

Board of SBVI Meeting  
Minutes  
March 14, 2025  
Via Zoom with locations in Pierre and Sioux Falls

**Members Present:** Ronda Williams, Richard Crawford, Jeff Nelson, Ryan Groeneweg, Deb Ver Steeg, Cherie Gerry, Cole Uecker, Nichole Nelson, Kelly Deckert, Burdette Clifford, Mike Hommel, Pam Fischer, Felicia Alspach, Krystal Stuwe.

**Others Present:** Becky Blume, Traci Lunzman, Sandy Neyhart, David Woodruff.

**Members Absent:** George Seamon, Carla Miller.

Ryan Groeneweg, Chair, called the meeting to order.

Richard Crawford made a motion to approve the agenda, second by Deb Ver Steeg. Motion carried.

Deb Ver Steeg made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 13, 2024, Board meeting, second by Felicia Alspach. Motion carried.

There were no public comments.

**Board Member Updates**

*Cole Uecker* – Thursday was the last day of session. It was a light session for them. Disability Day at the Capitol was successful. Disability Rights SD is watching some federal issues.

*Felicia Alspach* – Spoke about the One Stop and the good partnership between the Department of Human Services (DHS)

and Department of Labor and Regulation (DLR). All offices at the Sioux Falls One Stop meet ADA compliance. DLR met with Rehabilitation Counselors on their new online referral process.

*Krystal Stuwe* – She was thankful for the Board of SBVI onboarding training recording.

*Nichole Nelson* – School is in the process of hiring a new principal. They are gearing up for the summer program. She passed the exam for the counseling program.

*Burdette Clifford* - The transition process has been challenging for the Tribal VR program. There has been some turnover so hiring new staff.

*Kelly Deckert* – He is a graduate student at SDSU. National Federation of the Blind (NFB) will be holding annual convention in Brookings in April. Support group in Brookings met last week.

*Pam Fischer* – NFB Ponderosa Chapter disbanded. Sad to report the loss of Julaine, who passed away.

*Mike Hommel* – He is thankful for the nice weather.

*Traci Lunzman* – SBVI Quality Assurance Specialist. She manages contracts, data, supervises Ray, and works with school/transition.

*Cheri Gerry* – Program Specialist at the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. She received Certified Vocational Evaluation Specialist certification and is now able to perform evaluations. Julaine Arient-Rollman, former SBVI counselor in Rapid City office, passed away recently.

*Richard Crawford* - NFB State Convention will be in Brookings on April 18 & 19. Received approval for 3-D Art for the Blind to be displayed at Washington Pavilion. It will cost \$38,000 to bring "7 Art Movements" to South Dakota so fundraising efforts will be underway. It will be on display March, April, and May 2026.

*Jeff Nelson* - Manager of EROS Cafeteria through the Business Enterprise Program. EROS has approximately 300 federal employees in the office again. He also has the contract at the new One Stop office in Sioux Falls. Vending machines are in place, the micro market will be placed in the next couple weeks. He is also planning to do a coffee trailer in the parking lot.

*Deb Ver Steeg* – She is a member of South Dakota Association of the Blind. They are involved in an inter-state auction to raise funds.

*Ryan Groeneweg* – works at Center for Disabilities. The Special Education conference will be held next week in Rapid City. A large turnout is expected. Canvas is online learning with a variety of topics. It is free and credits may be available.

### **Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)**

Ryan Groeneweg reported that the SILC met on December 19<sup>th</sup> via Zoom. There was a speaker who presented on dementia and dementia care. They were finalizing reports and the goals for the State Plan for Independent Living. Next meeting is March 26.

### **Board Activities/Committees**

*Disability Day at the Capitol* - Deb Ver Steeg manned the booth for the Board of SBVI. She had brochures, vision simulators, signature guides, braille cards, and candy. Only six legislators stopped by the booth, but there were several other visitors. It

was a busy day, with lots of disability groups having booths. Disability Rights SD will continue organizing this event.

*Governor's Awards* – Nomination packets were recently mailed out. It is also available on the Department of Human Services website. There are five categories: Outstanding Individual with a Disability, Outstanding Employee with a Disability, Outstanding Employer of the Year (small, large, and public), Outstanding Transition Services, and Distinguished Service. Nominations are due by May 2, 2025 and the Governor's Committee will review applications. In the past, the Board of SBVI has voted to contribute up to \$5,000 toward the Governor's Awards event. Deb Ver Steeg made a motion that we contribute up to \$5,000 toward the Governor's Awards in 2025, second by Krystal Stuwe. All approved, motion carried.

*National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)* – NDEAM is celebrated each October. The committee received 11 proposals for events, speakers, etc., around the state. The total funds requested was \$48,575, with over \$16,000 in-kind donations. The committee approved the \$48,575 funding. SBVI has historically contributed up to \$5,000 for NDEAM activities. Discussion was held on Board's budget with Ronda stating that funds are available for these types of activities. Jeff Nelson made a motion to contribute up to \$5,000 for NDEAM activities, second by Nichole Nelson. All approved, motion carried.

