommodations to return to work, and/or prepare to attend post-secondary programs. During FY 2015, EST provided services to 84 individuals.

Assistance to individuals with disabilities to find employment can also be provided by an Employment Specialist. The Employment Specialist assists by contacting employers, providing job leads, helping to write a resume, identifying interests, and discussing all aspects related to a successful job placement. During FY 2015, job placement services were provided to 19 people, with 6 successful closures completed with individuals remaining on the job for 90 days or longer. Individuals referred to the Employment Specialist at SD Vocational Resources often have significant barriers to employment, such as vision loss, poor work history, legal records, mental health issues, and recent diagnosis of a disabling condition.

SDRC Satisfaction Results

The Skills of Blindness and SD Vocational Resources ask people to complete satisfaction surveys at the conclusion of training. In FY 2015, 21 people out of 45 returned surveys regarding the Skills of Blindness program; this was a return rate of 46%. The survey is comprised of twenty statements related to training and a numeric system correlates to the answer of how they feel; 1- Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3-Agree, 4-Strongly Agree, and NA-Not Applicable. The overall rating from respondents about skills of blindness classes was 3.5. This is a very positive rating about the satisfaction with the services we provide. Of the 21 questions, the highest rated response was, I was able to talk openly about my vision loss. Staff was available when I needed to talk to them which was rated 3.96. Additional comments about skills of blindness classes included ideas for teaching in all the classes, appreciation of the overall program and friendliness and compassion of staff.

Employment Skills Training (EST) has a questionnaire of 7 questions with a numeric value of 1 to 4 like the skills of blindness survey. Of the 84 people who attended EST, 55 people completed a survey, with a return rate of 65%. The overall rating for EST was 3.8; agree/strongly agree. Comments about training included:
"I liked having a place to go each day and looked forward to going."
"The patience of the staff and learning computer skills was great."

Vocational Resources Assists with Skill Development

At the time Alan applied for Vocational Rehabilitation services through the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), he was utilizing a wheelchair for nearly all of his mobility needs. Alan has spinal stenosis, peripheral neuropathy, and diabetic and lumbosacral radiculoplexopathy. Spinal stenosis causes a narrowing of the spinal canal and as this space becomes smaller, it can squeeze the nerves and spinal cord, resulting in pain and other symptoms. Peripheral neuropathy is a condition that causes tingling, numbness, and burning pain throughout the body, but primarily in the hands and feet.

Prior to receiving Vocational Rehabilitation services, Alan had experience working as a convenience store manager, meat clerk, and in positions in advertising and contracting. Alan's work experience was very physical, and when his symptoms worsened, he could no longer perform the essential functions of his job. He had surgery in July of 2012 and after, was unable to return to previous positions. Alan had to confront his health realities and their impact on his future employment opportunities.

Alan and his Rehabilitation Counselor explored new career options to match his current abilities through Employment Skills Training (EST) at SD Vocational Resources. Alan's interests were primarily in the area of clerical support. While attending EST, Alan received training on Dragon NaturallySpeaking, a type of voice recognition software that allows the user to speak into a microphone in order to produce their words as text on the computer screen. This enabled Alan to greatly improve his computer skills. After completing EST, Alan began working with an employment specialist at SD Vocational Resources. As a result of this, Alan found part-time employment as an Operation Specialist, earning over $11 an hour. Later, he was offered a full-time position with TCF Corporate, where he now earns enough to go off all Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits. Alan also receives health insurance, paid leave, and retirement. Today, Alan is working full time, driving his own vehicle again, and walking on his own. In his free time Alan enjoys music, golf and other sports with his wife.

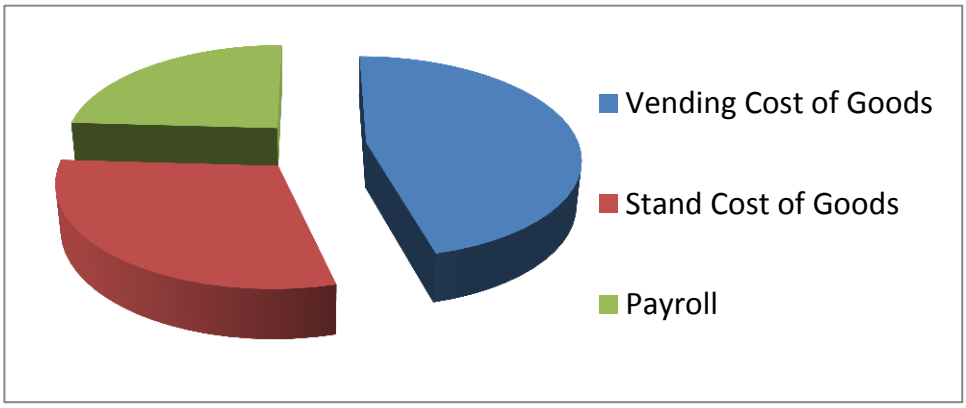
Business Enterprise Program

The SBVI Business Enterprise Program (BEP) provides self-employment opportunities in food service for qualified legally blind individuals. In South Dakota, Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired is the state licensing agency (SLA). The SLA recruits, trains, and licenses legally blind individuals interested in and eligible to participate in the BEP.

There are five vendors in the program; two started with the program in 2015 (Ismael Collazo, pictured on the left and Richard Jangula on the right). Two of the vendor operators have cafeterias on federal property and one has a coffee shop and vending route in state buildings. Two vendor operators' businesses consist of vending only on federal property.

The BEP owns 54 vending machines. These include hot beverage, cold beverage, snack, and combination machines. BEP purchased two new machines this fiscal year to expand vending at federal properties. The vendor operators have initiated healthy vending to offer more healthy options to meet their customer's preferences.

BEP Expenditures



This chart illustrates the 3 major expenditures the vendor operators incurred in FFY 2015. Vending cost of goods purchased is 39%, stand costs are 25% and payroll is 20% of overall costs.

The following table gives a breakdown of sales and net profits earned by BEP vendors in FFY 2015, and the previous two years.

Earnings and Expenses	2013	2014	2015
1) Gross Sales (total income)	$442,633	$505,011	$446,428
2) Merchandise Purchases	$234,950	$280,809	$241,596
3) Gross Profit	$207,684	$224,202	$204.832
4) Total Operating Expenses	$100,426	$125,304	$101,523
5) Net Proceeds	$128,660	$114,277	$115,561
6) Levied Set Aside Funds	$15,688	$14,469	$15,102
7) Net Profit to Vendors	$112,972	$99,808	$100,460

The need to recruit and train 2 new vendors to the program impacted sales and net profits for the program in 2015. The largest cafeteria location was closed for a period of several months. Gross sales, merchandise purchases, gross profits, and operating expenses were all less in 2015, compared to 2014. Total operating expenses, gross sales and gross profit were comparable to 2013. Net profit to vendors in 2015 was $633 more than in 2014. Vendor operators are challenged to find ways to reduce their expenses while providing quality food to their customers at a reasonable price.

Aging equipment is replaced as needed. During this past year, the BEP program needed to replace an ice machine, a commercial freezer, and a commercial refrigerator.

Vending at the Interstate Rest Areas is a major source of funding for the Business Enterprise Program. The BEP is responsible for vending contracts with third party vendors who service the rest areas.

Photo courtesy of the SD Department of Transportation

Service to the Blind & Visually Impaired Offices

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

To find the office that serves your county, go to: http://dhs.sd.gov/sbvi/county.aspx

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