

# South Dakota Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired

## Annual Report 2022



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







**BOARD OF SERVICE TO THE BLIND AND  
VISUALLY IMPAIRED**

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Dear Governor Noem:

On behalf of the members of the Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI), I am honored to present to you the 2022 Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired Annual Report. This letter is our opportunity to thank you for your leadership and ongoing support of the events sponsored by the Board and Division of SBVI. Board members advise the Division of SBVI on various activities throughout the year and appreciate the close working relationship we have with the Division. Some of the activities that are supported by the Board of SBVI include: the Governor's Awards which recognize employers and people with disabilities, Disability Awareness Month, and White Cane Day. With your leadership in promoting South Dakota and the employment of citizens with disabilities, we excel in helping citizens with vision loss access resources and meaningful employment opportunities.

Like many other agencies, SBVI has experienced unprecedented changes in staff over the past 24 months, but we have never changed our priority in serving citizens with vision loss through innovation and determination. We provide opportunities for new employees to learn while supporting the agency's mission to provide individualized rehabilitation services that result in optimal employment and independent living outcomes for citizens who are blind or visually impaired.

Members of the Board selflessly volunteer their time to ensure that South Dakotan's have access to quality services. As I begin my second term as Chair for the Board of SBVI, I can assure you, South Dakota citizens with vision loss receive exceptional services to help them achieve their goals.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jill Kundtz, Chair, Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Board of SBVI Annual Report outlines not only activities of the Board of SBVI but is also a snapshot of the Division of SBVI programs and services. Thanks to the commitment of SBVI staff, satisfaction with services remains high. Throughout this report success stories and comments from surveys reflect their accomplishments through the eyes of those who have participated in services throughout the year.

Members of the Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired contribute to the Division's mission by providing advice that reflects their unique expertise and experiences. Board activities promote independence and optimal employment for citizens who are blind or visually impaired.

The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment was a standing agenda item in 2022. As we move into 2023 the Board will focus on recommending activities to address findings from the assessment. In addition, the Board and Division will continue to address goals and strategies from the Department of Human Services strategic plan to improve services for our customers. The focus areas include:

### **Operational Excellence**

Use innovation to enhance services

Enhance ability to provide services across South Dakota

### **Tell Our Story**

Communicate and fulfill our mission

### **Talent Development**

Provide opportunities for growth and development to increase career satisfaction

Strengthen the workforce culture to engage current and future employees

### **Fiscal Responsibility**

Plan for and use new and existing funding opportunities to advance our mission

The Division of SBVI has implemented initiatives to address these goal areas with input from the Board. The SBVI financial need policy was revised to better meet our customer's needs for assistive technology devices by exempting assistive technology devices and services from economic need criteria. Orientation and mobility services have been expanded through an agreement with Independent Living Choices to hire Orientation and Mobility Specialists to deliver services across the state. Initiatives will continue to address focus areas with input from members of the Board as we work together to promote optimal vocational and independent living outcomes for citizens with vision loss.

## **Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired**

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

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

<b>Name</b>	<b>Hometown</b>	<b>Representation</b>
Jill Kundtz – Chair	Rapid City	Business and Industry
Kate Kosior	Pierre	State Education Agency
*Tana Buresch	Sioux Falls	Parent Connection
*Tami Francis	Beresford	Business and Industry
Burdette Clifford	Mission	American Indian VR Services
Chelle Hart	Sioux Falls	Disability Advocacy Group
Richard Crawford – Member at Large	Sioux Falls	Business and Industry
Elaine Fritz	Baltic	Parent of Child with Disabilities
Ryan Groeneweg – Vice Chair	Sioux Falls	Business and Industry/SILC
Kellie Hauglid	Sioux Falls	Vocational Rehab. Counselor
Kendra Ringstmeyer	Pierre	Workforce Dev. Council
*Cheri Knispel	Rapid City	Disability Advocacy Group
Gaye Mattke	Pierre	SBVI Director– Ex Officio
Jeff Nelson	Garretson	Business and Industry
Nichole Nelson	Aberdeen	Community Rehab. Program
Cole Uecker	Pierre	Client Assistance Program

\*Denotes members whose terms expired or who resigned during 2022

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

## **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** – Members of the Strategic Planning and Policy Development Committee provide input on strategic planning and policy development and evaluate state plan updates, consumer satisfaction survey results, 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.

## **Board Meetings**

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

December 3, 2021, Via Zoom

June 3, 2022, DDN - Pierre, Rapid City,  
and Sioux Falls

March 11, 2022, Pierre, SD, and Zoom

September 9, 2022, DDN – Sioux Falls,  
Pierre, and Rapid City

Based on advice of the Board, most meetings were held via Zoom initially and then through the Dakota Digital Network teleconferencing system with sites hosted for members to participate in person or remotely during the report period. This format was convenient for the public to attend either in person or via video conference. Meetings are open to the public and held at accessible locations or via video/audio conference.

Meetings are announced through the State of South Dakota Board Portal and posted at SBVI offices. Meeting dates are determined by the Board; agendas and minutes are posted on the Open Government Board Portal at: <http://boardsandcommissions.sd.gov>

The Executive Committee reviews the draft agenda with the Director of SBVI and recommends topics prior to distribution. Topics are chosen based on priorities identified by the Board and the Rehabilitation Act.

During the report period, topics addressed by the Board of SBVI included:

- Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment
- Financial Need Requirements for Assistive Technology
- Consumer Satisfaction Survey Results

## **Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment**

The comprehensive statewide needs assessment was a standing agenda item at all meetings during the report period. Russ Thelin of Known Way Consulting assisted with the assessment and sought input from a variety of sources using qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities in South Dakota.

The Board Strategic Planning and Policy Committee will meet to bring recommendations to address the findings to the full Board for discussion and action. Findings and recommendations were categorized as follows:

### **Agency Counseling and Guidance**

- Research root causes behind the limited/unprovided rehabilitation counseling and guidance findings. Considerations might be:
  - Duties and task priority and comfort and skill level of counseling staff
  - Cultural misalignment of duties (implicit and explicit expectations)
  - Skills training for confidence in counseling and coordinating services delivery for individuals with blindness/vision loss who have coexisting disabling conditions. Specifically mentioned: Autism, Mental Health, Intellectual Disability, Brain Injury
  - Consider further analysis of reasons behind increasing unsuccessful after IPE (28) closures for “no longer interested/no further services” reasons, including if there is a correlation between the Counseling and Guidance findings and unsuccessful after plan closures; is length of time to engagement (timeliness to services) a factor for unsuccessful after plan closures?

### **Agency Services Awareness and Access**

- With multiple sources indicating lack of knowledge of availability of VR services as a most significant barrier, especially post-COVID, identify means and ways to make information on services and how to access or connect with VR services available.
- Consider reaching out to representatives of the Asian community within South Dakota to make SBVI services and resources known given the higher percentage of prevalence reported by Cornell Disability Statistics for ages 16-20 visual disability.

### **Mental Health**

- Consider possible strategies to enhance the partnership between SBVI and Mental Health at all levels for support services for mutually served individuals.

### **Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs)**

- Consider options to:
  - Help existing CRPs retain staff and reduce rapid turnover.
  - Increase consistent availability of CRPs in rural and tribal areas of the state.

### **Cultural Humility/Sensitivity/Intelligence**

- Consider cultural humility/intelligence training for VR staff and partners for better culturally responsive services.
- Consider potentials to provide resources to individuals with blindness/vision loss who are not English speakers (ESL, materials available in Spanish, Somali, Vietnamese).



## Board Activities

### Governor's Awards for Employment of People with Disabilities

Governor Kristi Noem recognized the achievements of businesses, individuals with disabilities, and other South Dakotans for their contributions toward the employment of people with disabilities at the 2022 Governor's Awards ceremony on October 26 in the state capitol rotunda.



Governor Noem presented awards to the following 2022 recipients:

- Outstanding Individual with a Disability - Helen Hartmann, Sioux Falls
- Outstanding Employee with a Disability - Kayley Shade, Sioux Falls
- Outstanding Small Private Employer - JoDean's Steakhouse & Lounge, Yankton
- Outstanding Large Private Employer - Family Fare Supermarket, Rapid City
- Outstanding Public Employer - Midco Aquatic Center, Sioux Falls
- Outstanding Transition Services Award - Bev Petersen, Sioux Falls
- Distinguished Service Award - John Hamilton, Sioux Falls

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

### South Dakota Disability Employment Awareness Month

Observed annually in October, National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) celebrates the contributions of America's workers with disabilities past and present and showcases supportive, inclusive employment policies and practices. In recognition of the important role people with disabilities play in a diverse and inclusive American workforce, the theme for NDEAM 2022, "**Disability: Part of the Equity Equation.**"



South Dakota recognized NDEAM with events in 12 communities around the state. Educational and awareness activities were held in person and virtually addressing topics related to workforce and disabilities. Jill Kuntz - SBVI Board Chair, and Catherine Greseth - Past Chair of the Board of SBVI and Director of the Workforce Diversity Network of the Black Hills, were two of the women featured on billboards in the Rapid City area promoting National Disability awareness month.

## White Cane Day

Governor Noem released a proclamation declaring October 15, 2022, White Cane Day in South Dakota to recognize the capabilities and aspirations of citizens who are blind or visually impaired. A press release also acknowledged White Cane Day.