### **SBVI Program Updates**

*Independent Living Older Blind* – Sandy Neyhart attended program managers conference in Arlington, VA, in February. It is a great opportunity to discuss relevant issues with other state managers. The manager from Montana spoke highly of their partnership with South Dakota and how they use the

Rehabilitation Center for training staff. He encouraged other states to look at the valuable training offered by South Dakota. The CCTV lease/loan program currently has 201 machines. Sixty-nine machines are leased for \$30/month and 102 machines are loaned to those who meet financial need. Older machines are generally replaced with new machines; however, funding for replacements was not available this year. If older machines are leased, often times the machine is released to the person who has leased it. Other older machines are given to nursing homes, senior centers, and other non-profit organizations. Amigo and handheld machines are not in this program. Over the years, the program has served over 1,600 people. Sandy has been recruiting presenters for Independent Living sessions at Fall Conference in October. She is also helping develop the agenda and training sessions for All Staff Training. Sandy will be retiring on June 6, 2025 after 23 years with SBVI and 39 years with the State. She has a transition document in process for her replacement to reference.

*Vocational Rehabilitation* – David Woodruff has been in his supervisory position for about two years. His office is located at the Sioux Falls One Stop. Currently fully staffed, he works with staff to make sure they feel supported. Improved outreach and rapid engagement are areas he is working on with staff. The Case File Review will be held in May. Caseloads in Sioux Falls and Aberdeen remain steady, while there has been some growth in Pierre and Rapid City. There are two self-employment plans in process and two candidates are beginning the process to be Business Enterprise Program vendors. SBVI recently implemented SARA, which is an electronic assistant that helps with scheduling appointments, appointment reminders, etc. mostly through email or text messaging. Sioux Falls office is moving to the One Stop building located on the east side of town near Dawley Farms

area. Transit is available to the office. A shelter will be built in the future. Discussion was held about the possibility of meeting at the Sioux Falls One Stop for the next Board meeting so board members can get a tour and become familiar with the new office location.

*Rehabilitation Center for the Blind* – Cherie Gerry gave the update for April Schulte. The newly hired Quality Assurance Specialist participated in skills of blindness classes alongside current students. By actively engaging in these sessions, she was able to observe the methods and techniques used in Skills of Blindness instruction, gaining valuable insight into the programs and services we provide. She stayed in a training apartments, allowing her to experience the residential component of the program. The Orientation and Mobility teacher did a Zoom presentation for the public, sharing tips and tricks for safe travel with a visual impairment. The link to the presentation is on the DHS YouTube channel and the Rehab Center Manager is working on getting a section on the DHS website under the SD Rehabilitation Center for all Zoom presentations. The next quarterly workshop will be on March 28<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 pm and will be focused on the Communications class. Dining in the Dark event organized by the Sioux Falls Area Lions was held on Thursday, January 9<sup>th</sup>. Approximately 40 individuals were present at the event. The manager is still working with General Manager of Via/Sioux Area Metro (SAM) about issues with the bus system, bus stop, etc. Conversations are still ongoing. Rehab Center Manager was asked if she would attend the next city council meeting to provide input on concerns. Discussion was held on the online scheduling system. Please share your concerns about Sioux Area Metro. Ten students were referred for transition week. SDRC Counselor has been conducting interviews. Transition week is scheduled for June 1-5, 2025. Students and staff recently participated in Community

Training Events including eating at Big Sioux Burger as part of the Annual Burger Battle and Tomacelli's Pizza as part of the Pizza Battle.

SDRC Program Specialist facilitated the completion of two vocational assessments for two clients: the Career Occupational Preference System (COPS) and the Career Orientation and Placement Evaluation Survey (COPES). The third and final assessment, the Career Ability Placement Survey (CAPS) is expected to be completed by the end of February. A comprehensive report summarizing all results will be generated to provide actionable career recommendations for the two vocational rehabilitation clients.

*Business Enterprise Program (BEP)* – Vending machines have been installed on first floor of Sioux Falls One-Stop. BEP is waiting to order three machines for the third-floor staff break room, which will be called the Hub. The micro-market has been ordered, with estimated completion date of mid-April. There will be approximately 850 employees working at the Sioux Falls One-Stop location. Project Skills participants have been managing the Aberdeen vending site. The Huron site has been steady. Legislative session was a success for vending in Pierre. Interstate vending is average for this time of year. 2024 income brought in over \$95,000 due to higher traffic and refunds from third-party vendors. Two consumers are interested in BEP. One is from Sioux Falls, and the other is from Rapid City.

