

Board of SBVI Meeting Minutes  
September 12, 2025 9:00 A.M.  
Via Zoom with location in Sioux Falls

**Members Present:** Richard Crawford, Ryan Groeneweg, Deb Ver Steeg, Cherie Gerry, Burdette Clifford, Mike Hommel, Dana Stillman, Felicia Alspach, Krystal Stuwe, Jeff Nelson

**Others Present:** Becky Blume, Traci Lunzman, Kama Kwiecinski, April Schulte, Ray Tracy, David Woodruff

**Members Absent:** Pam Fischer, Ronda Williams, George Seamon, Carla Miller

Ryan Groeneweg, Chair, called the meeting to order. Introductions were made.

Richard Crawford made a motion to approve the agenda with the addition of one additional topic to be added during member updates. Felicia Alspach seconded. Motion carried.

Deb Ver Steeg made a motion to approve the minutes from the June meeting. Richard Crawford seconded. Motion carried.

**Public Comments:**

None

### Board Member Updates:

*Richard Crawford* – NFB is sponsoring 3D art display at Washington Pavilion. This exhibit consists of 7 different tactile art pieces. There will be no charge to the public to see this exhibit. Richard is hopeful that the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SDSBVI) will take students to see the exhibit. It was suggested to notify colleges so that campus art students know of the exhibit. The total cost of the display is \$36,000. To date, they have raised over \$11,000. The \$9,000 down payment has been made. Grant applications have been submitted for the remaining cost. Richard is asking the Board to sponsor \$1,000 for the exhibit if the application is approved and there are funds in the budget. Suggested organizations to contact for funding included Lions Club and Thrivent. Richard made a motion to approve \$1,000 pending application approval and budget availability to support the art display. Dana Stillman seconded. Motion carried. The exhibit will be available for viewing March, April, and May 2026.

*Cherie Gerry* – The Rehab Center has been busy. She is preparing for her son's upcoming wedding.

*Deb Ver Steeg* – SDAB has written a letter to commission, Mayor, and owner of the transit, but did not receive much response. She is very frustrated with transit as she tried for over an hour to get transit and ended up taking a more expensive Lyft. Transit also only lets you ride for 6 miles and then makes you get off and make a

new trip request. Richard will contact LaRae regarding the South Dakota blind organizations writing letters.

*Ryan Groeneweg* – The Run, Walk, and Roll event is scheduled for September 20. It is a free fun walk. There is a fee for active runners. There will be vendors, booths, food trucks, lots of activities. Usher's Syndrome is the focus this year. Ryan interviewed with Dakota News and Kelo Living to promote the activity. It was suggested that Richard consider a spotlight interview regarding the art display. Richard will connect with Ryan to get contact information.

*Felicia Alspach* – It is reporting season in Department of Labor and Regulation. She is making sure numbers are accurate before submitting. She has also been reviewing State Plan.

*Krystal Stuwe* – Her son is now 18 and in the transition years. She feels the agency should be better about advertising job coaching for project skills. It may be an opportunity for Northern State University students to make more money.

*Dana Stillman* – Twenty-eight students attended summer school. They enjoyed a lake day and other various activities. The school is acquiring new furniture. They have a color aquarium with live fish. New playground equipment is in process. Mr. Kjellsen is the new Principal. September 25 and 26 is the SDSBVI All- School Reunion.

Question of how many summer school students are totally blind? Dana did not have specific numbers, but from recall advised that very few are totally blind.

*Burdette Clifford* – His program is currently on suspension due to breach of confidentiality on three occasions. Rehabilitation Services Administration and the tribe met to discuss but he had not heard the outcome. Ryan asked about the Board writing a letter of support, but Burdette would like to wait to see what the outcome is before we do anything. If a level of support can be offered, Burdette will reach out.

