

South Dakota Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired 2023 Annual Report

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



Service to the Blind
& Visually Impaired

Dear Governor Noem:

I thank you for your service to the great state of South Dakota and invite you to review the 2023 Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) Annual Report. This report's purpose is to inform you of our Board activities and the work of the SBVI rehabilitation counselors and teachers across South Dakota. I have served on the Board of SBVI since 2019, and upon reappointment, I was recently nominated to serve as the Chair of the Board of SBVI. As you know, this Board passionately engages in advising and supporting activities such as White Cane Day, Disability Employment Awareness Month, Disability Awareness Day at the Capitol, and many other events that increase awareness, support, and foster collaboration with all agencies that assist all South Dakotans and their families who are blind or visually impaired, and invariably, works closely with agencies addressing all disability-related challenges.



Our Board membership has representation from individuals and organizations who focus on access for citizens with vision loss and employment. Fifty percent of members are blind or visually impaired, and membership also includes current or former clients of the Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired Vocational Rehabilitation Program. This report reflects the effort, time, and passion of each member of this Board and the fact that the work of many hands really does make a difference.

As the current chair, should we meet, you would not know that I am legally blind. I represent a small, somewhat rare population as a person with Usher Syndrome, Type 2. In short, Usher Syndrome affects both hearing and vision and, in my case, my vision loss is progressive. I come from a generation that is uncomfortable with sharing about personal challenges, but seeing the impact of sharing about personal successes, overcoming barriers, and advocating for others, I desire to do better and, indeed, to champion the many, many wonderful people with disabilities that may otherwise be overlooked.

In closing, our Board thanks you for your continued support, not only for those who are blind and visually impaired but of all persons with disabilities and their families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryan Groeneweg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ryan M. Groeneweg, Ed.S., BCBA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Board of SBVI Members.....	1
Board of SBVI Committees and Meetings.....	2
State Plan Goals and Strategies.....	3
Board Activities.....	5
Vocational Rehabilitation Program.....	7
Independent Living Program.....	19
Rehabilitation Center for the Blind.....	23
Business Enterprise Program.....	32
SBVI Office Locations and Contact Information.....	34

BOARD OF SERVICE TO THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

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

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

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

*Denotes members whose terms expired or who resigned during 2023

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, and functions performed by SBVI that assist 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

Meetings during the report period were held on the following dates via the Dakota Digital Network (DDN) with conference rooms in Rapid City, Pierre, and Sioux Falls with the option to attend virtually by computer or phone:

December 2, 2022, Video Conference

March 10, 2023, Video Conference

June 2, 2023, Video Conference

September 15, 2023, Video Conference

Based on advice of the Board most meetings were held via the DDN 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
- State Plan Development
- Consumer Satisfaction Survey Results

STATE PLAN GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The Board Strategic Planning and Policy Committee met to develop draft goals and strategies for discussion and action by the full Board. The following goals and strategies were approved for submission with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined State Plan:

Goal 1: Increase VR client successful employment outcomes.

Strategy 1.1: Improve timeliness from application to service provision to ensure client engagement.

Strategy 1.2: Increase counselor/client engagement as full partners in the development of services.

Strategy 1.3: Decrease unsuccessful closures through consistent client/counselor engagement and emphasizing the value of service provision.

Goal 2: Improve quality guidance and counseling services to Vocational Rehabilitation clients.

Strategy 2.1: Provide counseling skills training to increase comfort and skills level of counselors.

Strategy 2.2: Improve consumer satisfaction results and follow up with respondents who express dissatisfaction with SBVI services.

Strategy 2.3: Prioritize counseling and guidance by aligning duties with clear expectations for committing time to provide counseling to clients on a consistent basis.

Goal 3: Increase awareness of and access to SBVI services.

Strategy 3.1: Expand outreach in communities to include organizations such as National Federation of the Blind of South Dakota, SD Association of the Blind, Lions Clubs, Sertoma, Rotary, Kiwanis, Optometric Society, and local referral sources.

Strategy 3.2: Annually conduct activities that promote services for individuals with vision loss including those from minority backgrounds, such as individuals working with local Lutheran Social Services Center for New Americans and tribal vocational rehabilitation programs.

Strategy 3.3: Update and ensure accessibility of the SBVI website and outreach materials and procedures that staff utilize to promote services to clients, referral sources, employers, and other entities.

Goal 4: Build capacity to increase staff engagement, expertise, and retention of qualified staff.

Strategy 4.1: Create individual development plans with counselors based on training and development needs.

Strategy 4.2: Cross train staff to ensure sustainability and build expertise.

Strategy 4.3: Provide mentoring opportunities for newer staff with a focus on understanding blind culture.

Goal 5: Strengthen the agency's ability to provide quality services to minority populations in South Dakota.

Strategy 5.1: Provide training opportunities to SBVI staff on culturally relevant service provision and cultural sensitivity.

Strategy 5.2: Collaborate with Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs to ensure that eligible individuals are served in an effective and efficient manner on reservations and tribal lands.

Strategy 5.3: Inform minority populations of vocational rehabilitation services and the role of SBVI to meet the needs of those who are blind or visually impaired in these populations.

Goal 6: Improve coordination of services to facilitate the transition of students from high school to postsecondary education and/or training in preparation for employment.

Strategy 6.1: Increase the number of potentially eligible students referred by SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach Consultants and Vision Transition Specialist.

Strategy 6.2: Increase the provision of pre-employment transition services to students with visual impairments through outreach to public and Tribal schools across South Dakota.

Strategy 6.3: Promote participation in transition activities such as Project Skills, Project Search, Youth Leadership Forum, Rehab. Center for the Blind Transition Week, and Employment Skills Training, for students who are blind or visually impaired.

Strategy 6.4: Ensure that families are informed of opportunities for community resources available to assist their youth to transition successfully.

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 2023 Governor's Awards ceremony on October 30th in the state capitol rotunda.



Gov. Noem presented awards to the following 2023 recipients:

- Sandy Hook, Pierre – Distinguished Service
- Carissa Brandt, Pierre – Outstanding Employee with a Disability
- Patty Kuglitsch, Sioux Falls – Outstanding Individual with a Disability
- Yakkity Yak Coffee Shack, Sioux Falls – Outstanding Private Employer (Small Employer)
- AMCON Distributing Company, Rapid City – Outstanding Private Employer (Large Employer)
- City of Rapid City, Rapid City – Outstanding Public Employer
- Ashley Halvorson, Beresford – Outstanding Transition Services

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

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 2023 was "**Advancing Access & Equity.**"



NDEAM with events was held in fifteen communities around the state. Education and awareness activities were held in person and virtually addressing topics related to the workforce and disabilities. Two members of the Board served on the committee to select activities and determine financial support. The Board of SBVI sponsors NDEAM events on an annual basis.

White Cane Day

Governor Noem released a proclamation declaring October 15, 2023, White Cane Day in South Dakota to recognize the capabilities and aspirations of citizens who are blind or visually impaired. The proclamation was distributed to members of the Board of SBVI to share at white cane events they participated in.



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. Due to inclement weather, out of town organizations were not able to be present for the event on February 22. SBVI supplied vision simulators, Grandpa's White Cane books, and annual reports for the Board of SBVI table. The next Disability Day at the Capitol is scheduled for February 28, 2024.

A public forum was held on April 21, 2023, in conjunction with the National Federation of the Blind of South Dakota convention in Rapid City. SBVI shared draft goals and strategies for the state plan. Discussion was held on orientation and mobility services, ADA requirements for building accessibility, transportation issues and costs, and serving as an SBVI Board member.

A public forum was held via Dakota Digital Network on December 8, 2023, to offer the opportunity for input on the SBVI portion of the state plan with an emphasis on goals and strategies developed by the Board of SBVI. Conference room sites with audio visual equipment were hosted in Aberdeen, Rapid City, Pierre, and Sioux Falls with the option to attend virtually by phone or computer. Eighteen people attended the forum, and no suggestions were made for edits to the state plan.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

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 South Dakota. The reporting below reflects data that the Rehabilitation Service Administration tracks based on Program Year July 1, 2022– June 30, 2023.

Program Year Performance

- 392 people were served through the SBVI VR program, compared to 401 people the previous year.
- 61 people were successfully rehabilitated through the vocational rehabilitation program, compared to 64 the previous program year.

“South Dakota Rated Fifth in the Nation for Employment Rate of People with Disabilities”

The 2023 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium Report, a compilation of data from multiple sources such as the Social Security Administration and the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, identified South Dakota as the 5th highest employment rate for people with disabilities in the nation at 51.2%. This is an increase from last year’s rate of 46.6% and well above the national average of 40.7%. This highlights the work ethic of people with disabilities in South Dakota, as well as businesses who are benefited by hiring people with disabilities. There is more work to do; however, the employment of people without disabilities is 83.6%.

Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Performance Measures

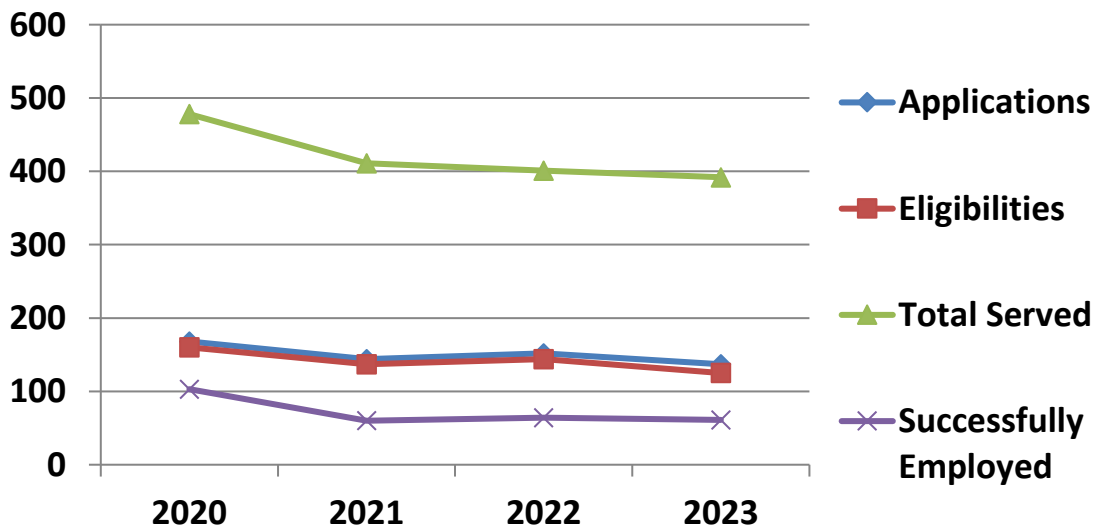
RSA Performance Measures	Program Year 2022 Negotiated Levels - SD	Program Year 2022 Actual - SD	National Blind Agency Average	SD Blind Actual - SD
Employment rate 2 nd quarter after exit	52.7%	61.8%	46%	59.8%
Employment rate 4 th quarter after exit	50.2%	56%	43%	50.9%
Median Earnings 2 nd quarter after exit	\$2,900	\$3,599	\$7,949	\$5,337
Credential Attainment Rate	35%	34%	41%	22.2%
Measurable Skills Gains Rate	44%	49.8%	56%	51.2%

Each year, state VR programs are required to negotiate performance measures with RSA. These measures are agreed upon by General VR (SD-G), Blind VR (SD-B) and RSA based on each state’s unique circumstances, such as labor market information and barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities. For VR clients who received services in South Dakota, VR met and exceeded all performance measures, except for credential attainment, at one percent below the negotiated level.

Included in the table above is national and SD-B agency data. SD-B was rated third highest among the twenty-two Blind VR agencies in the country for employment rate second quarter after exit and fifth in the nation for highest employment rate fourth quarter after exit. These measures show that SBVI clients are maintaining their jobs long-term after their case is closed and they are no longer receiving services. SD-B has improved in measurable skills gains, but needs to increase credential attainment rate, rating twentieth among the twenty-two blind agencies.

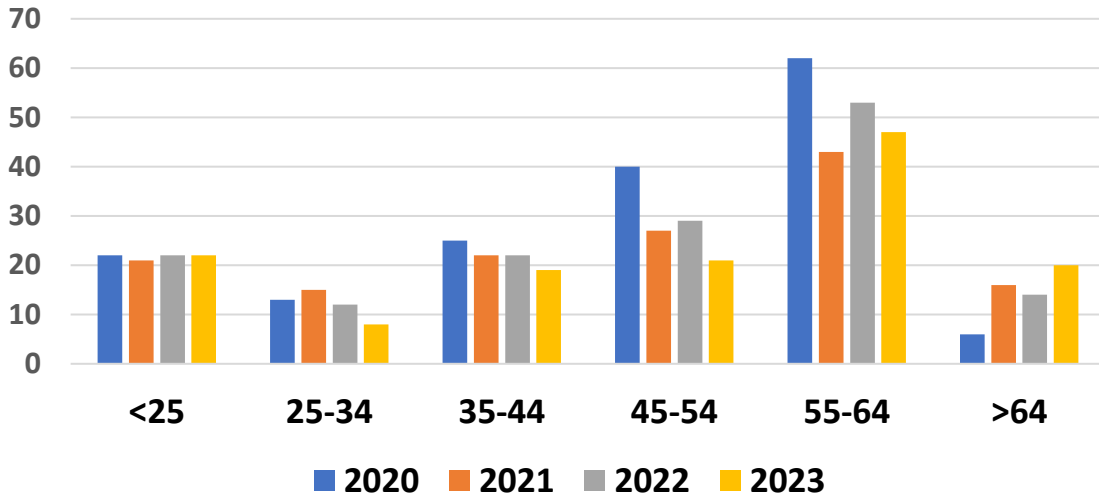
SBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Caseload Summary

The following chart illustrates the number of people who have applied for and received services from the SBVI vocational rehabilitation program over the past four years. SBVI counselors saw a slight decrease in the number of vocational rehabilitation applications in the most recent year. There were 137 applications, 125 eligibilities, a total of 392 individuals served, and 61 clients exited as successfully employed.



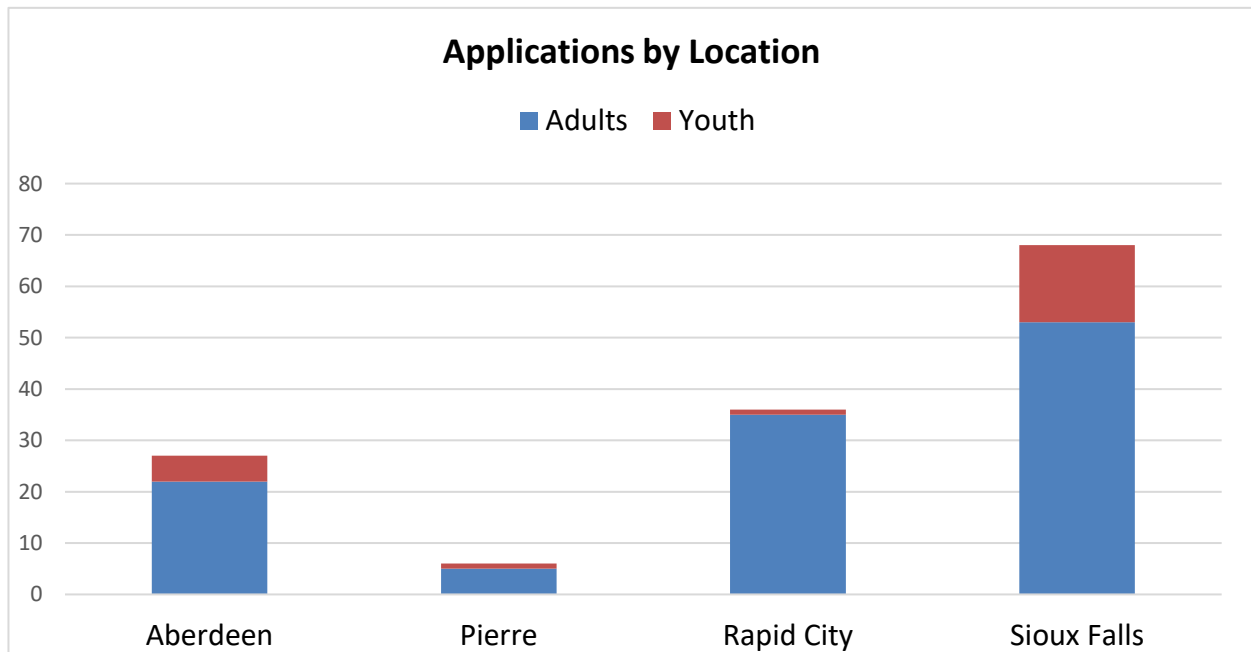
Although SBVI takes applications from individuals starting at age 14, historically most applicants who apply for services are between the ages of 55-64 due to the progressive nature of their vision loss. In 2023, SBVI saw a slight increase in applications for individuals over 64 years of age.