In the press release, South Dakota Department of Human Services Cabinet Secretary Shawnie Rechtenbaugh said, "White Cane Day serves as a reminder of how the white cane contributes to the independence and civic participation of people who are blind or visually impaired. The goal of White Cane Day is to bring public awareness about South Dakota White Cane laws and to recognize the white cane as a tool of independence for blind pedestrians on our streets and in our communities."



A walk was hosted by the National Federation of the Blind in Brookings with 8 people participating, local media covered the event. Staff and clients at the South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind recognized White Cane Day with a walk and signs to educate the public about white cane laws.

## Public Relations

Outreach activities are a focus of the Board of SBVI to ensure citizens with vision loss have access to services. Activities are conducted to educate the public about accessibility for people with vision loss.

The Board of SBVI has sponsored a booth at Disability Awareness Day during the South Dakota Legislative Session in the capitol rotunda in Pierre. The South Dakota Association of the Blind and National Federation of the Blind of South Dakota members are invited to participate in this opportunity to educate lawmakers about issues related to blindness. Fourteen organizations participated in the event. Ryan Groeneweg represented the Center for Disabilities and Board of SBVI at the event and distributed "Grandpas White Cane" books at the Board of SBVI booth. The next Disability Day at the Capitol is scheduled for Wednesday, February 22, 2023.

A public forum was held in conjunction with the National Federation of the Blind of South Dakota convention on April 22, in Rapid City. Concerns were expressed regarding transportation and recruiting new members to the organization. The Board of SBVI sponsor public forums in conjunction with consumer organization conventions to obtain input and strengthen partnerships.

## Breaking Barriers

Following is an article about Board Chair, Jill Kundtz who was one of four women featured in “Black Hills Women” magazine’s Sept./Oct. edition in an article entitled “Breaking Barriers”.

*Jill Kundtz is State Chair for the State Board of Service to The Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) and Spiritual Care Services Coordinator for Monument Health.*

*Jill Kundtz was declared legally blind in 2018, and she reached out to the SBVI for services. That phone call led to an appointment on the board, a leadership position that has helped Kundtz advocate and serve others with disabilities across the state.*

*Kundtz is a nurse by trade and is no stranger to leadership. She’s served on the board of the Society of Gastroenterology Nurses and Associates and several other local and national boards.*

*“I’ve always been an advocate for people,” she said.*

*Her message to women with disabilities is clear: don’t give up on your dreams. “Don’t doubt yourself,” she said. “You are a gifted person, and you can do things as well as anyone; you just might need some accommodations. You have just as much value.”*

*Kundtz said her strong will and perseverance has helped her push forward, and she tries to help others maintain the same perspective. She has also been diagnosed with cancer and multiple sclerosis.*

*“I have a fighting spirit,” she said. “When something happens to you, you can either bury your head in the sand or have a five-minute pity party and then move on. I have a patient who has their leg cut off and I remind them that they’ll have an adjustment period and that’s OK. But then what are you going to do? What do you want for the rest of your life?”” BHW Women in Business*





# VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

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The Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program provides individualized rehabilitation services that result in optimal employment outcomes for citizens who are blind or visually impaired. Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors provide specialized services throughout the State of South Dakota. The VR program reporting below reflects data that the Rehabilitation Service Administration tracks based on a program year, July 1, 2021–June 30, 2022, also known as State Fiscal Year 2022 (SFY22).

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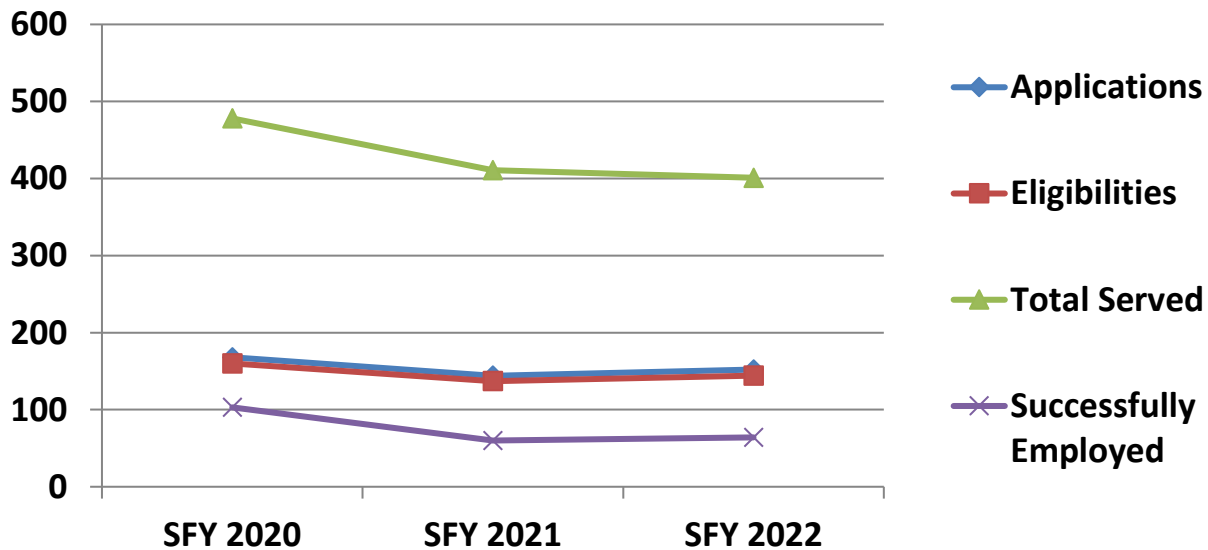
## Program Year Performance

- 401 people were served through the SBVI VR Program in the most recent state fiscal year, compared to 411 people the previous year.
  - 64 people were successfully rehabilitated through the vocational rehabilitation program, compared to 60 the previous program year.
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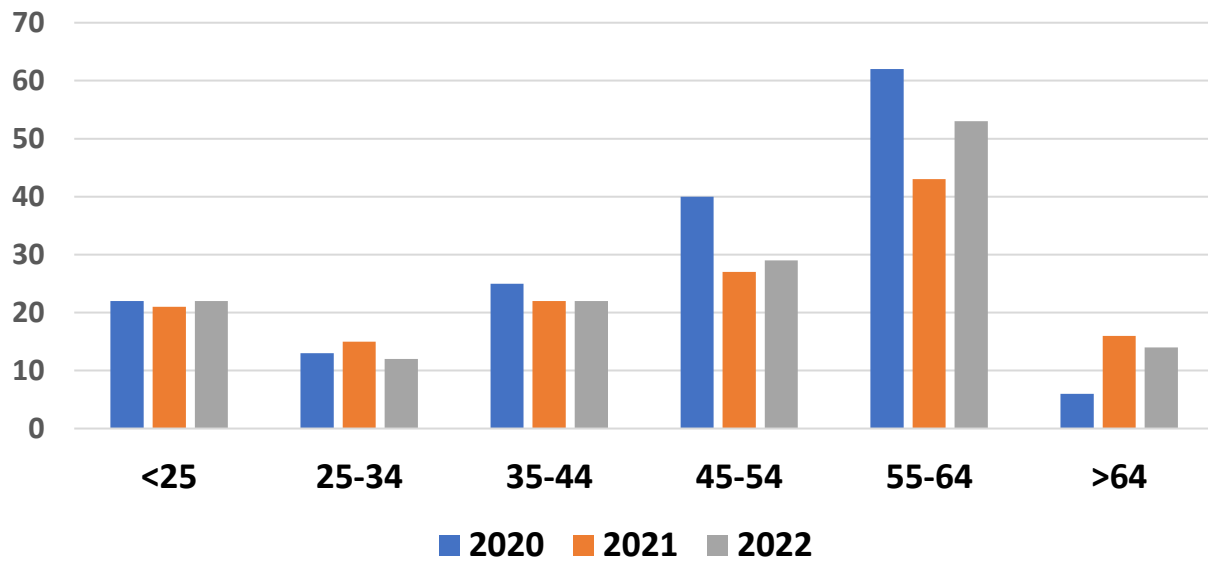
## SBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Caseload Summary

The following chart illustrates the number of people who have applied for and received services from the SBVI Vocational Rehabilitation program over the past three years. SBVI counselors saw a slight increase in the number of vocational rehabilitation applications in the most recent Program Year. There were 152 applications, 144 eligibilities, a total of 401 individuals served, and 64 clients were successfully employed.