*Mike Hommel* – He spent the summer gardening and has been canning and freezing the produce in preparation for winter. He did get a smart phone from the State. It is voice-activated and easy to use. He was introduced to the Medi-glasses that read to you. The Groton Lions Club is purchasing these for him. He should have them by next meeting.

#### Review of State's Open Meeting Laws:

Traci Lunzman reviewed the South Dakota's open meetings laws. SDCL Ch.1-25 requires that official meetings of public bodies must be public, and advance notice is to be given of such meetings. Open meetings laws apply to all public bodies of the state and its political subdivisions. Agendas should be posted in a location that public can view at least 72 hours before a meeting. Proposed agendas are also required to be posted on

<http://boardsandcommissions.sd.gov>. Public bodies are required to provide time on their agenda at every official meeting for public comment. Boards are now required to review open meeting laws yearly and make note of the review in the meeting minutes.

The Board of SBVI is in compliance with the requirements and timelines of the open meeting laws. Some key points are below:

Zoom is an allowable open meeting format, and a physical location is provided by SBVI. Anyone can attend a Board of SBVI meeting. Though rarely used, there is time on the agenda for public comments. Hard copies of agendas are posted and viewable from the outside of the building.

A meeting agenda is available at least 3 days before the meeting and any meeting materials are made available prior to the meeting if possible or shared after the meeting. Meeting minutes are on the Boards and Commissions website within ten days of a meeting taking place. Open meetings laws will be reviewed annually.

#### Statewide Independent Living Council Update:

SILC met on June 17<sup>th</sup> via Zoom. The State Plan for Independent Living was discussed. Rhonda Erickson, benefits specialist, gave a presentation about ABLE accounts. She explained the age moved from 26 to 46. SILC had election of officers. Ryan was re-elected Chair. Brett Glirbas and Kendra Gottsblien also serve on the Executive Committee. Outgoing member, Patty Kuglitsch, was thanked for her contributions to the SILC. New

member orientation was held online on August 7<sup>th</sup>. Next meeting is September 30.

### Board Activities/Committees:

*Governor's Awards* – This is Cherie's first year on this committee. She found it more difficult than she anticipated. Sandy Neyhart received the Distinguished Service award. Governor's Awards will be held October 8 at 11 a.m. in the Capitol Rotunda. Richard plans to attend. There was a question if it will be livestreamed. Becky will send the link to watch to Board members when it becomes available.

*National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)* – Carla was not present at the meeting to give the report. Becky will send a list of NDEAM events with the minutes. April did give an update for the Sioux Falls event. It will be held in conjunction with Fall Conference on October 15. There will be a session with Jana Burke who will discuss the benefits of hiring people with a disability from 8:30-10:00 a.m. Valued Voices: Experiences of Individuals with Disabilities in the Workplace panel will be from 10:30-noon. The luncheon will feature speaker Parker Hanson, a man who was born without limbs. Traci informed the Board that the Aberdeen event will be held on October 10. Sunshine Suzy is the speaker. The event is free, but pre-registration is required. More information is available on the Aberdeen Convention Bureau webpage. Dana has a meeting next week and will ask about livestream.

Sunshine Suzy website is <https://www.sunshine-suzy.com/professional-speaker>.

Comment was made that Parker Hanson may a good advocate for the transit in Sioux Falls.

#### SBVI Program Updates:

*Older Blind Independent Living* - Kama reported that the Rehab Teachers have been focusing on outreach by building and strengthening their relationships with eye care providers. A positive result of this outreach campaign has resulted in several phone calls and the first new referrals from the Philip and Martin areas in several years.

Peer support groups remain active around the state, and the teachers provide presentations and assistance as needed.