Age at Application

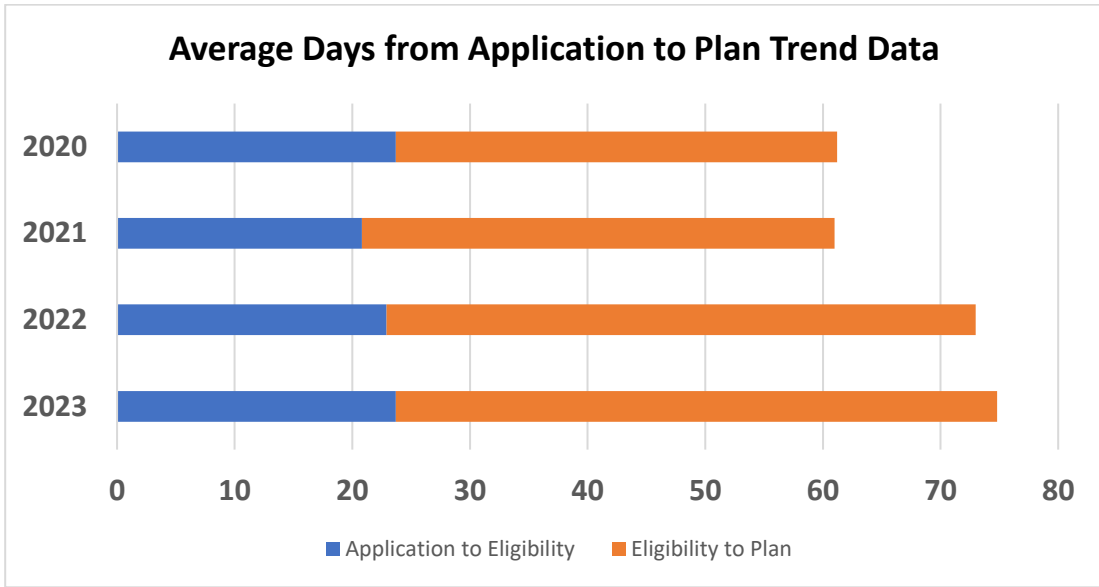


SBVI completed 115 new applications from adults and 22 applications from students and youth. Youth is defined as individuals in the vocational rehabilitation program under the age of 25. Sioux Falls obtained the most VR applications of adults and youth, for a total of 68 applicants. Rapid City and Pierre obtained one application for youth for the year. Increased outreach to schools and SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired outreach consultants is needed to increase applicants of students and youth.

Applications by Location

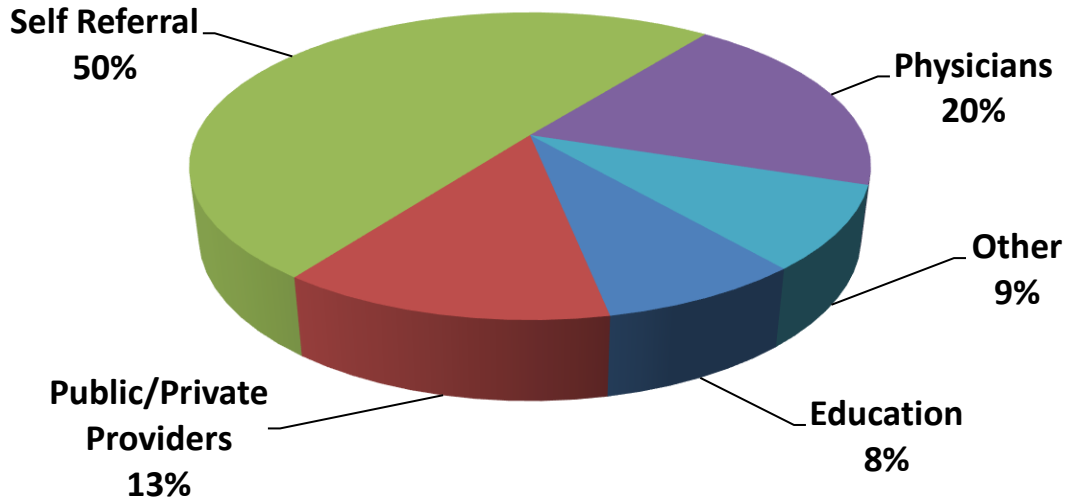


Timeliness of Services



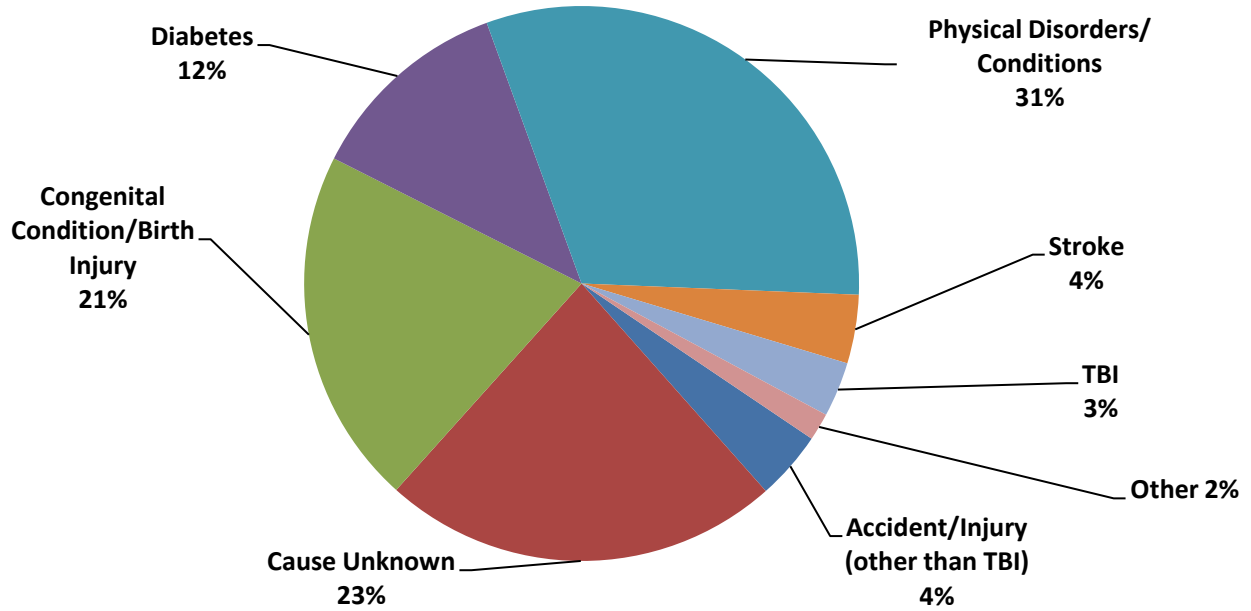
In 2020, the average days from application to plan was 61 days. This has increased in 2023 to an average of 75 days, an increase of 23%, which may impact timeliness of services. A goal for SBVI is to minimize the number of days between application to plan, focusing on maintaining client motivation and keeping them engaged in services.

Referral Sources



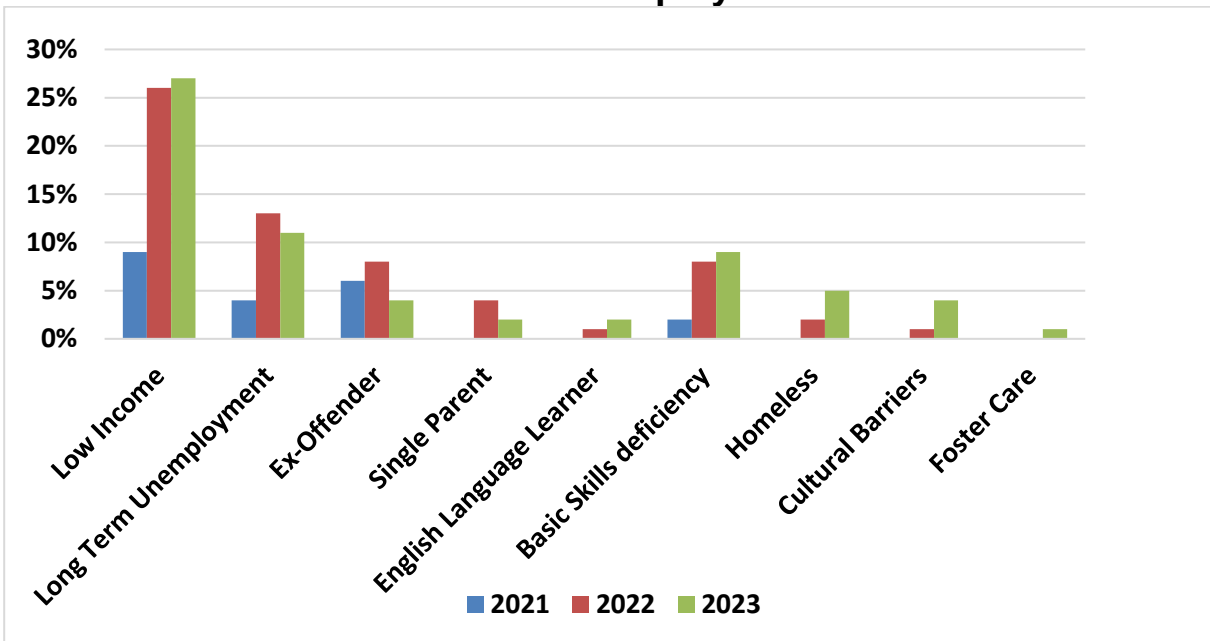
Referrals from self/family/friends remain the largest source for applicants. SBVI experienced a decline in referrals from physicians and an increase in other public and private providers, and education. With a focus on transition services to students, SBVI staff will continue to increase outreach efforts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