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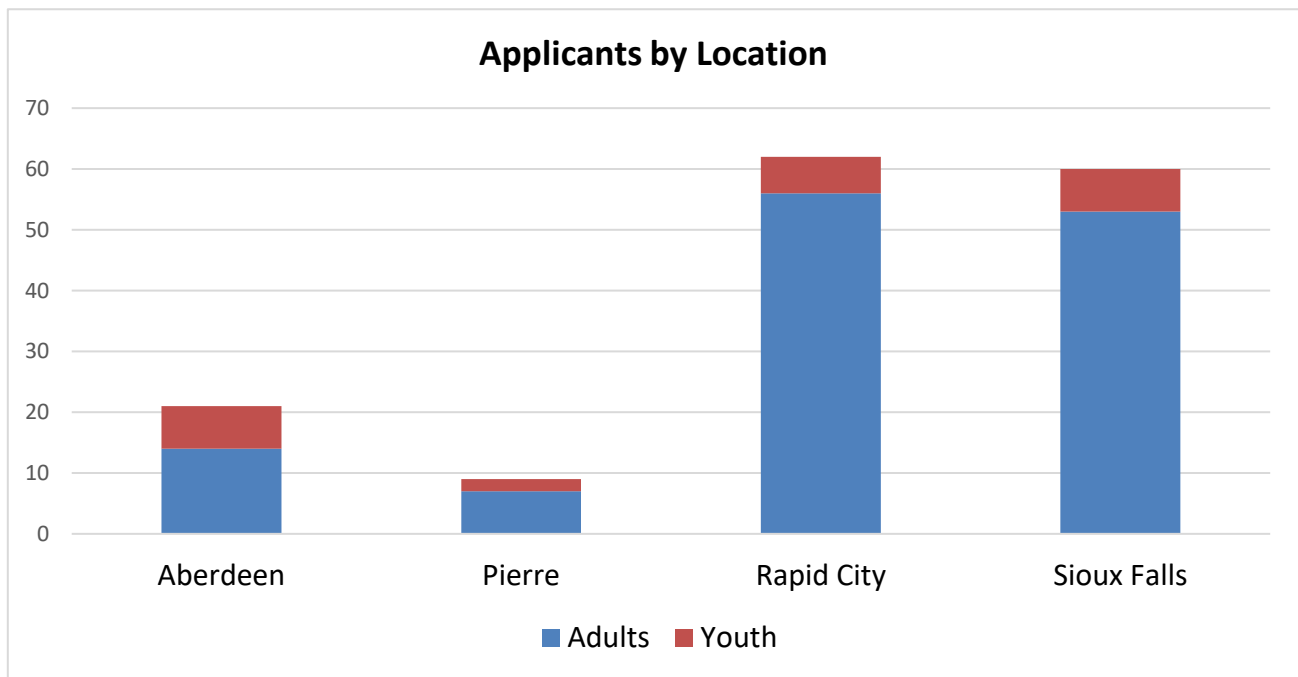


### Age at Application



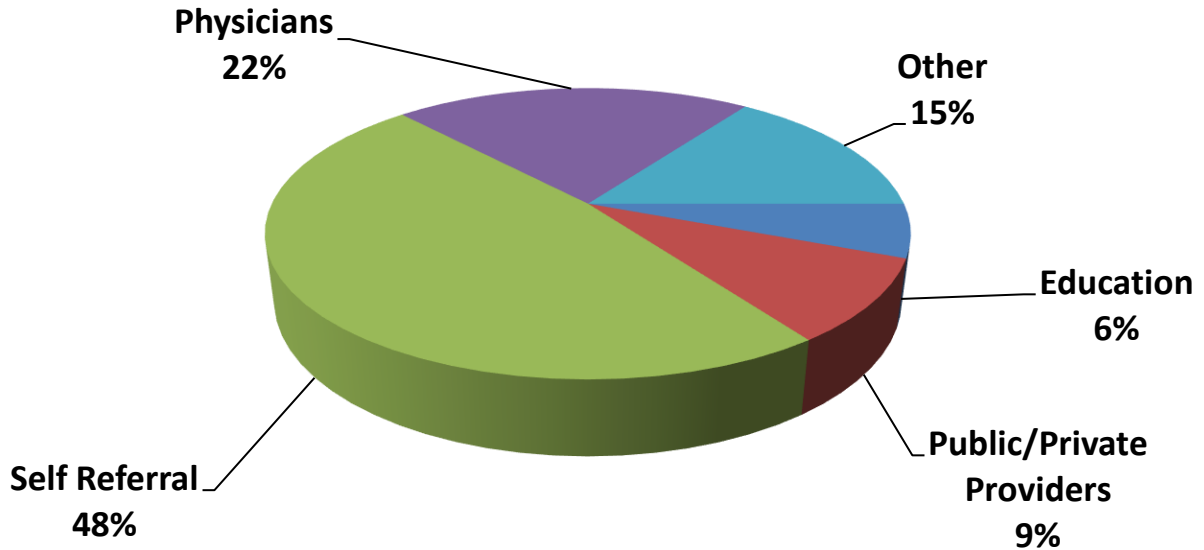
Although SBVI takes applications from individuals starting at age 14, historically most applicants who apply for services are between the ages of 55-64 due to the progressive nature of their vision loss.

### Applicants by Location



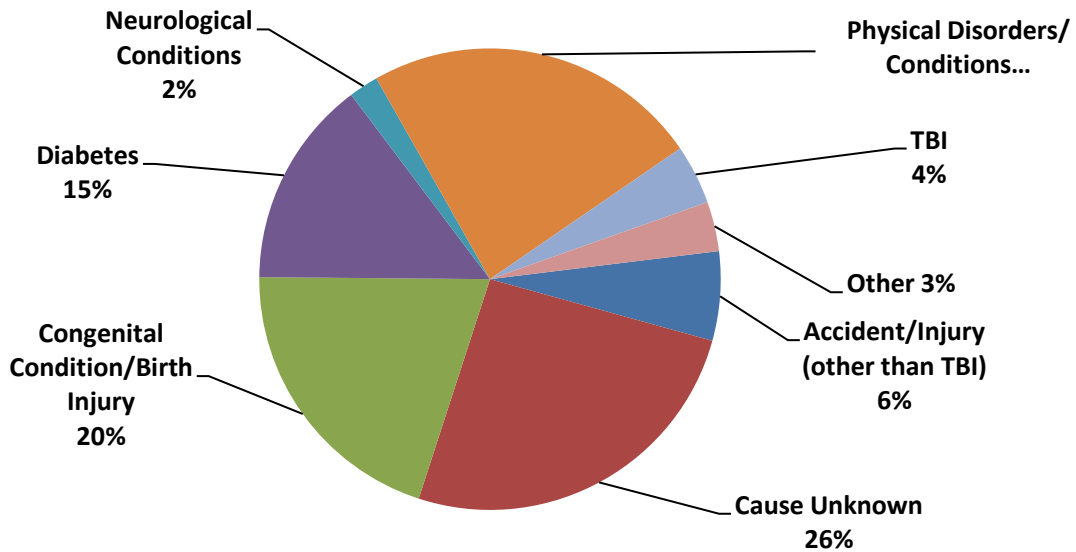
SBVI saw a total of 130 new applications from adults and 22 applications from students and youth. Youth is defined as individuals in the vocational rehabilitation program under the age of 25. The average age of youth who applied for services was 17 years old, and the average age of adults who applied was 47 years old.

## Referral Sources



Referrals from self/family/friends remain the largest source for applicants. SBVI experienced a decline in referrals from physicians and an increase in other referrals, including employers and American Indian VR Programs. With a focus on transition services to students, SBVI staff will continue to increase outreach efforts to school personnel and parents to inform them of the availability of transition services for students with vision loss.

## Causes of Impairments



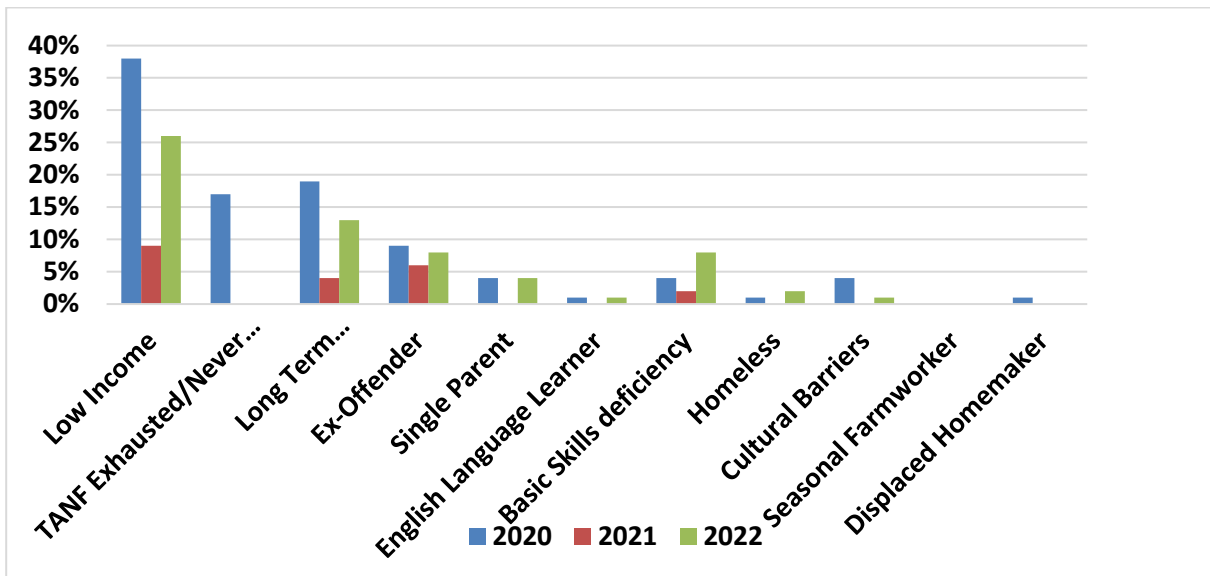
For VR clients determined eligible for the program, the cause of visual impairment for most of them was due to cause unknown (26%), a physical disorder/condition (24%), congenital condition/birth injury (20%), or diabetes (15%).

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*“Very helpful to improve the skills at my job- they made me very comfortable at my job.”*

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## Barriers to Employment



SBVI identifies barriers clients are experiencing that impact their ability to obtain work without assistance. The above chart shows the percentage of clients who are experiencing these barriers when SBVI first develops a plan of services with them. Low income, long-term unemployment, basic skills deficiency, and ex-offenders are the main barriers to individuals obtaining employment.