The CCTV program currently has 191 machines. Of these, 103 are loaned to individuals who meet our financial need criteria, and 62 are leased at \$30 per month for those who do not meet financial need. As renewals come due, machines over ten years old are surplusd out of the program due to depreciation. At that point, a CCTV is valued around \$65, and no longer appropriate to charge a lease. Clients are given the option of forfeiting their \$50 deposit to keep their machine. Most choose to keep it, which allows them to maintain consistency in their daily routines. If client choose not to keep it, it is donated

to a non-profit. There is not a waiting list at this time, but as more machines age out, there is no budget for replacements at this time. In 2014 and 2016, DHS purchased many CCTVs, and those machines are now reaching retirement age. Kama met with Brett Burden at DakotaLink to brainstorm solutions. SBVI will consider keeping some older models in the loan program only, and DakotaLink's low-interest loan program could be a good option for clients who don't want to wait for a replacement. The Lions Clubs are also showing interest in supporting this effort. A new CCTV can range in price from \$3000-\$5000.

Since October 1, the SBVI Independent Living program served 520 individuals and provided 487 assistive devices. The average age of participants is 83, with the youngest age 21, and oldest is 102. The IL program consistently met the client goals, with a 90% success rate on the 152 cases closed this year. In addition, 185 referrals occurred where individuals chose not to sign up for services because their needs were met during the initial visit with a teacher.

Consumer satisfaction surveys continue to show strong results. For the third quarter, 50 surveys were mailed out and received 21 back, with an average rating of 3.63 out of 4. A few surveys requested follow-up for more training or device support.

In August, staff participated in training sessions on NFB Newslines. This service provides audio access to more than 600 newspapers and magazines, as well as job



listings, retail ads, and emergency alerts. Training has prepared staff to help clients set up and use this resource. SBVI now have educational accounts in place so that staff can train others in using the service, and are beginning to integrate this tool into independent living training.

Melea Ellingson attended the Cheyenne River Free Vision Clinic in August. Over 900 people received free eye exams and glasses. She met with providers and participants to share information about SBVI services.

Stacey Stueven has been nominated to serve on the Mayor's Council for People with Disabilities in Rapid City, giving her the opportunity to advocate for individuals with vision loss locally. Stacey also assisted the RAVE Peer Support group in Rapid City to prepare for the annual ADA fair. She helped create materials and outreach tools so the group could present to the public with confidence.

Amanda Jones continues to serve on the board of Better Together, which connects volunteers with older adults experiencing isolation. Her involvement has led to cross-referrals and partnerships. She also participates in the local Agency on Aging Coalition.

Kim Smith is active with the Spearfish peer support group, assisting with presentations and group activities.

Tricia Eggers serves as the SBVI representative on the Statewide Independent Living Council, recently completing new member orientation and will attend the upcoming SILC meeting on September 30.

Kama continued with graduate school classes at SDSU over the summer. She completed the four-part virtual OIB-TAC Program Manager Training which covered program management, reporting, and evaluation, and has been valuable in aligning best practices. She presented updates to the South Dakota Association of the Blind board highlighting outcomes, satisfaction results, and outreach efforts with the IL program. She attends monthly OIB Program Manager meetings, where managers from the states and territories share best practices, collaborate, address common program challenges, and share ideas on how to improve service delivery to our older blind population.

Kama is working on both the 7-OB report and the Independent Living portion of the SBVI annual board report. RSA recently extended the 7-OB reporting deadline to 120 days after the close of the fiscal year, due January 28, 2026. Kama will be attending the Run, Walk, and Roll event, Governor's Awards, and Fall Conference.

*Vocational Rehabilitation* - Matt Markve has been hired as the new SBVI VR Counselor in Rapid City. He has completed his 2-week training at the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired and has transitioned to working on his caseload. Matt has previous experience with Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

David and Kim Smith toured the Pine Ridge area with Heath from the Oglala Lakota Tribal VR program, met with a large variety of tribal resources and made face-to-face connections, including their transportation systems. They also visited with an individual who has lost her sight and is in need of both VR and IL services. Kim completed the intake meeting, demonstrating devices and low vision aides. The individual has a history of writing grants and teaching others about sustainable plant growth in areas that haven't traditionally been good for this. By the end of the appointment, she said "I have hope now."