*Quality Assurance* – Traci Lunzman is the newly hired Quality Assurance Program Specialist. There has been a 23% increase in applications from this time last year. Traci will be monitoring the increase and the budget. Case File Review will be held May 12-14 in Sioux Falls. Counselors, manager, and administration staff will be reviewing the cases. As part of the corrective action plan, SBVI

will be holding a rapid engagement training for staff. Region 8 Field Managers and Directors from North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and South Dakota will meet in Deadwood July 15 and 16 for a regional meeting that focuses on VR fiscal issues, including order of selection. SBVI All Staff Training will be held in Sioux Falls July 29-31. One of the agenda items for this training is the history of SBVI. Fall Conference is scheduled for October 14-16 in Sioux Falls. The theme is "Painting the Future." DHS is updating the records retention policy. A draft has been developed with a goal of completion by May for Bureau of Administration approval and implementation by July 1. Traci has been working on progress updates for the DHS Strategic Plan.

### **Director's Comments**

**Membership/Nomination Update** - Cole Uecker resigned from the Board as Client Assistance Program representative. He has submitted a nomination and that has been forwarded to the Governor's office. Cole will remain on the board until a replacement is appointed. Ryan Groeneweg's first term expires June 30, 2025. A nomination for his reappointment has been submitted to the Governor's office. Nichole Nelson's second term expires on June 30, 2025. She has submitted a nomination to replace her in her role on the board.

**New Board Member Onboarding Training Follow-Up** –The training was recorded, and a YouTube link can be emailed if Board members are interested in watching it.

**Legislative Session 2025** – Last day of the 2025 legislative session was March 13, with the exception of veto day on March 31<sup>st</sup>. DHS's only bill was SB 4- an act to authorize the sale of real property in Spink County by DHS. This is property at the



Developmental Center that is no longer needed. This bill was deferred to the 41st day by the Senate State Affairs committee on Jan 24th. When a bill is deferred to the 41st day, that means it's dead. The major theme of the session was lower state tax revenues than previously projected. This made for hard decisions for legislators. The Governor's recommended budget included a 1.25% pay raise for state employees, and the same increase for providers; however, community support providers received a larger increase. Another area of emphasis from the state legislature has been on internal controls. SBVI and DHS already have controls in place to prevent the risk of fraud. SBVI continues to look at ways to reduce the risk of fraud and ensure that tax dollars are spent appropriately.

**2026 Budget** - SBVI budget is ok for now. SBVI is still using case service expenditures towards the FFY 2024 grant. Ronda recently talked to other states in Region 8, and three of five states are actively exploring a wait list for services. The other two states are in a similar position to South Dakota. There are sufficient resources now, but expenditures are increasing. SBVI will need to begin identifying ways to balance out expenditures. The goal is to tighten expenses with minimal impact on client services.

**SD Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment** - While South Dakota VR programs continually assess performance and the needs of South Dakotans with disabilities, the Rehabilitation Act, as amended, requires each state vocational rehabilitation agency to conduct a comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) jointly with the State Vocational Rehabilitation Board(s) every three years. CSNA is an opportunity to gather input from key stakeholders in a way that produces actionable findings. The CSNA provides a summary of the rehabilitation needs of the

larger statewide disability and workforce systems that includes the South Dakota VR programs, with the goal to assist the agencies in evaluating priorities and establishing an action plan to guide future rehabilitation program development and improvement. SBVI will work in partnership with the Division of Rehabilitation Services to hire a consultant for the CSNA. The Board of SBVI Strategic Planning and Policy committee will help with this process.

**DHS Updates** – DHS Strategic Plan –The 5-year DHS Strategic Plan timeline is coming to an end. Goals and strategies were developed within five focus areas. SBVI will meet on March 28 to review the current plan and get feedback from staff on suggested goals and strategies for the next five years. Krystal Stuwe mentioned increasing awareness and how people are getting their information on Instagram, Tik Tok and other social media, not by brochures. She stated SBVI and the Board needs to make sure information is getting to young parents or young adults with vision loss. George Seamon sent Newline statistics for January and February 2025. There were 117 subscribers, 689 call minutes, 4,552 total online accesses, and 2,852 accesses to South Dakota newspapers. It was discussed that this information needs to be shared so more people access this service.

**Federal Updates** - One change that has been proposed that may have an impact on the VR program is the possible dismantling of the US Department of Education, which is where the VR program receives grant funding. When a new administration starts there is usually some upheaval, and it creates some anxiety amongst stakeholders, staff, and people with disabilities. SBVI will continue to monitor this process.

### **Plan Next Meeting**

The bylaws state that the executive committee elections shall be held during the last meeting of the state fiscal year in June. Current executive committee includes Ryan Groeneweg, Chair; Richard Crawford, Vice Chair; Jeff Nelson, Member at Large. Board members need to think about nominations for this and elections will be held at the next meeting. Richard Crawford made a motion to have the next Board meeting on June 13, 2025, via Zoom with sites in Sioux Falls and Pierre, seconded by Deb Ver Steeg. All approved, motion carried.

Ryan Groeneweg made a motion to adjourn the meeting, second by Deb Ver Steeg. All approved, motion carried. Meeting adjourned.