## Employment Data at Closure

Employment Category	Total Cases	Average Weekly Hours	Average Weekly Wage	Average Hourly Wage
All Employment	64	30	\$444.34	\$14.64
Competitive Integrated Employment	61	29.5	\$420.06	\$14.22
Self-Employment	3	46.7	\$341.63	\$23.33

SBVI clients average a 30-hour work week, with an average hourly wage of \$14.64. Those in competitive integrated employment saw an average hourly wage of \$14.22 per hour.

## Impacts to Employment

SBVI assisted 64 clients to successfully obtain employment. Those clients had a visual impairment as their primary disability, but 66 percent of them were also diagnosed with a secondary disability, which impacts their ability to work. It is common for SBVI Counselors to work with clients who have multiple disabilities affecting more than their vision. SBVI increasingly works with clients with multiple disabilities as reflected in the following table.

Secondary Impairment	Clients Employed at Exit
Diabetes Mellitus	7
Physical Disorders/Conditions	6
Cause Unknown	4
Congenital Conditions/Birth	4
Depressive and other Mood Disorders	4
Cerebral Palsy	3
Accident/Injury (other than TBI or SCI)	3
Asthma Circulatory	2
Specific Learning Disabilities	2
Schizophrenia and other Psychotic Disorders	1
Specific Learning Disability	1
Traumatic Brain Injury	1
Autism	1
Cardiac and other Circulatory System Conditions	1
Anxiety Disorder	1

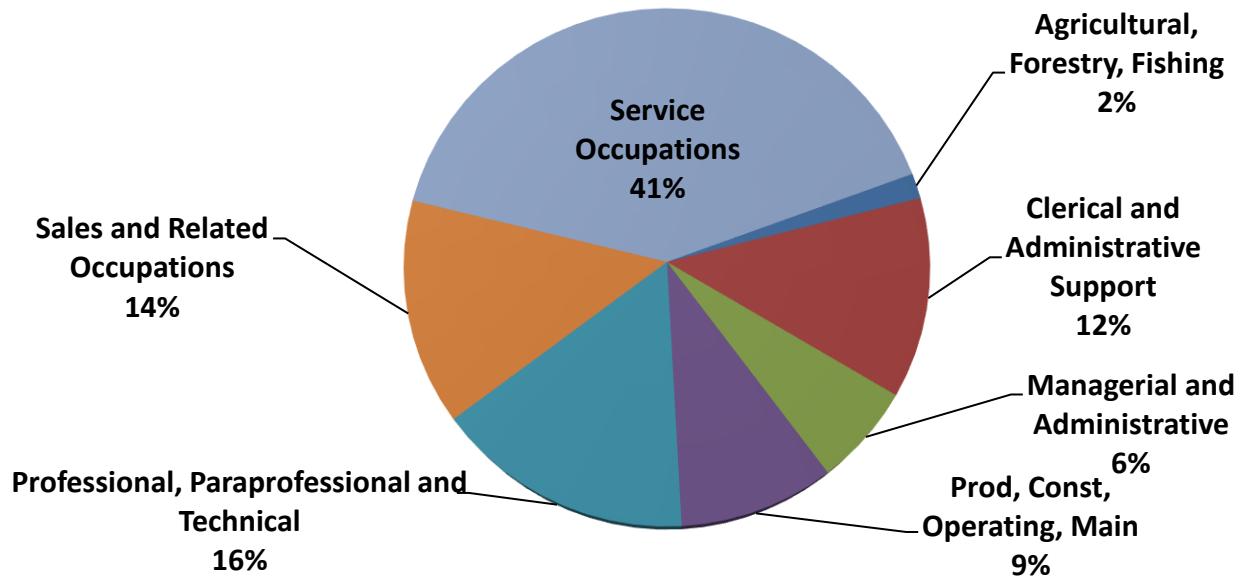
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*“All of the counselors and people I have worked with have been, above all, extremely nice and helpful. Their primary concern is to help me achieve my full potential and that has empowered me and helped me come a long way towards my goals. I have not yet completed my eventual employment goals, although that is not related to your amazing services. When the time comes, I will be working with you again and I am confident that I will achieve even more thanks to you. Thank you so much.”*

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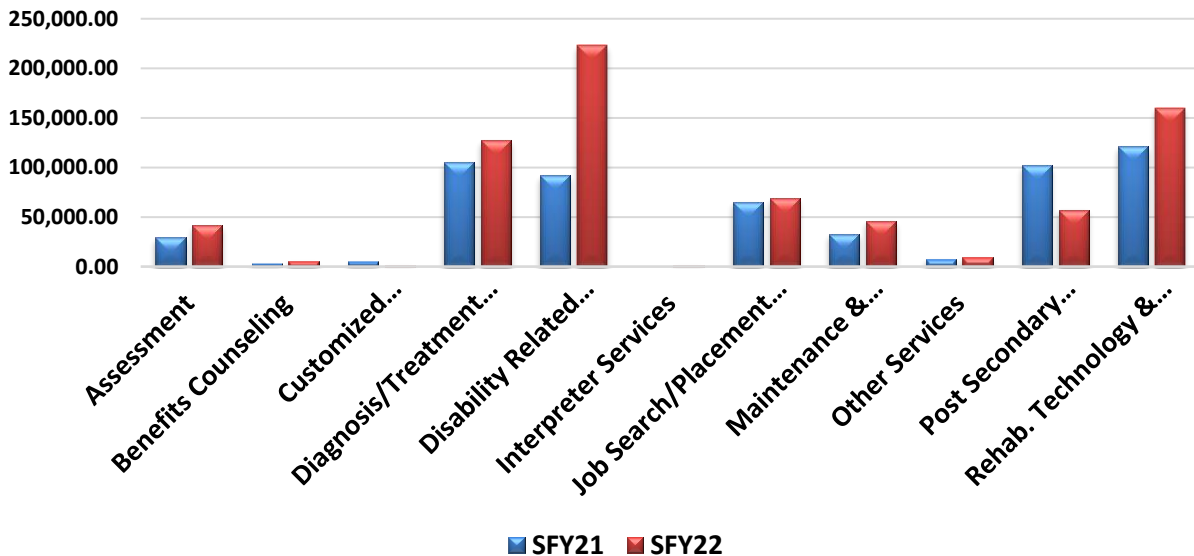


## Occupations Of Individuals Successfully Employed



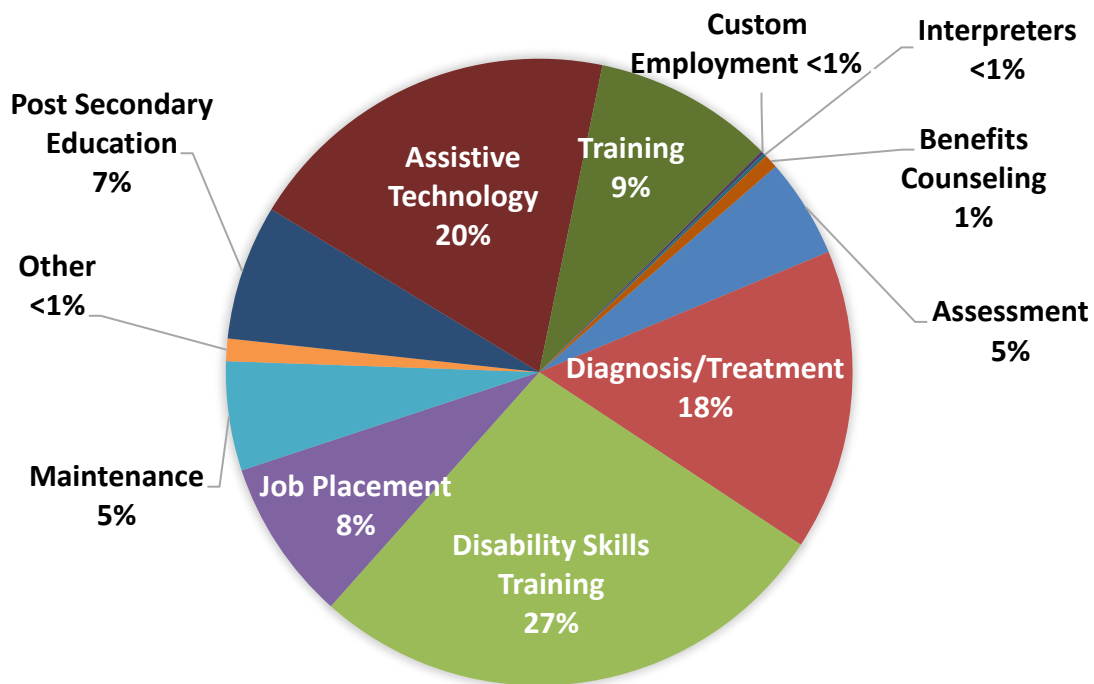
The Vocational Rehabilitation program helped 64 people to achieve their employment goals. This chart reflects the occupations of people successfully employed, with 41 percent of the jobs in service occupations and 22 percent of them in managerial, professional, or technical careers.

## Vocational Rehabilitation Purchased Services Analysis



SBVI spent \$817,834.36 on client services for VR participants, an increase of 35% compared to the previous year. SBVI increased disability related skills training by 142% and almost doubled the amount spent on training. However, SBVI spent 44% less on post-secondary education than the previous year.