One goal for VR counselors is to connect with all their territory schools. SBVI has 3 CRC certified VR Counselors and 3 more currently participating in the master's program at SDSU. Job placements have slowed due to lack of employment specialists in some areas of the state. Caseloads are up in Rapid City, constant in Pierre, but slightly down in Sioux Falls.

The Aberdeen DRS/SBVI office is in process of a remodel. The largest portion of the remodel has been completed and DRS/SBVI staff have moved back in.

SBVI VR staff met with SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired staff in Aberdeen and received a tour of the facility. Counselors came away with a better understanding of the resources available at the school. SBVI staff connected with the superintendent and Transition Specialist to discuss what is and is not working

in the partnership. Overall, it was a great tour and meeting and has led to better collaboration early in the school year.

SBVI supported a client recently with a trip to the Disability:IN 2025 Conference in Orlando, FL. She was selected as a "NextGen Leader" out of a pool of 1,156 total applications. She was the only representative from SD selected to attend; there are 93 total NextGen Leaders invited to this conference from across the US. With aspirations to become a leader in the health field, this was a fantastic opportunity not just for her personally but to also represent South Dakota and people with visual impairments. She describes the experience as "incredible in a variety of ways." The client couldn't stress enough how meaningful it was to connect with peers with disabilities and talking about that shared experience with them, working with peers to identify accommodations, connecting with industry leaders, and how they've overcome challenges to get where they are.

David is working on updating the SBVI intake packet to create a more accessible version that can be used with screen readers. He is also outlining procedures for onboarding Employment Specialists and include training on working with individuals with blindness and visual impairments.

Discussion was held on helping parents understand how programs work together. April wants to work with SD

Department of Education and DHS media specialist to develop a process map to follow services available based on the age of the person with visual impairment.

Comment was made that young parents want small bursts of clear and concise information. Ryan suggested that Amy Scepaniak work on this project, too.

### *South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind -*

Marissa Mammenga began as the Rehabilitation Counselor on June 24. She is a licensed Social Worker with BA in Criminal Justice & master's in social work. Keely Kielman was hired as the Senior Secretary and started August 18<sup>th</sup>. She has experience as a receptionist and guest service representative and serves as a Staff Sergeant in the South Dakota Air National Guard.

Currently there are 5 students in training in Skills of Blindness training at the Rehab Center. It is a little slower right now, so staff have been doing quite a bit of outreach. Three students starting training within the next few weeks.

Laurie Megard, Communications Instructor, joined a Rehabilitation Teacher on a home visit to support a client in developing adaptive hand sewing skills and improving accessibility. Orientation and Mobility Instructor, Chad Ray, has been working with a teacher at LifeScape regarding a 5-year-old individual who has light perception and is nonverbal. Chad built an assistive mobility device out of PCP pipe to help this individual travel safely. He has also been helping Sam Dirkson who is pursuing her

O&M certification. Chad presented to the Brookings Low Vision Peer Support Group on basic information on white canes, cane tips, safe travel techniques, and sighted guide methods. Attendees also had the opportunity to ask questions related to safe travel within their community. This outreach served as a valuable opportunity to share information and build rapport with members of the low vision support group. Center Assistive Technology Instructor plans to present to the peer support group soon. Three new devices were recently approved for purchase to support client training at the Rehab Center: an iPad, an Android phone, and an electric braille device. These devices will enhance the Center's ability to provide effective, up-to-date training for clients.

April recently met with Kevin Hansen of Sioux Falls Transit to discuss new staff training, with sessions scheduled for Sept 23–24. Ray Williams, the new HR Manager at SF Transit toured the Center and discussed client transportation challenges. April requested approval for a staff member from the Rehab Center to serve on the Public Transit Advisory Board (PTAB), which was approved by the Director. Participation on the PTAB will provide SBVI with the opportunity to contribute to discussions affecting local transportation services and to advocate for the needs of its clients.