Causes of Impairments



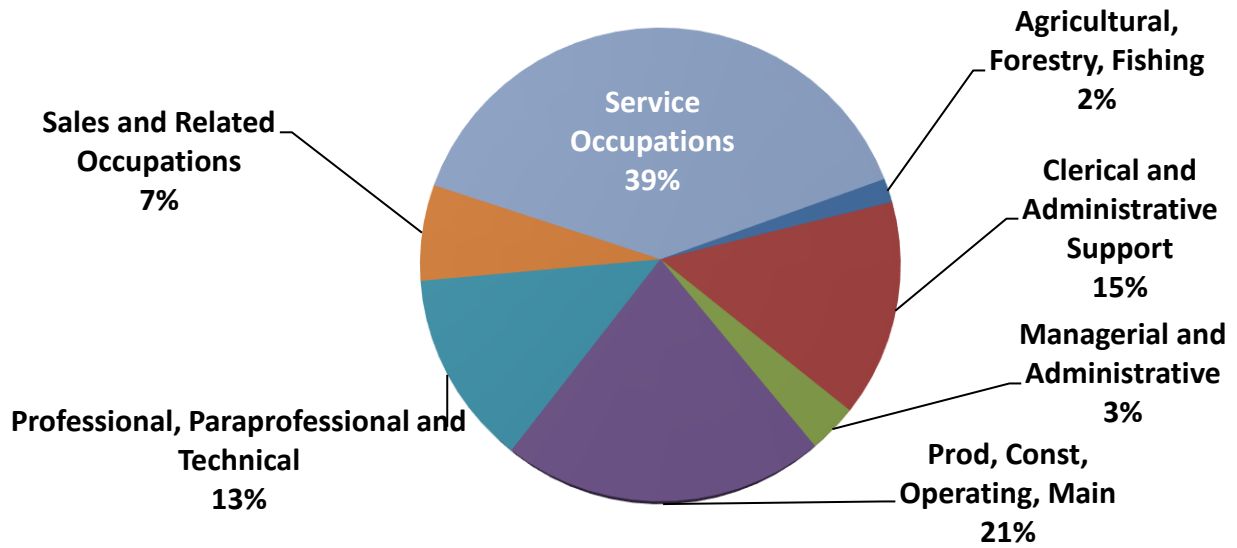
For VR clients determined eligible for the program, the cause of visual impairment for most of them was due to either a physical disorder (31%), an unknown cause (23%), congenital condition/birth injury (21%), or diabetes (12%).

Barriers to Employment

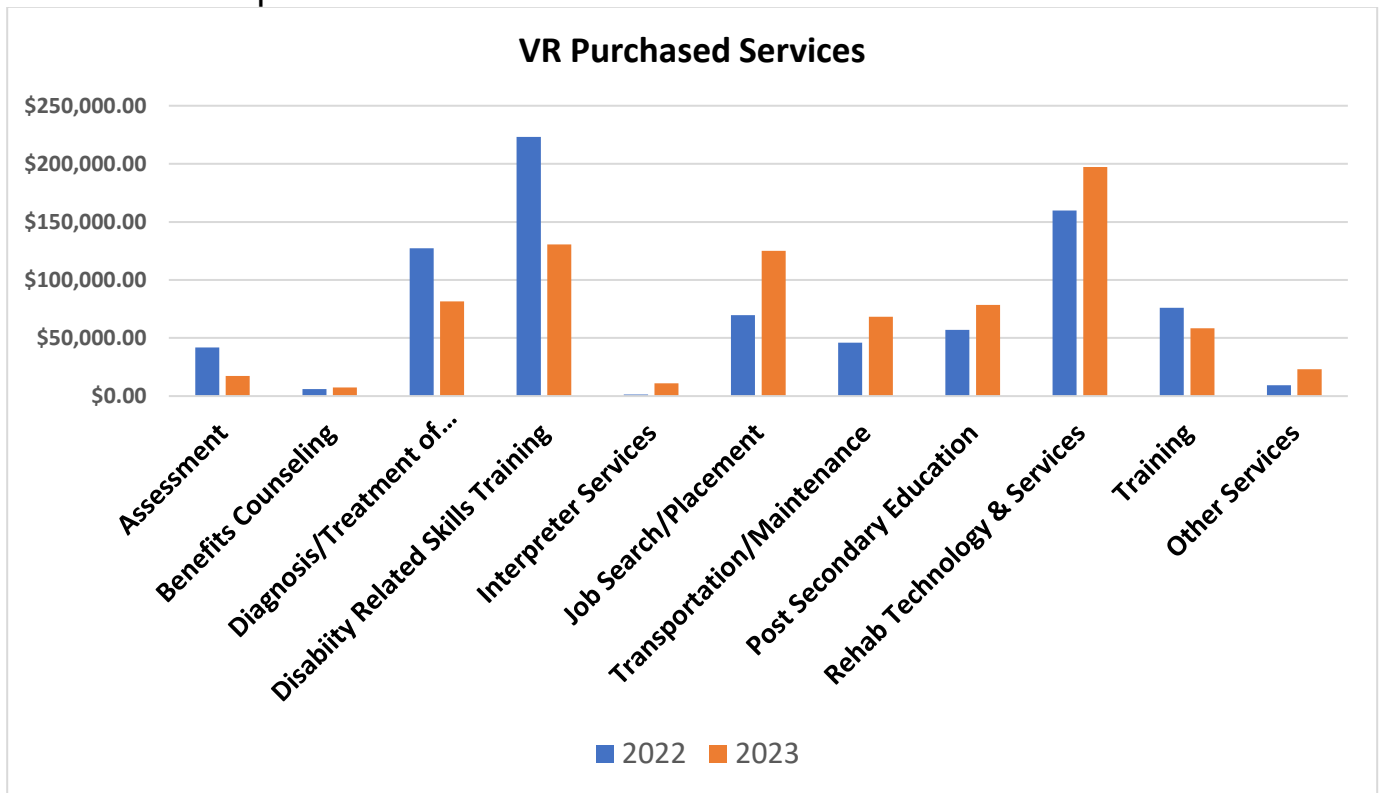


SBVI identifies barriers clients are experiencing that impact their ability to obtain work without assistance. The above chart shows the percentage of clients who are experiencing these barriers when SBVI first develops a plan of services with them. The main barriers to employment include low income,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

Occupations Of Individuals Successfully Employed

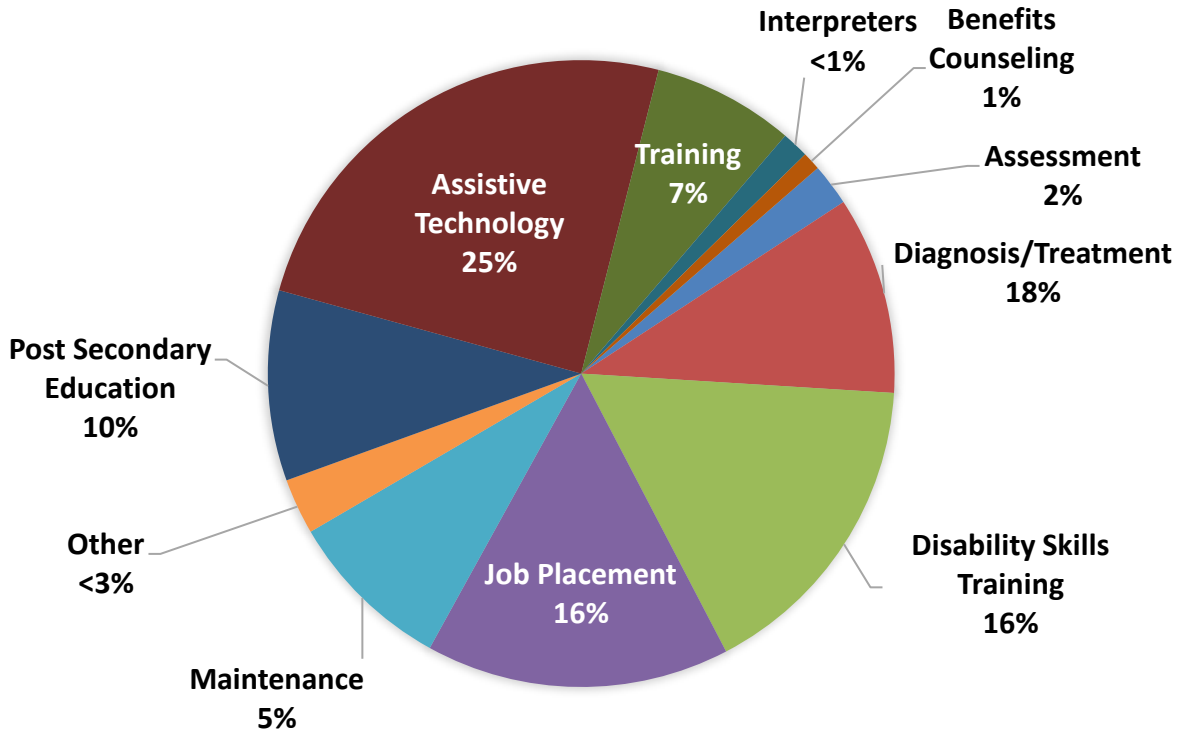


The Vocational Rehabilitation program helped 61 individuals to achieve their employment goals. This chart reflects the occupations of people successfully employed, with 39 percent in service occupations and 21 percent in production, construction, operating and maintenance occupations.