## Vocational Rehabilitation Services Provided



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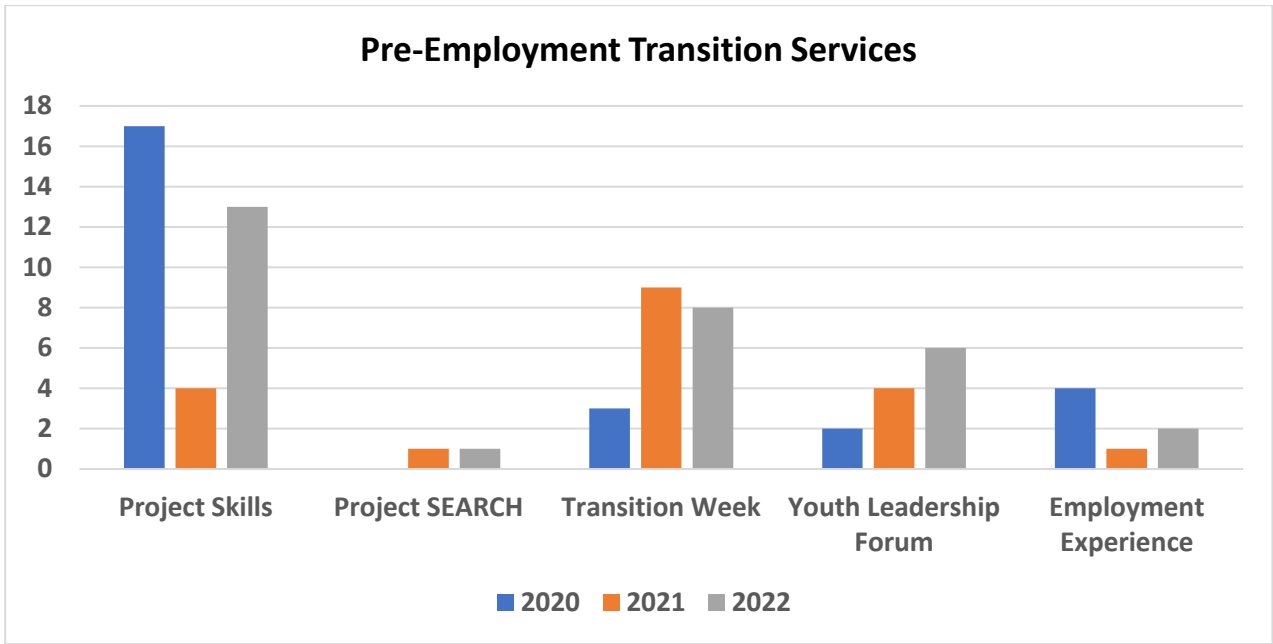
The above chart reflects the wide variety of services SBVI provides to assist clients to obtain or maintain employment. SBVI assists clients to overcome their vision-related impediments to employment by providing diagnostic and treatment services to improve their vision, and disability skills training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

The most common services provided included disability skills training, assistive technology, diagnosis and treatment, and job placement services, which totaled 73 percent of all services provided.

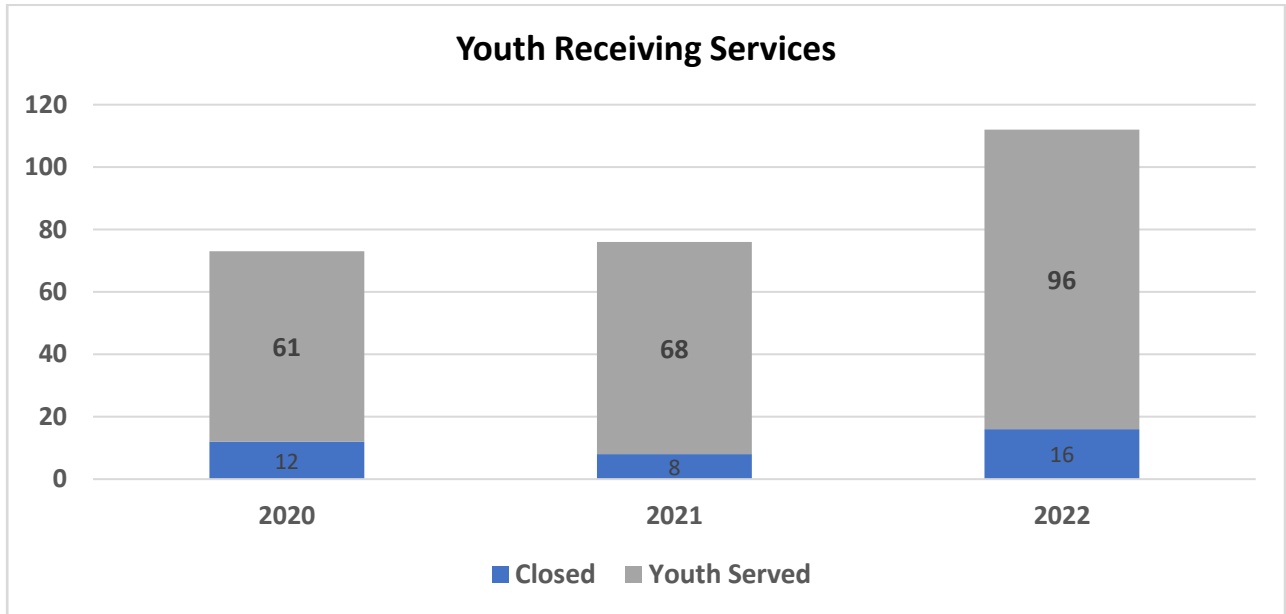
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*"I think it helped me obtain my employment. My situation is different than many. My vision changes all of the time during the day. Light, heat, air, wind are all factors of me seeing. The two eyes do not work together well. I am very satisfied by the great effort of your team. Always courteous manner and excellent response. It is not the teams fault I didn't emotionally adjust to my vision loss. They were great! I love my job- I do not recall of voc-rehab helped me with this position but they did give me great referrals and opportunities for jobs. I am good for now. every day is a new day and eyes are always a challenge. Continue my quarterly appointments locally and in Sioux Falls. Insurance still doesn't cover all medicines. Right now, employed I can afford. If I become unemployed, this may become difficult."*

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The activities shown in the graph above illustrate planned services in Individualized Plans for Employment to secondary school students. These activities provide job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary options, workplace readiness training, and self-advocacy training.



SBVI has worked closely with public schools and the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired to increase employment experiences for youth ages 16-24, which has resulted in an increase in transition-age students receiving services.

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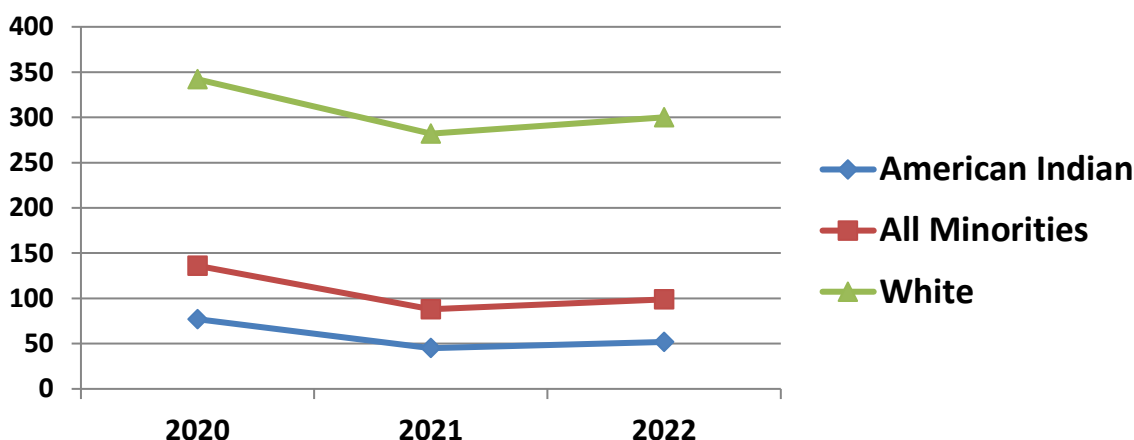
*“You guys did amazing keep up the good work and I don’t think you need to improve anything.”*

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SBVI collaborates with the Division of Rehabilitation Services, Departments of Education, Labor and Regulation, and Social Services to assist with identifying eligible and potentially eligible students with disabilities and their need for services as young as 14 years of age. Beginning October 1, 2022, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by these departments to decrease the age of a “student with a disability” from age 16 to age 14. SBVI can now provide consultation, technical assistance, and pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities as young as 14 years of age.

### Services to Minorities

According to the 2020 United States Census Bureau’s census data, South Dakota’s minority (non-white) population is 19.3 percent, a 5 percent increase from the 2010 census. The largest minority group in South Dakota involves American Indians making up 8.8 percent of the state’s total population. This year, 13 percent of individuals served by SBVI were of American Indian descent, and one-third of all individuals served reported coming from a minority background.



The Board and Division of SBVI work to address culturally relevant services for minority populations through numerous initiatives. The Director of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe Vocational Rehabilitation Program is a member of the Board of SBVI, and SBVI has relationships with the six American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation programs in South Dakota.