An AT Workshop was held on June 27. Topics included Ray-Ban Meta Glasses, iPhone accessibility, screen readers and magnification for computers, and braille tech. These can be viewed on Trainings and Workshops

webpage on the SBVI website. Assistive Technology walk-in clinics are still available.

Clients of the Center attended Community Training Events (CTE). Five Skills of Blindness clients participated in the August CTE at the Sioux Empire Fair. Activities included enjoying fair food, visiting Old MacDonald's Farm where they interacted with a mini horse and puppies, and riding several amusement rides. They learned navigation in crowded spaces using a white cane and identifying potential obstacles, money management skills to purchase food or tickets while staying within a set budget, and building confidence and independence in unfamiliar, public settings. These CTE are held at least once a month and provide students with the opportunity to apply the skills they are learning in real-world environments.

Transition Week will be held May 31 – June 4, 2026.

April presented at the annual South Dakota Association of the Blind (SDAB) Conference August 23, held virtually. She received a thank-you email from the President of SDAB, stating "I want to thank you for coming to speak to our SDAB membership meeting this past Saturday. Most everyone on the call has been impacted by training at the Rehab Center, and it's good to know that the Center is alive and well. Thank you for all you do, and thanks again for speaking with us."

Two Budget and Finance staff members and a staff member from the South Dakota Developmental Center attended Skills of Blindness classes. The staff gained

insight into the experience of living with visual impairment or blindness, learned about available adaptive devices and technology, and received information on resources that support clients.

*Business Enterprise Program* – Ray Tracy informed the Board that progress is being made at the One Stop. A Medicine Shop has been added. This will carry individual packets of over-the-counter medications. Ray and Jeff are working with the Rehab Center for Braille signage. Two machines needed repair. The Aberdeen site was being operated by two students through the Project Skills/ BEP Project. One student graduated and the other student will continue the project this year. Business is steady in Huron. Ray has been conducting repairs. The Pierre site is still in operation. The Interstate Vending performance remains average for this time of the year. There are currently two consumers training for the program, one from Sioux Falls and the other from Rapid City. They are anticipated to complete training by the end of the year. Ray has been working with Veterans Affairs to secure a location in Rapid City.

*Quality Assurance/Training* – Traci Lunzman reported that Case File Reviews (CFR) were held May 12-14, 2025, in Sioux Falls. All SBVI VR and management staff participated. They reviewed 108 randomly selected cases to ensure compliance with policies, identify strengths and areas for improvements/. Applications were in 91.67% compliance which was down from PY24. Issues found were date mismatches between systems and undated applications. Strong areas for Eligibility included Eligibility letters: 96%, Documentation guidelines: 96%, and Priority category assignment: 98%. Eligibility concerns



were Certificates: 81.5% (missing signatures/dates, incomplete updates) and Impairment coding: 89.7% accuracy. Timeliness average was 24.12 days which was a slight improvement from 25.2 days.

IPE Development was strong with area. The only concern was missing signature and system inconsistencies. The timeliness average was 38.82 days from eligibility to plan which improved from 51.55 days.

Service Delivery was also a very strong area with all services above 96%.

The only concern with Case Closures was closure page details at 84.5% due to being incomplete or inconsistent.

The Feedback from Reviewers was positive.

David and Traci have been meeting with counselors individually to discuss the findings from CFR. Traci will be working with DRS to update the CFR module, so it better aligns with policies/procedures, increases consistency across programs, and makes it more concrete and less open to interpretation.

Traci also reported on the WIOA Performance Indicators.