SBVI spent \$798,596.32 on client services for VR clients, with a substantial increase from the previous year in job search/placement services and rehabilitation technology and services. The increase in rehabilitation technology and services may be due to a change in policy, no longer requiring VR clients to meet financial need to receive assistive technology devices. There was also a surprising dip in the purchase of physical restoration services and disability-related skills training when compared to the previous year.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services Provided



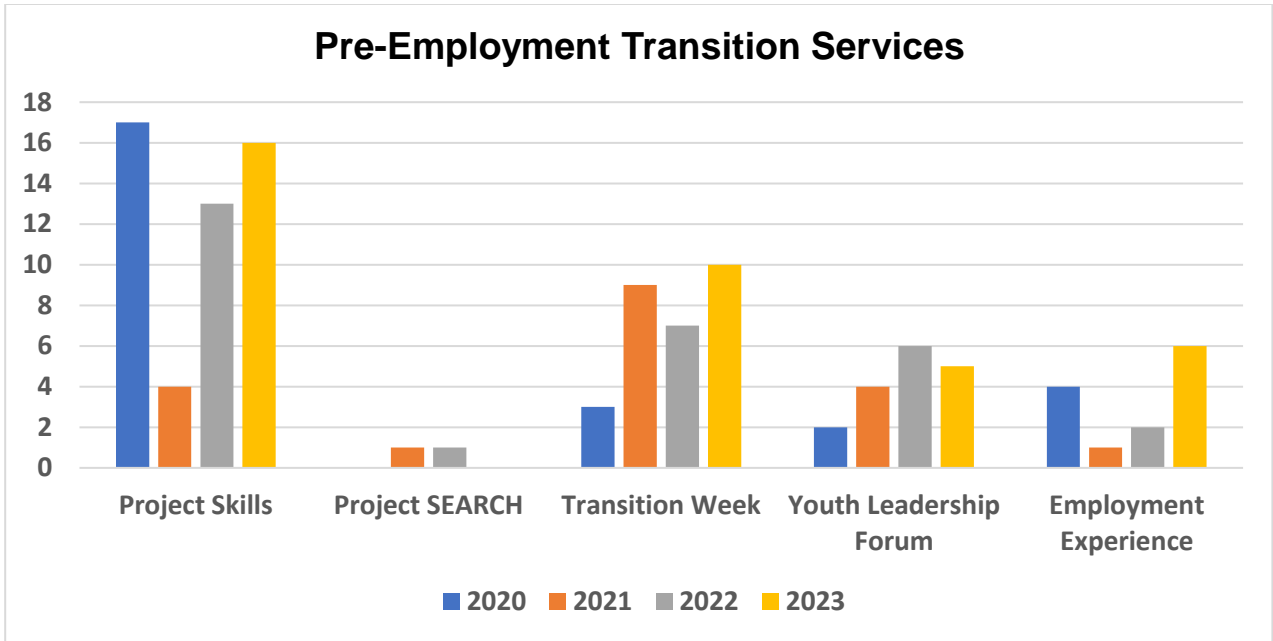
The above chart reflects the wide variety of services SBVI provides to assist clients to obtain or maintain employment. SBVI assists clients to overcome their vision-related impediments to employment by providing diagnostic and treatment services to improve their vision, and disability skills training and assistive technology to overcome vision-related 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 assistive technology, diagnosis and treatment, disability skills training, and job placement services, comprising 75 percent of all services provided.

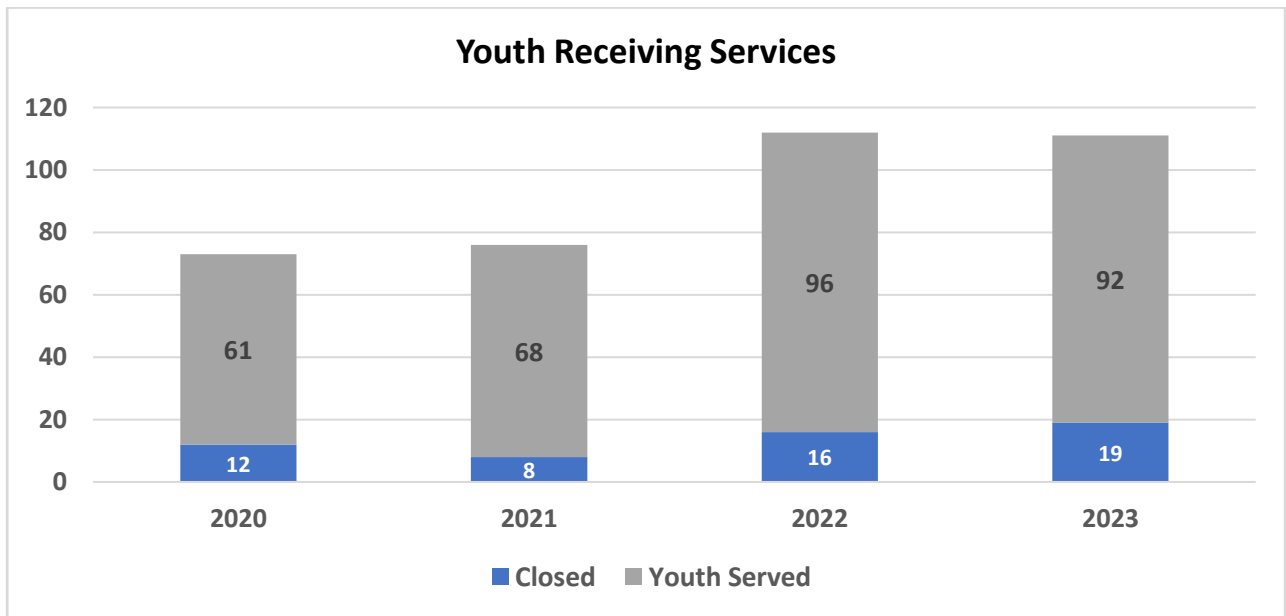
Employment Data of Successfully Employed Clients at Closure

Total Cases	Average Weekly Hours	Average Weekly Wage	Average Hourly Wage
61	31	\$564.96	\$18.22

SBVI clients who received services and were closed successfully employed average a 31-hour work week, with an average hourly wage of \$18.22. This is a 24 percent increase from last year's average hourly wage of \$14.64 and results in a higher average weekly wage of about \$565. This has a total impact of \$1,792,053.60 annual income for 61 individuals.



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. In 2023, SBVI increased the work-based learning experiences for students compared to last year.

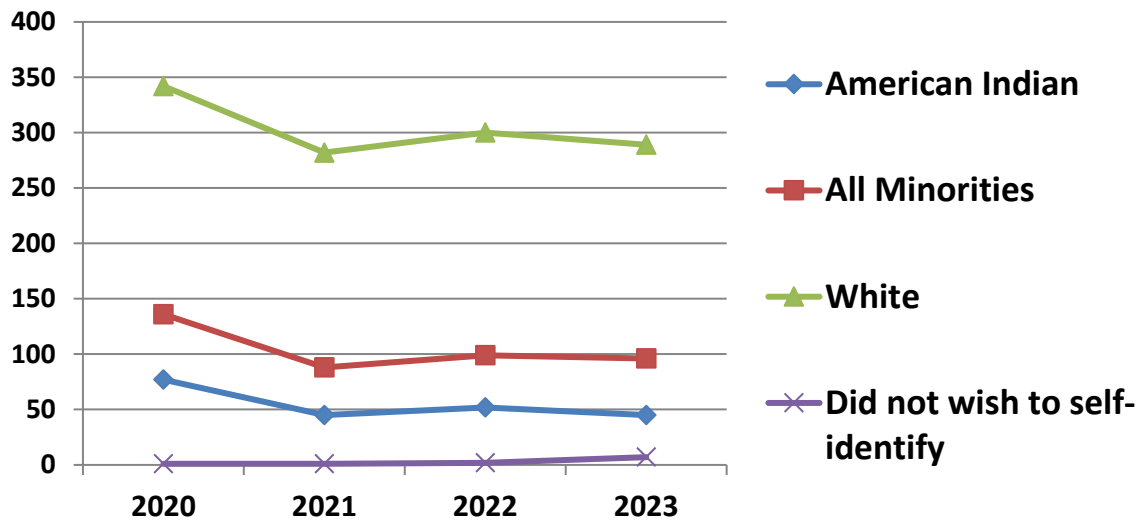


SBVI has worked closely with public schools and the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired to increase employment experiences for youth ages 16-24. SBVI collaborates with the Division of Rehabilitation Services, Departments of Education, Labor and Regulation, and Social Services to assist with 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 definition 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, 11 percent of individuals served by SBVI were of American Indian descent, twenty four percent of all individuals served reported coming from a minority background and seven participants did not wish to identify their race or ethnicity.