### Vocational Rehabilitation Program Client Satisfaction Survey Analysis

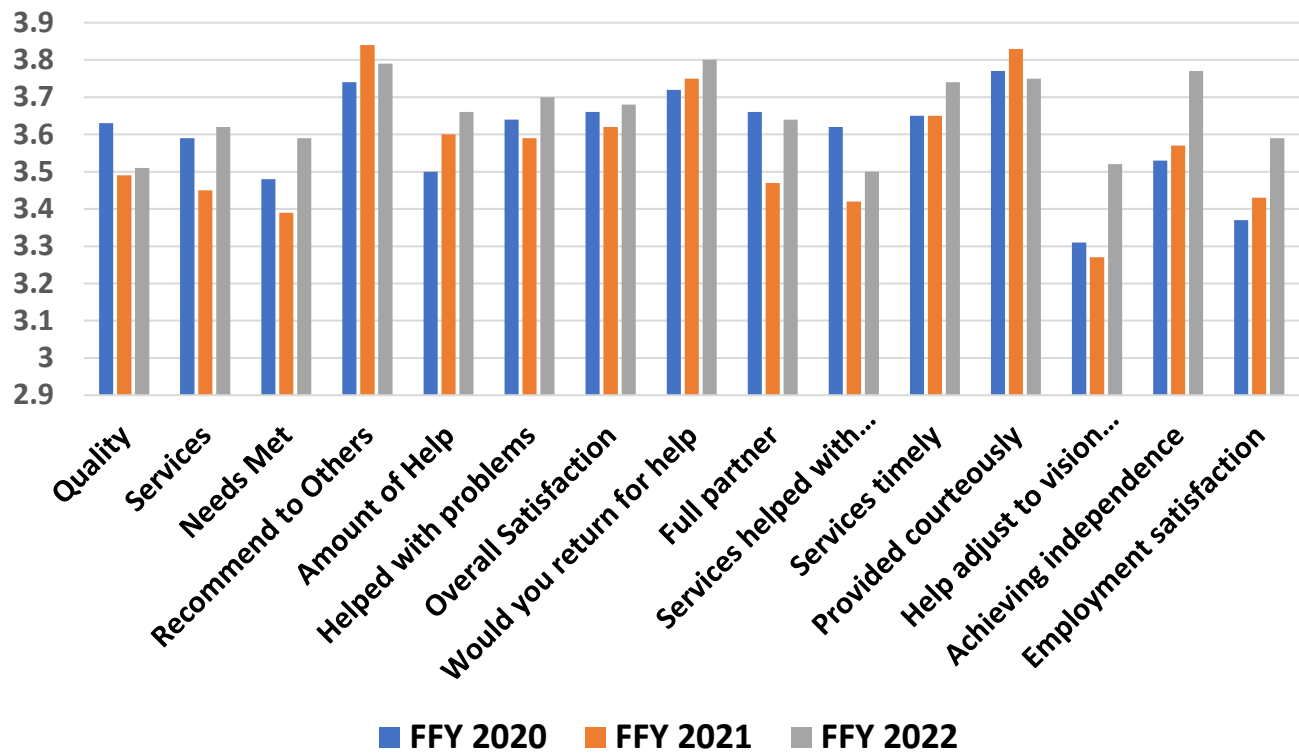
SBVI partners with the Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired to conduct an annual client satisfaction survey, which consists of eight core questions that contribute to a composite satisfaction scale: The Client Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ-8), Larsen, Attkisson, Hargreaves, and Nguyen (1979). An additional seven questions were developed with the help of the Board of SBVI, and consumers rated their satisfaction level from 1 (Poor) to 4 (Excellent). This is the 13<sup>th</sup> year that SBVI has conducted this annual survey.

Between October 1, 2021, and September 30, 2022, the survey was sent out to 114 individuals who received services and were closed from the SBVI vocational rehabilitation program during the past federal fiscal year. Surveys were sent via mail, email, or they were contacted by phone, based on their preference.

Of the 114 questionnaires, 42 were returned, resulting in a 37 percent response rate. The responses were submitted to Survey Monkey this year, and average ratings were identified over the course of four quarters. This data gets shared with the Board of SBVI on an annual basis. Along with the survey ratings, previous clients have an opportunity to provide comments and feedback. Many of those comments are found throughout the Board’s annual report.

<b>Satisfaction Survey Questions</b>	<b>Average Rating</b>
1. How would you rate the quality of service you received?	3.51
2. Did you get the kind of service you wanted?	3.62
3. To what extent has our program met your needs?	3.59
4. If a friend needed similar help, would you recommend our program to him/her?	3.79
5. How satisfied are you with the amount of help you received?	3.66
6. Have the services you received helped you to deal more effectively with your problems?	3.70
7. In an overall, general sense, how satisfied are you with the service you received?	3.68
8. If you were to seek help again, would you come back to our program?	3.80
9. Were you a full partner in the process to determine your employment goal and services to be provided?	3.64
10. Do you feel that the services provided by your counselor were necessary to obtain or keep your employment?	3.50
11. Were information and services provided to you in a timely manner?	3.74
12. Were information and services provided to you in a courteous manner?	3.75
13. Did the services help you adjust to your visual impairment?	3.52
14. How beneficial were services in assisting you in achieving more independence?	3.77
15. How satisfied are you with the employment that you obtained as a result of Vocational Rehabilitation Services?	3.59

## Satisfaction With VR Services



Compared to the previous two years, results show substantial increase in employment satisfaction, help adjusting to their vision impairment, achieving independence, meeting client needs and receiving desired services.

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*“Mike Webb is an awesome person and advocate!”*

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## Adjusting My Path



My journey with vision loss began in my early 20's when I was diagnosed with a form of juvenile macular degeneration. I was losing my central vision. Still in college, as I looked ahead to the future I had planned, the unknown of continued vision loss was a scary prospect. I was fortunate for the ophthalmologist who referred me to Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired for low vision assistance. I am now a 44-year-old wife and mother of three with over 20 years in my marketing career. SBVI helped me secure

the tools and support that I needed to finish college, secure, and maintain a career, and thrive in my everyday life.

Services provided include low vision evaluations, tuition assistance, help finding a job after college, handheld magnifiers, digital magnifiers, laptops, monitors, ZoomText software and closed-circuit TV's. Bioptic lenses have been a very crucial part of maintaining my independence. Most recently SBVI has provided me with a new laptop with ZoomText, a 27" monitor, and the Compact 10 digital magnifier. I am extremely grateful for the many tools that I have received, as they continue to help me function in my career and everyday life.

The resource I am most grateful for is the human support. The people in the SBVI office here in Aberdeen are amazing! The goal of living with a disability is just that, living with it. You must learn how to function in and contribute to the world around you. Both counselors that I have worked with have visual impairments which allowed them to offer much more than technical assistance. They share in the understanding of what it is like to live with low vision, and both were very open about their personal experiences as well as tricks that have helped them function. It was very reassuring to see others thriving with their low vision. It provided me an understanding that low vision would not be an end to my plans, it simply meant I needed to adjust my path.

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*I was pleased with all the help I received. It helped so much when Trisha put larger numbers on my phone and microwave. My large print watch is wonderful as are the larger lights. Thanks so much!*

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## **INDEPENDENT LIVING BLIND PROGRAM (ILB)**

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People who acquire vision loss later in life are often less able to perform their activities of daily living, tend to be less mobile, and experience isolation which can have a significant impact on the physical and mental well-being of an older person. Services from the Independent Living Blind Program are intended to help people achieve their personal goals so they can resume their daily activities despite their vision loss. Through training and provision of magnification devices, the individual can learn to use their remaining vision which leads to an improvement to their quality of life.

In FY2022, the ILB program provided one or more of the services listed below to 454 individuals with vision loss compared to 420 in FY2021. Staff closed the cases of 201 individuals successfully in 2022, compared to 197 in 2021.

<b>Type of Service and Description</b>	<b>Number of People</b>
Communication Skills – training in the use of the telephone, handwriting guides, telling time, reading, or writing braille, etc.	354
Daily Living Skills – training in the use of adaptive aids and assistive technology for daily living	362
Low Vision Devices & Services – training and acquisition of items such as magnifiers, solar shields, video magnifiers, (CCTVs) travel canes, insulin gauges, various talking equipment, adaptive cooking items, etc.	443
Counseling – Peer, individual, or group counseling to assist with adjustment to visual impairment and blindness	145
Low Vision Exams – Evaluations to identify strategies and devices for enhancing visual performance	166
Advocacy Training – participation in advocacy training activities such as consumer organization meetings and peer support groups	15
Referral to Other Agencies – Referral to other service providers, programs, and agencies.	338
Orientation and Mobility – Travel training and learning to access public or private transportation to travel safely and independently.	72

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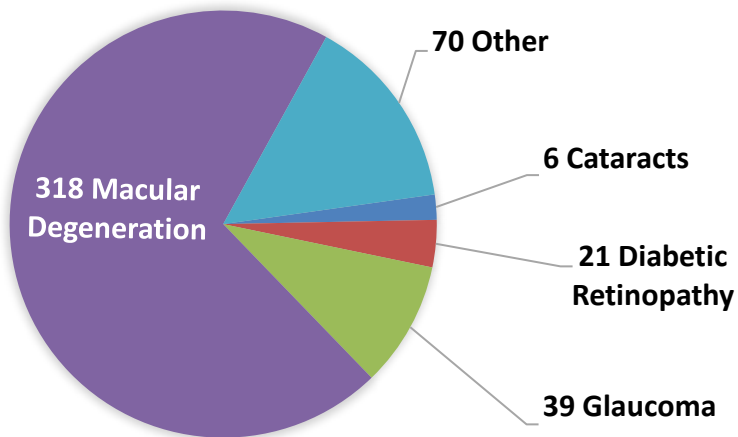
*Amanda from the Sioux Falls office is just the best. I have "wet" macular degeneration & she was so helpful.*