There were results are as follows:

Employment Rate – 2nd Quarter After Exit

- SBVI: 56.5%
- DRS: 61%
- Combined: 60.6% (target: 61.9%)

Employment Rate – 4th Quarter After Exit

- SBVI: 47.6%
- DRS: 54.5%

- Combined: 53.8% (target: 56.1%)

#### Median Earnings – 2nd Quarter After Exit

- SBVI: \$5,864
- DRS: \$3,579
- Combined: \$3,696 (target: \$3,600)

#### Measurable Skill Gains

- SBVI: 74.1%
- DRS: 70.4%
- Combined: 70.6% (target: 50%)

#### Credential Attainment

- SBVI: 71.4%
- DRS: 43.6%
- Combined: 44.3% (target: 34.5%)
  - Postsecondary Rate:
    - SBVI: 75%
    - DRS: 55.4%
    - Combined: 56.5%
  - Secondary Rate:
    - SBVI: 33.3%
    - DRS: 38.9%
    - Combined: 38.8%

In summary, SBVI excels in earnings, credential attainment, and education outcomes, which raise overall statewide performance. Combined statewide results generally meet or exceed targets, with SBVI's strengths helping balance overall performance.

#### Director's Comments:

*SD Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment* - an assessment is conducted every three years to evaluate the agency's service history for the past three program years and to project what is needed to serve for the next three program years. The data collected will be the basis for refreshing the statewide program goals and strategies for the next 3 program years. The Board's role in the process includes collaborating with the Division, providing input through surveys and assessments, reviewing, and analyzing the results, and advising on how to integrate the findings into the State Plan. SBVI and DRS are contracting with Black Hills Special Services Cooperative with Dr. Ryan Young. The assessment will involve reviewing data/survey information and conducting interviews. This assessment will focus on 6 areas: persons with disabilities, persons with the most significant disabilities, persons of minority backgrounds, unserved and underserved individuals, individuals served through other components of the workforce system, youth with disabilities, and providers. Ronda will arrange to have Dr. Young present at the December meeting. The Board of SBVI Strategic Planning & Policy committee typically helps with this process. The committee is currently comprised of: Ryan Groeneweg and Richard Crawford, with Ronda Williams as staff liaison. This committee also helps with the development of the Combined State Plan for the Workforce Innovations and Opportunities Act (WIOA). Cherie Gerry would like to be a member of this committee.

*Department Updates* - DHS 101 is a 2-day training for all DHS staff that has been part of the DHS strategic plan for the past 5 years. Goal to get every DHS employee to learn about every division within the department and improve how we can work together. One thing common within our department is to provide services to individuals with disabilities throughout SD. It's an opportunity to get staff from every division to learn more about what the Department does.

*Budget* - VR agencies receive their VR grants from the US department of education. A summary of changes included in their budget request included: Reversion to the 2024 VR grant level, elimination of several programs including the Client Assistance Program (CAP), Supported Employment grants, Training programs, and Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights and the loss of supported employment funding of \$300,000 will also negatively impact services, as well as the loss of training funds that supported education for VR counselors. This could potentially put the SBVI VR program at risk of going on an Order of Selection, or waiting list, in a few years. However, on July 31, 2025, the senate appropriations committee passed a FY 2026 appropriations bill that adds funding to the VR program, keeps funding for the client assistance program, training programs, and supported employment, including language that stabilizes the US Department of Education.

It's important to note that this is an initial step in the appropriations process. The bill still needs to be approved by the full Senate, and the House of Representatives will also need to pass its own version of the bill before a final budget for the Department of Education in FY 2026 can be enacted.

*Fall Conference* – Fall Conference will be held October 14-16 in Sioux Falls at the Ramkota Hotel. Speakers/topics include Dr. Lester on personality disorders, sessions on Trauma-Informed Care, Technology & Artificial Intelligence, Homelessness & Addiction, Call to Freedom (focused on supporting survivors of trafficking), Disability Determination Services, and Home Again. SBVI Board members are welcome to attend, with expenses covered by the Board of SBVI budget. Please let Becky know if you are interested in attending.

White Cane March will be October 18<sup>th</sup> in Sioux Falls.

Next meeting will be held December 5, 2025, via Zoom with an in-person location at the Sioux Falls One-Stop office.

Ryan Groeneweg, Chair, adjourned the meeting.