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. Counselors also provide outreach to Bureau of Indian Affairs schools located in their territories.

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 14th year that SBVI has conducted this annual survey.

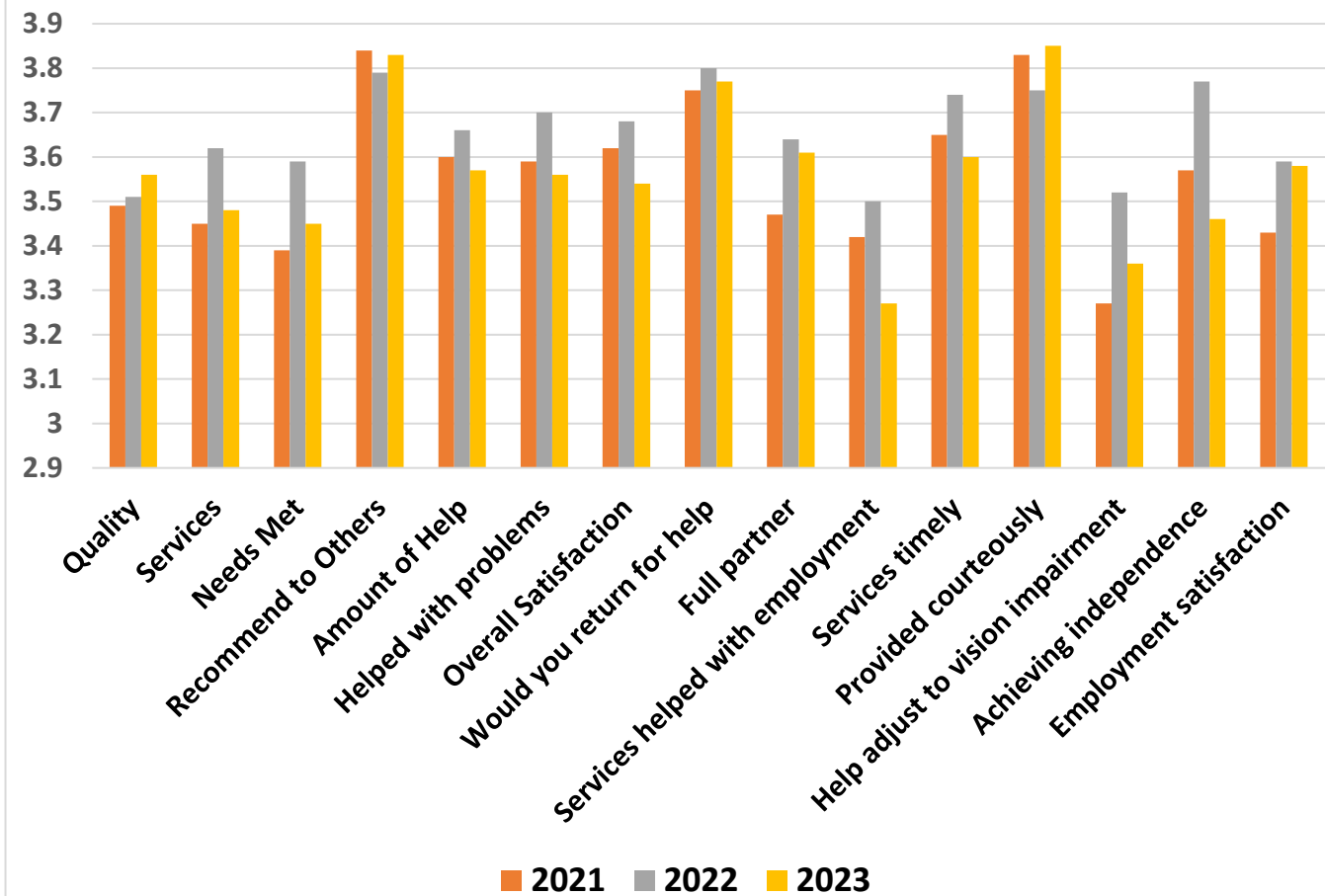
Between October 1, 2022, and September 30, 2023, the survey was sent out to 119 individuals who received services and were closed from the SBVI vocational rehabilitation

program during the past year. Surveys were sent via mail, SurveyMonkey by email, or contacted by phone, based on their preference.

Of the 119 questionnaires, 57 were returned, resulting in a 48 percent response rate. All 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, and request follow up, if needed.

Satisfaction Survey Questions	Average Rating
1. How would you rate the quality of service you received?	3.56
2. Did you get the kind of service you wanted?	3.48
3. To what extent has our program met your needs?	3.45
4. If a friend needed similar help, would you recommend our program to him/her?	3.83
5. How satisfied are you with the amount of help you received?	3.57
6. Have the services you received helped you to deal more effectively with your problems?	3.56
7. In an overall, general sense, how satisfied are you with the service you received?	3.54
8. If you were to seek help again, would you come back to our program?	3.77
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?	3.27
11. Were information and services provided to you in a timely manner?	3.60
12. Were information and services provided to you in a courteous manner?	3.85
13. Did the services help you adjust to your visual impairment?	3.36
14. How beneficial were services in assisting you in achieving more independence?	3.46
15. How satisfied are you with the employment that you obtained as a result of Vocational Rehabilitation Services?	3.58

Satisfaction With VR Services Trend Data



Compared to the previous two years, results show improvement in quality and courteous services, and that those who responded would recommend our services to others. Aspects needing improvement include providing services that help with employment, helping with adjustment to vision impairment, and achieving independence.

CAN-DO Attitude Success Story



Our daughter Molly has had quite a journey! Born with cataracts in both eyes, she had her first of many eye surgeries at only a week old. Once she reached school age, she was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, and learning disabilities in comprehension and math. Even though school and peer relationships were a challenge, Molly never gave up her CAN-DO attitude and always tried her best in school. She made it through that trying time and even tried her hand at martial arts, eventually earning a black belt. Molly was in honor choir and show choir in middle school and started to come out of her shy introverted nature to make a few friends.

Once she was old enough to have lens implant surgery, Molly was able to get vision that we all take for granted. Although her eyesight is better, she would still struggle with nystagmus and glaucoma, but was diligent about taking her medication to keep her eyes healthy. Molly then began getting sick more than usual with lots of sinus and lung infections that would come and go. She kept her grades up and even started her first job at a day care center with the help of Project Skills. She learned to drive a car and took her first big steps towards independence. Molly developed a deep love for children, especially those who have physical or other disabilities like her. Molly's sweetness and patience made her a natural and all children just seemed to gravitate to her. During her senior year, she told me she wanted to work as a teacher's aide. My husband and I worried, knowing that it would be a challenge for her to pass the paraprofessional test. The summer after high school she continued to work with the Project Skills program and took some college courses at Northern State University.

Her health took a turn for the worse and after testing she was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis. This was the reason behind a large majority of her vision and health issues. We got her on an aggressive treatment plan, and she was able to get things under control. Learning a new lifestyle of medications and treatments are a challenge for anyone, but Molly always kept that positive attitude. She went to the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind in Sioux Falls for four months to live in an apartment with assistance from vocational rehabilitation services to learn life skills and study for the paraprofessional test. She was offered a job as a teacher's aide at her old elementary school and passed the test the first time she took it! She was so proud and jumped right in and began working full time at Lincoln Elementary with special education pre-school children.

Molly has become an amazing woman, educator, daughter, and friend, touching so many lives with her sweetness, laughter, and love. My husband and I are so proud of all that she has accomplished, and we know that her future is very bright!

INDEPENDENT LIVING BLIND PROGRAM (ILB)

People who acquire vision loss later in life often struggle with performing 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 resume their daily activities despite their vision loss. Through training and the provision of magnification devices, the individual can learn to use their remaining vision, which leads to an improvement in their quality of life.