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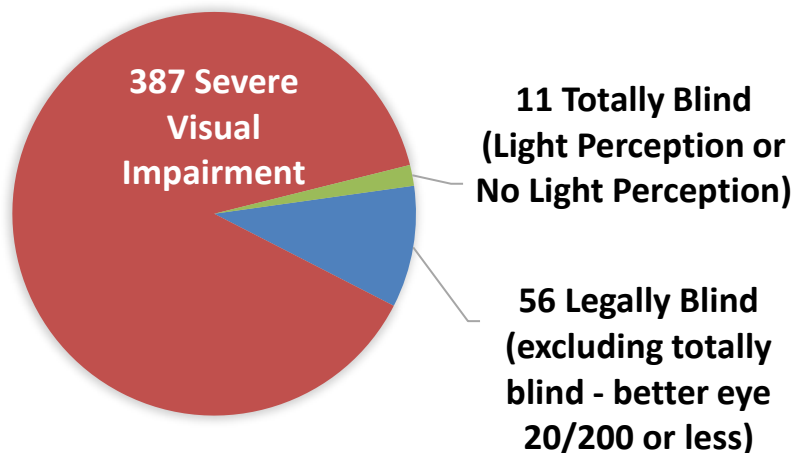
## Types of Eye Diseases for People Served

Macular degeneration was the primary cause of vision loss in 318 (70%) of the 454 individuals who received services in 2022, as reflected in the following chart. When reviewing the primary types of eye diseases among the people served in the ILB program, macular degeneration occurs more frequently than others listed. Macular degeneration results in blurring of the sharp, central vision needed for straight-ahead activities such as seeing faces, driving, reading, and sewing. It affects an individual's ability to see fine detail but causes no pain, which means it can be undetected for a period of time.



## Degree of Vision Loss

The following chart explains the degree of vision loss experienced by the 454 individuals (over age 55) served in 2022. Only 11 people served in the program (3%) experienced total blindness. Individuals who have some remaining vision which can be used to complete activities of daily living often experience severe visual impairment, which makes up 387 or 89% of the people served.

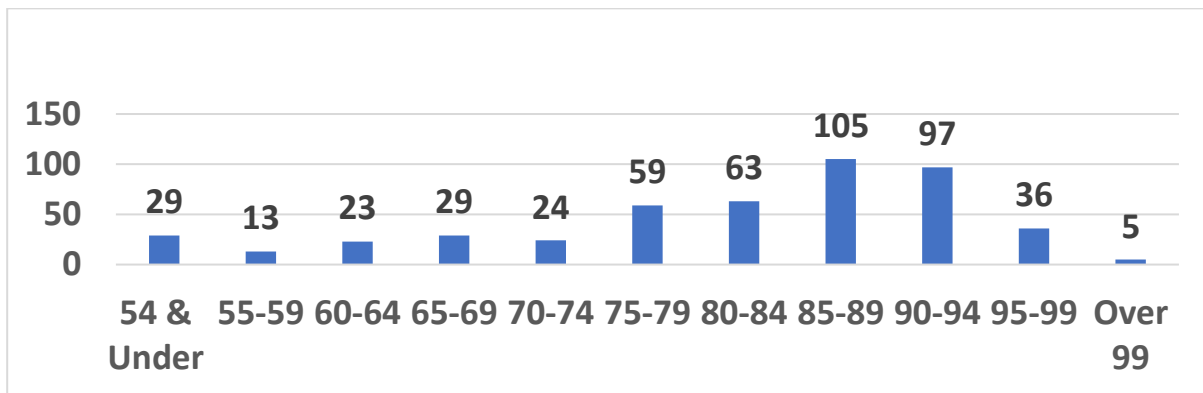


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*Tricia is very good. She is a pleasant lady, kind & visits nicely. Helps with my needs.*

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## Age Range of ILB Individuals Served in FY2022



The target population for the ILB program is individuals over the age of 55; however, Rehabilitation Teachers also served 29 individuals under age 55 who are experiencing vision loss. As reflected in the chart, 305 or 63% percent were over the age of 80, with 5 people over the age of 100.

### Satisfaction with Independent Living Services

Citizens who receive services from the ILB program can provide feedback through a satisfaction survey which is sent to them a few weeks after the end of their services. Survey responses assist SBVI to assess whether services are effective in helping citizens to maintain or regain their independence. A phone call to the respondent occurs if they require more low vision services or have questions about their devices. One hundred eighty-one surveys were sent out to those whose services ended during the 2022 fiscal year. Ninety-eight people responded to the survey, which is a 49% response rate. Phone calls to people who didn't respond to the paper survey were completed to obtain their feedback about their services.

### Electronic Video Magnification (CCTV) Lease/Loan Program

SBVI created the CCTV Lease/Loan Program in 2004 with memorial funds donated specifically for providing devices for older citizens which could not be purchased using the limited Older Blind grant funds. The program began with 24 units as a start-up to determine if we could address a need for older program participants who could not acquire the devices using insurance or Medicaid. SBVI has purchased over 408 machines for the program. The CCTVs provide a magnified image that has a substantially higher resolution for individuals with low vision.

As technology changed, SBVI expanded the selection to include optical character recognition (OCR) that magnifies and provides auditory output of the printed information. CCTV units may be leased for \$30 per month or loaned at no cost for those who meet financial need criteria. The CCTV Lease/Loan Program currently has two hundred nineteen units. SBVI is proud of this program which has demonstrated a significant service to 1,216 older citizens with low vision since 2004.

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*I was very thankful for all the help and direction Nancy gave me. She made me feel comfortable.*

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## REHABILITATION CENTER FOR THE BLIND

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

### Adaptive Skills of Blindness



The Rehabilitation Center for the Blind provides daily classes to teach adaptive skills of blindness. During 2022, there were 26 men and 24 women who attended training at the Center. In addition, there were 7 high school transition-age students who attended Transition Week. The demographics of students attending training were 48 percent women and 52 percent men, with an

average age of 35 years. Twenty-four percent were blind, 16 percent were legally blind, 38 percent were visually impaired, 14 percent were staff in new employee training, and 8 percent were medical students. Secondary disabilities affecting students included diabetes, deaf/hearing impaired, learning disabilities, mental health, brain injury, and other conditions. Trainees were referred from all district offices, with 52 percent of all referrals from the Sioux Falls office.

### Low Vision Clinics



Low vision evaluations with Dr. Nick Wenande occur the second Wednesday of each month. In 2022, there were 9 clinics serving 50 people, a slight increase from 2021. The total number of people served through the low vision clinic was still on the lower end due to fewer referrals. Individuals referred from the Older Blind Independent Living program made up 44 percent and referrals from Vocational Rehabilitation program made up 56 percent.

## **Assistive Technology (AT) First Friday Clinics**

Computers using assistive technology are vital to assist people with visual impairments to work remotely and stay connected. In 2022, 104 people participated in assistive technology training including first Friday walk-in clinics or telephone, FaceTime, email, or Skype assistance. This was an increase compared to 87 people in 2021. This assistance allows people to obtain technical assistance as they need it, not just while they are attending classes at SDRC.

## **Transition Week 2022**

Transition week was held June 12-16, with 7 students attending. The students reported some of their favorite activities included the business tours and night activities which entailed Wild Water West, Dave & Busters, bowling, and a movie night. The students toured Southeast Technical College and learned the importance of connecting with the disability coordinator if planning to attend college after high school. A presentation with the Department of Labor described services offered through their programs. Molly Christensen, with Empowered Coaching, concluded the event with an interactive presentation about setting realistic goals and having the self-confidence to go after those goals.



## **South Dakota Vocational Resources**

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors from Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) refer individuals to Employment Skills Training (EST) to prepare for a career change or college. A variety of assessments and accommodation evaluations help determine interests, strengths and accommodations needed for employment. Students gain computer skills, options to make a career change and how to develop a resume' and interviewing skills. The Center works as a team with the VR Counselor and the individual to figure out the next steps to reach an employment goal. The Employment Skills Supervisor is a Certified Brain Injury Specialist and served 9 individuals with a brain injury in 2022.

Employment Skills Training (EST) assisted 82 individuals in 2022, compared to 83 in 2021; 67 attended in-person, 5 participated in virtual one-on-one training, and 10 participated in the virtual World of Work class. In 2021, only 41 individuals attended in-person compared to 67 in 2022. Virtual training continued for people outside of the Sioux Falls area, which was a great option to reach more clients statewide with employment needs; however, this number decreased from 42 in 2021, to 15 in 2022, due to in-person numbers increasing.



Virtual World of Work classes continued and were provided via Zoom for people with varying degrees of experience. Topics included employer expectations, how to search and apply for jobs, developing a resume, gathering references, practice interview questions, etc.

Job placement services were provided to 47 individuals in 2022, compared to 26 served in 2021. Post pandemic trends reflect individuals are ready to look for employment in the community and a newly hired employment specialist with strong connections with the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are the two main reasons for the increase in job placement services.



### Summary of Services

SDRC Service	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY2022
Transition Students	11	5	9	7
Low Vision Patients	59	23	48	50
Employment Specialist	32	26	26	47
Skills of Blindness	54	34	36	50
Employment Skills Training	68	38	83	82
O&M On-site	13	0	0	0
AT Walk-in Clinic & First Friday Classes	45	150	87	104
Total	282	275	289	340

### Satisfaction Survey Responses

Participants in the adaptive Skills of Blindness program are asked to complete a survey regarding their satisfaction with services. The overall rating was 3.78 on a 4.0 scale, which falls between the ratings of (3) Agreed and (4) Strongly Agreed to the questions about the quality of services. With seasoned staff and a good understanding of teaching the skills of blindness, they are often praised by participants that they provide an environment where students are encouraged and helped to build their self-confidence.

Responses received for the question, “What did you like best about the program?”

- *“I love how the instructors taught the whole person rather than just teach a set of skills. There was much care and compassion.”*
- *“Services are generally good. O&M gave me the confidence and technique to cross streets 98% straighter and accurately. Very happy with services, and training went fast.”*
- *“Everything is great!”*

The Employment Skills Training (EST) area uses a similar format of questions and narrative responses to obtain information about the quality of services. The overall rating was a 3.83 on a 4.0 scale, which falls between the ratings of (3) Agreed and (4) Strongly Agreed.

When asked the question, “What did you like best about the program?” responses included:

- *“I liked our discussions regarding employment, what the employer wanted to hear. In general, everything about obtaining employment.”*
- *“No question was unanswered, all curiosity conquered, and I genuinely feel like the people here care about me and want me to succeed.”*
- *“Loved the new things I learned on the computer.”*
- *“I was able to gain the skills that I need to fulfill to get a job in an office setting.”*
- *“Training was excellent. Liked the weekly interview session so much.”*

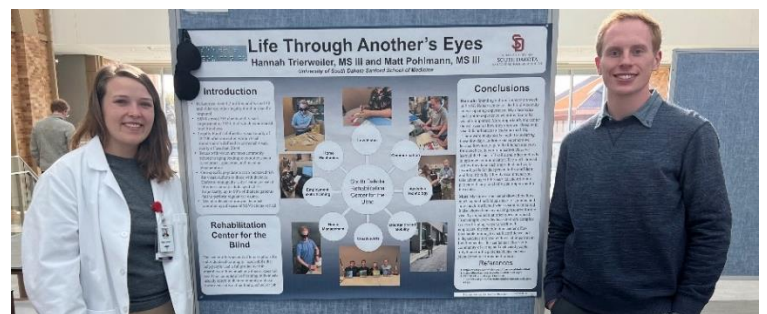
### USD Medical Students

Four USD medical students participated in 3 days of cultural immersion at the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, August 24-26. The cultural immersion program provides experiences to students so they can learn about disabilities, different cultures, and organizations they are unfamiliar with. This annual event helps expose a new group of doctors to the services provided by SDRC. The medical students

then create a poster of what they have learned and present at an event which is open to the public. The medical students, along with clients/staff, did the sculpture walk and lunch downtown



while blindfolded to be given an opportunity to use the skills learned. Feedback provided from medical students included the following, *“this was a fantastic experience that exposed me to many aspects I would never have thought about; I had a wonderful time and would not change anything”* and *“I really learned so much, and hope I am able to share everything this Center has to offer”*. Below are pictures of the students with their poster presentations.



## Partnerships

Three Montana Vocational Rehabilitation staff including their Bureau Chief, Quality Assurance Officer, and VR Counselor/IL Supervisor, attended training at SDRC to learn about the skills of blindness curriculum for their clients and to increase their skills and knowledge when working with people with low vision/blindness. To the right is a picture of three Montana staff who attended the Center with their final creative arts/shop projects.



## Dining in the Dark

Three administrative Montana staff, Sioux Falls field staff including vocational rehabilitation counselors and rehabilitation teachers, vocational rehabilitation counselor supervisor, skills of blindness students, and Center staff all participated in an event called “Dining in the Dark” on November 16. This event gave the students and staff the opportunity to experience selecting meal options from a buffet using sighted guide to their table and eating under a blindfold which allows those without vision loss to increase their awareness of life for a person who is blind. Approximately 24 people attended.



## Recipe for Success

Jeffrey attended SDRC and participated in skills of blindness classes. Jeffrey works in food preparation at Marlin’s Family Restaurant in Mitchell; he has been employed since May 2021. Marlin’s Family Restaurant supported Jeffrey to attend training to develop additional skill sets for the workplace. Jeffrey learned how to navigate safely within his environment; utilized the Seeing AI app on his iPhone to read food tickets; and learned adaptive techniques to prepare, cook, and serve food. Jeffrey applied his skills when he returned home on weekends to work. His employer noticed improvement in his quality of work, and he was given extra duties and is now responsible for maintaining the food on the buffet. Through his motivation and commitment to training, Jeffrey was able to achieve maintaining his employment with Marlin’s.



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*Mary, my instructor taught me skills on my computer and gave me information to obtain a job. I was hired the week before completing my course; I am very happy, and my life is changing for the good”.*

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## Preparation Meets Performance

While in high school, Alex participated in pre-employment transition services by attending Transition Week at the SDRC. Alex was introduced to the world of work by touring different work sites and learning about a variety of vocations. Alex also attended Skills of Blindness Training where he developed skill sets to achieve his goals of independence.

Alex attended the Employment Skills Training program one summer and demonstrated excellent work habits. He was proud of his accomplishments completing fine motor tasks and cleaning. He practiced interviewing skills in the World of Work classes and practiced interviewing to work at the grocery store near his home.

In the fall of 2021, Alex participated in Project Search where he developed job readiness skills in and out of the classroom. Alex gained experience in Dow Rummel's restaurant and housekeeping departments. Alex spent his third and final Project Search rotation on Augustana University campus as a dishwasher. In addition to exploring employment at Augustana, Alex spent 2 days shadowing at University of Sioux Falls' dining service.

While Alex was keeping busy at Project Search during the week, he also worked at Fry'n Pan as a dishwasher on the weekend. Alex graduated from high school in May of 2022. Alex decided to work with the Employment Specialist at the South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind for assistance with finding full-time work. Alex had wonderful references and connections due to his work ethic, customer focus, initiative, and positive attitude. In Fall of 2022, Alex applied, interviewed, and was offered the front-end food service position at University of Sioux Falls (USF). Alex does a great job for USF's dining service and is eager to learn new tasks to better serve the customers.





## Business Enterprise Program



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

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

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

Three vendors were licensed with the Business Enterprise Program in January 2022. Celeste Centenaro managed the café at the Federal Building in Aberdeen and vending in federal properties. She resigned on August 25, 2022. Dan Munce operates a vending route with machines in various locations in Huron. Jeff Nelson manages the café at the Earth Resource Observation and Science Center in Garretson, SD.

The annual vendor's meeting was held in November 2022, through teleconference. Jeff Nelson is the Chair of the Vendor Committee and Dan Munce is the Vice-Chair.

### Interstate Rest Area Vending

Through an agreement with the SD Department of Transportation, the BEP is responsible for vending at the South Dakota rest areas along Interstates 29 and 90. The SD Departments of Transportation and Tourism developed a Revitalized Plan for rest areas. As a result, in 2022, the Vivian Eastbound and Salem Westbound locations underwent renovations.



New contracts with third-party vendors for designated rest areas began in June 2022; contracts were awarded to vendors who bid to contribute the highest commission percentage from sales to the BEP. Current commissions paid to the Business Enterprise Program range from 54 to 68 percent. Income from rest area commissions for June 1, 2021, to May 31, 2022, was \$65,093.00 for I-90 rest areas, and \$19,179.00 for I-29, totaling \$84,271.00.

The revenue from rest area commissions increased from the previous year.

Tourism numbers continued to rise in 202, during the pandemic, and sustained into 2022.

The rest area commissions are utilized to support the Business Enterprise Program. In addition, funds are used to purchase and repair equipment and assist with other expenses such as insurance, bookkeeping, and initial inventory for the vendors.



<b>Earnings and Expenses</b>					
	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
Gross Sales (Total Income)	\$432,909	\$350,259	\$251,625	\$137,960	\$123,784
Merchandise Purchases	\$240,724	\$182,530	\$109,779	\$52,277	\$57,532
Gross Profit	\$192,185	\$167,729	\$141,846	\$85,683	\$66,231
Total Operating Expenses	\$115,735	\$137,289	\$89,628	\$68,468	\$17,451
Net Proceeds	\$65,921	\$30,819	\$43,515	\$21,818	\$48,723
Levied Set Aside Funds	\$11,034	\$7,785	\$6,104	\$5,464	\$8,399
Net Profit to Vendors	\$54,887	\$23,034	\$37,411	\$16,354	\$40,324

The gross profits continued to decline for BEP vendors during 2022. The impact of the pandemic and price increases contributed to the loss of income. In addition, facilities were slow to return from remote work in facilities with cafeterias and vending routes. The vendor's proceeds benefited from commission sales and lower operational expenses as a consequence of closing.

## SERVICE TO THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED OFFICES

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<p><u>Sioux Falls Office</u> 811 East 10th Street, Dept. 22 Sioux Falls, SD 57103-1650 Phone/TTY: (605) 367-5330 Fax: (605) 367-5327 Toll Free: 1-800-265-9679</p>	<p><u>Pierre Office</u> 912 E. Sioux Ave. c/o 500 East Capitol Ave. Pierre, SD 57501-5070 Phone/TTY: (605) 773-3318 Fax: (605) 773-5161 Toll Free: 1-877-873-8500</p>

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



Please contact the SBVI state office in Pierre to request alternative formats.