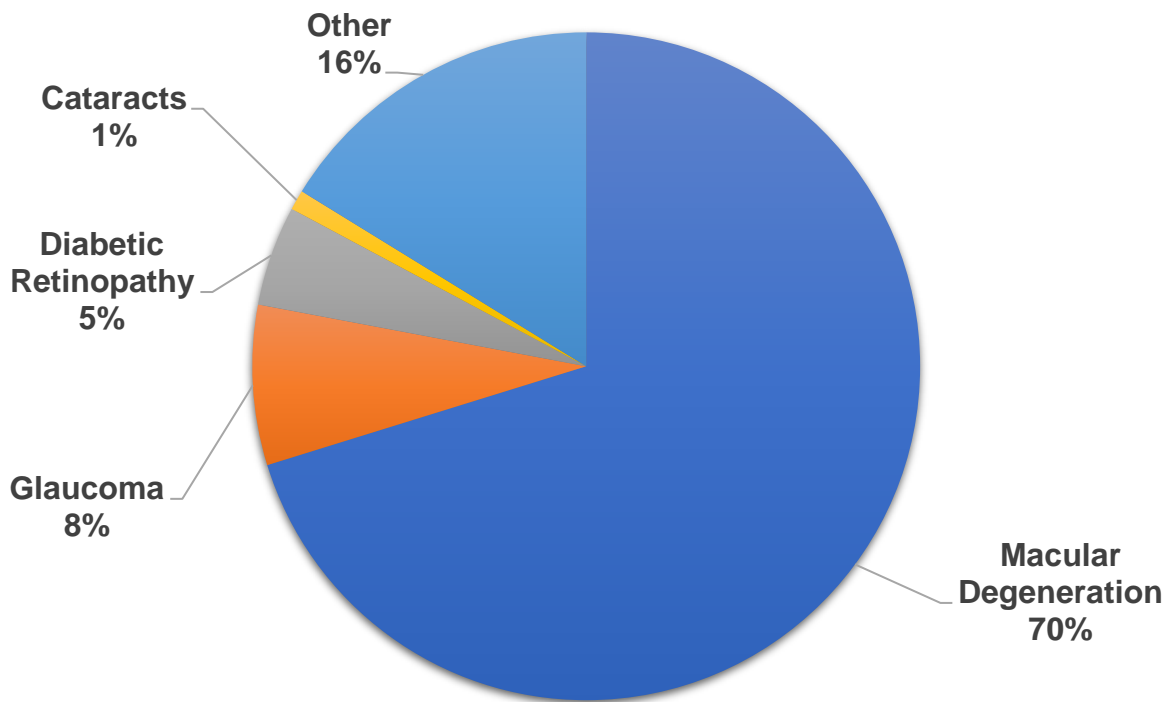
In FY 2023, the ILB program assisted 413 individuals with vision loss compared to 454 in FY2022. Staff closed 205 cases in 2023 compared to 201 in 2022. The chart below provides information on the types of services provided to people in 2023.

Type of Service and Description	Number of People
Communication Skills – training in the use of telephones, writing guides, telling time, reading using large print or braille, etc.	341
Daily Living Skills – training in the use of adaptive aids and assistive technology for daily living	333
Low Vision Devices & Services – training and acquisition of items such as magnifiers, solar shields, video magnifiers (CCTVs), talking equipment, adaptive cooking items, etc.	395
Counseling – Peer, individual, or group counseling to assist with adjustment to visual impairment and blindness	89
Low Vision Exams – Evaluations to identify strategies and devices for enhancing visual performance	158
Advocacy Training – participation in advocacy training activities such as consumer organization meetings and peer support groups	14
Referral to Other Agencies – Referral to other service providers, programs, and agencies.	305
Orientation and Mobility – Travel training to learn how to travel safely and independently.	69

Types of Eye Diseases for People Served

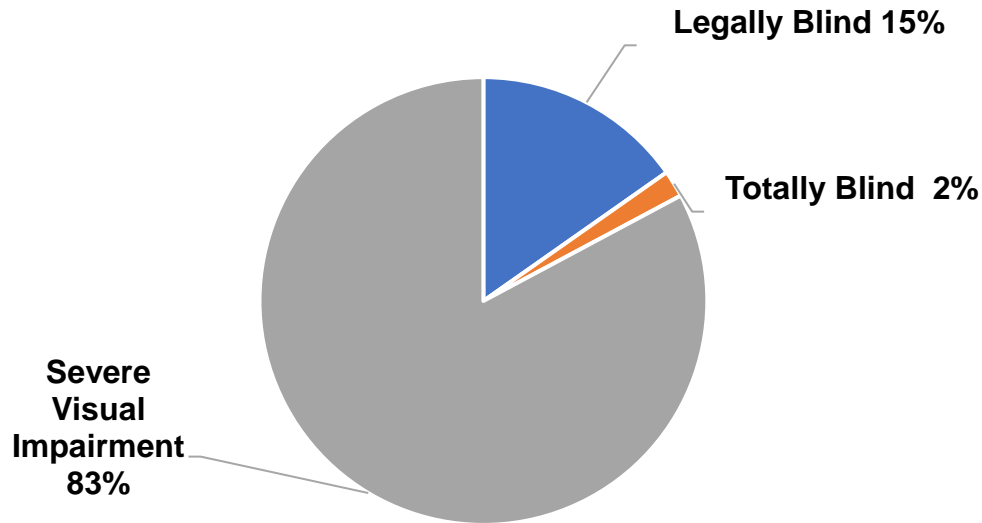
Macular degeneration was the primary cause of vision loss in 290 (70%) of the 413 individuals who received services in 2023, as reflected in the following chart. When reviewing the primary types of eye diseases among the people served in the IL program, macular degeneration occurs more frequently than others listed. Macular degeneration is an eye disease that 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 while.

Causes of Vision Loss

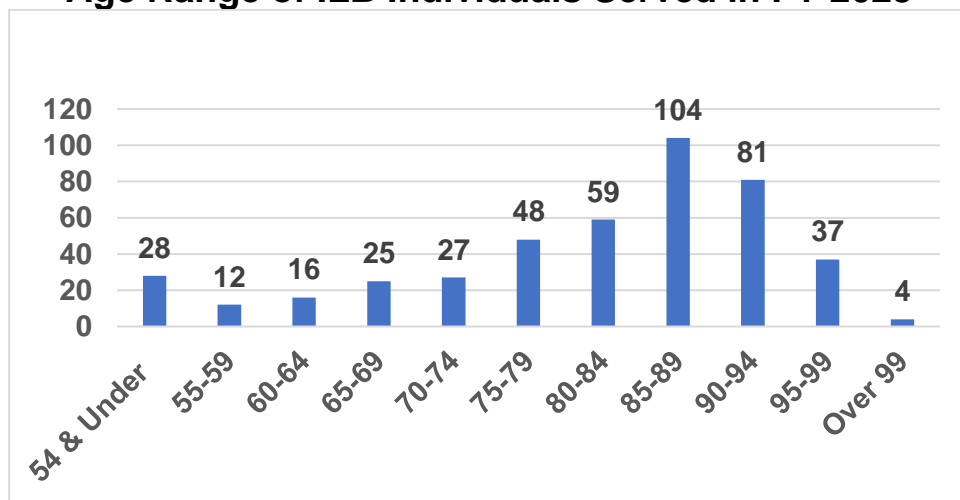


Degree of Vision Loss

The following chart explains the degree of vision loss experienced by the 413 individuals (over age 55) served in 2023. Only eight people served in the program (3%) experienced total blindness. Individuals with some remaining vision are experiencing varying degrees of severe visual impairment, which makes up 342 or 83% of the people served. Rehabilitation Teachers provide training along with adaptive devices to encourage the individual to use their remaining vision which helps them complete activities of daily living.



Age Range of ILB Individuals Served in FY 2023



The target population for the ILB program is individuals over 55; however, Rehabilitation Teachers also served 28 individuals under age 55 experiencing vision loss. As reflected in the chart above, 285, or 64% percent, were over the age of 80, with four 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 maintain or regain their independence. Two hundred and six surveys were sent out to those whose services ended during the 2023 fiscal year. Ninety-six people responded to the survey, which is a 46% response rate. Phone calls were made to people who didn't respond to the paper survey to increase the feedback about services. Below are several comments from surveys returned to the agency:

- *Thanks so much for your help. The lights and cane were beneficial.*
- *Wonderful service for the blind. I don't know what I would do without it.*
- *We were very satisfied and feel the service is a great help to independence and confidence in daily living.*
- *I read a lot and really appreciate the help reading. Thank you. I have already recommended to friends.*
- *The services were helpful for my mom. We appreciate all the services provided by DHS and SBVI.*
- *This was such a great service! Thank you. Nancy is a wonderful help!*
- *Your representative did a very nice job for me. She was nice, pleasant, and very informative. I learned a lot just visiting with her.*

Electronic Video Magnification (CCTV) Lease/Loan Program

SBVI created the CCTV Lease/Loan Program in 2004 with memorial funds explicitly donated for providing devices for older citizens that could not be purchased using the limited Older Blind grant funds. The CCTVs provide a magnified image with a substantially higher resolution for individuals with low vision. What started out as a pilot project with 24 units has resulted in a program that many people rely on to accomplish their daily tasks.

As technology changed, SBVI expanded the type of machines available to include optical character recognition (OCR) which magnifies and offers 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 has 209 machines available and has purchased over 425 machines since it started. The magnification devices from this program have been provided to an estimated 1,400 older citizens with low vision since 2004.

REHABILITATION CENTER FOR THE BLIND

The South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind (SDRC) in Sioux Falls, SD, 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 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 disabilities 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 2023, there were 26 men and 41 women who attended training at the Center, including 10 high school transition-age students who attended Transition Week. The demographics of students attending the training were 61 percent women and 39 percent men, with an average age of 38 years. Nineteen percent were blind, nineteen percent were legally

blind, twenty-five percent were visually impaired, thirty percent were staff in new employee training, and six percent were medical students. Sixty percent of trainees had at least one type of secondary disability. The top 5 secondary disabilities this year were emotional/mental health, deaf/hearing impairment, diabetes, and learning disabilities. Trainees were referred from all district offices, with seventy-two percent of all referrals from the Sioux Falls office and twenty-three percent from Aberdeen.

Low Vision Clinics

Low vision evaluations with Dr. Nick Wenande occur on the second Wednesday of each month. In 2023, there were 9 clinics serving 48 people, a slight decrease from 50 in 2022. There was a slight decrease in clinics due to the remodel and weather. Individuals referred from the Older Blind Independent Living program made up sixty percent and referrals from the Vocational Rehabilitation program made up forty percent.



April showing a client a CCTV in the newly remodeled Low Vision Room.

Assistive Technology (AT) Walk-in Clinics

Computers using assistive technology are vital to assist people with visual impairments to work remotely and stay connected. In 2023, 119 people participated in assistive technology training including AT walk-in clinics or telephone, FaceTime, email, or video conferencing platforms like Teams or Zoom. This was an increase compared to 104 people in 2022. This training allows people to obtain technical assistance as they need it, not just while they are attending classes at SDRC.

Transition Week 2023

Transition week was held June 11-15 with 10 students in attendance. The students reported some of their favorite activities included business tours and night activities which entailed Wild Water West, Dave & Busters, bowling, and Great Shots. The students toured the Earth Resources Observation and Science (EROS) Center to learn more about the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) and how this could be a future employment option. Tours of Humane Society, Amazon Fulfillment Center, and Kelo-Land News taught students about employment opportunities at these businesses. The director of accessibility at Augustana College presented and the students learned the importance of connecting with the disability coordinator if planning to attend college after high school. Finally, representatives from the South Dakota Association of the Blind presented on the importance of consumer organizations and how they can become more involved.



A photo of the Transition Students with Jeff Nelson at EROS.



A group photo of the Transition Week attendees outside after their tour of the Sioux Falls Area Humane Society.

South Dakota Vocational Resources

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors from the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) refer individuals to employment skills training (EST) for a variety of assessments, accommodations evaluations, to gain computer skills, make a career change, explore career options, and learn interviewing skills. The adaptive skills of blindness classes help clients with vision loss gain additional independent living skills and EST helps prepare them for future employment or college. The Center staff work as a team with the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and the client to figure out the best steps to help reach their employment goal. The Employment Skills Supervisor is a Certified Brain Injury Specialist who served three individuals with a brain injury in 2023, and contacted 116 organizations, families, and service providers to help individuals with brain injuries connect with available resources.

Employment Skills Training (EST) assisted 57 individuals in 2023, as compared to 82 in 2022; 57 attended in-person EST. The decrease was due to no virtual training needs identified by VR counselors, and the Center underwent a remodel. Training was relocated to a workspace within the Department of Health. Some clients chose to start training after the remodel was completed. Post-remodel, 22 clients started training and 8 clients have completed training.



A panoramic picture of the Employment Skills Training area.

Job placement services were provided to 49 individuals in 2023, compared to 47 served in 2022. A new Employment Specialist was hired after a three-month vacancy, and due to her diligent work, job placement service referrals significantly increased within the first four months of her employment. During that time, 20% of clients she worked with obtained competitive employment and 20% received job coaching services to maintain employment. The remainder of the individuals are actively seeking competitive employment with three more clients accepting positions in October 2023.

Summary of Services

SDRC Service	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
Transition Students	5	9	7	10
Low Vision Patients	23	48	50	48
Employment Specialist	26	26	47	49
Skills of Blindness	34	36	50	64
Employment Skills Training	38	83	82	57
AT Walk-in Clinic & First Friday Classes	150	87	104	119
Total	275	289	340	347

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 3.68 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 for providing 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 liked reading and being around people with similar disabilities.”.

“Excellent teachers and all together amazing experience.”.

“I liked being able to learn the skills to help my needs; to be independent.”; and

“I like that they allow you to be independent but are still hands on if you need assistance.”.

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 3.79 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 the knowledge base that was available to me. I was able to get most of my questions answered right away. Very helpful.”.

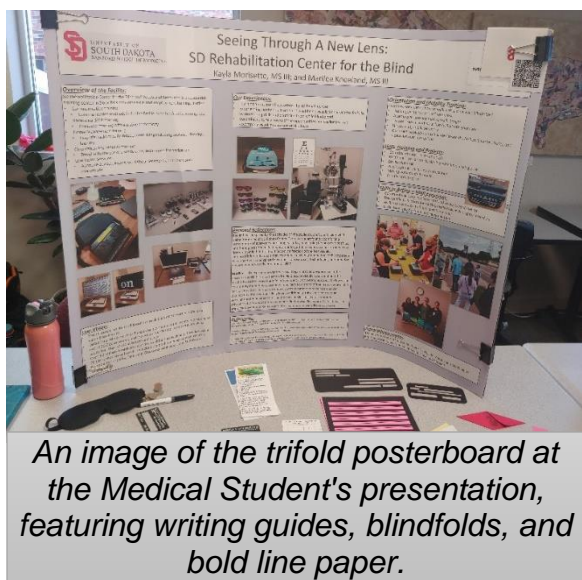
“Gaining the ability and knowledge that I will be able to go into the work world and find a stable job.”.

“The entire experience was great! The instructor Mary Tommeraasen was terrific. Also, the entire staff made me feel welcome and respected as a person. Everyone was great.”;

“I liked the patience and understanding that I received from Mary to meet my needs, as well as explaining everything so thoroughly to my understanding.”; and “Mary was very hands-on and helped, if need be, even if I didn't want to do something. she was very encouraging.”

When asked how EST can be improved - the main response was *“nothing”*. One client responded, *“I don't really see much need for any improvements because everything that I needed was provided and then some. I'm very appreciative on all that I received, and all the staff members are very friendly as well. What a great experience! Thank you!”*

USD Medical Students



An image of the trifold posterboard at the Medical Student's presentation, featuring writing guides, blindfolds, and bold line paper.



A group photo of the medical students with their projects from Creative Arts and Home Mechanics during their time at the Rehab Center.

Four University of South Dakota (USD) medical students participated in three days of cultural immersion at the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, August 23-25. 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 it at an event that is open to the public. The medical students, along with clients/staff traveled to the Empire Mall using the Sioux Area Metro and ate lunch in the food court at the mall while blindfolded to be given an opportunity to use the skills learned. Feedback provided by medical students included the following, *“I had a very enjoyable time while learning about everything. I will definitely think of this facility if I see anyone with vision impairments in my future medical practice.”* and *“I really liked learning about sighted guide and how it's a skill we will have! Learning ways, we can support people with visual impairments should definitely be kept in the agenda”*. Shown above are pictures of the students with their poster presentations.

Workplace Transformation

The South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind remodel started towards the end of February with all staff needing to be out of the offices by February 24th so Interstate Office Products could remove office furniture the following week. Painting and new flooring were completed, then furniture delivered on March 15. After installation of furniture and final touches on paint, staff moved back to the center by March 27. Staff relocated to other offices during the remodel to continue to serve clients, but it did impact the level of training that could be provided. The remodel was featured by Jodi Schwan in the Sioux Falls Business Journal:



<https://www.siouxfalls.business/striking-workspace-transformation-positions-state-office-to-better-serve-visually-impaired/>

“The Tough, The Brave, The Empowered”



Hector was born in Puerto Rico and moved to the United States as a young adult. He is a brown belt in Tae Kwon Do and Okinawan in American Kempo Karate. During Transition Week, Hector volunteered to work with the Transition Students on a Karate and self-defense demonstration. Work history included correctional officer, martial arts instructor, owned and operated cleaning business, and for a short time in the U.S. Military but was medically discharged. Vision loss is

from myopic degeneration, glaucoma, and presbyopia; also has asthma and moderate to severe hearing loss due to a childhood injury. Hector attended the Rehabilitation Center to improve his independent living skills and receive assistance in finding a job. He attended and successfully completed both the Skills of Blindness and Employment Skills Training programs.

Some of the skills learned while in training were functional braille to read public signs; adaptive techniques to cook and clean; how to manage medications and clean breathing machine; how to use a cane and travel safely within the environment including how to use the bus independently which he currently utilizes to and from work; and utilize a smartphone and computer with accessible settings to communicate with employer,

medical staff, and family. He also did home mechanics and made several projects including a phone holder, a peg game, a picture frame, and a coat rack for his apartment. The employment skills training program was also utilized to learn how to use a computer and CCTV in the workplace, develop a resume, and prepare for interviews. He learned to use Google Translate to translate some of the information he was typing or reading into Spanish which he found very helpful.

Hector became successfully employed with the Toy Lending Library earlier this year. He also helps other families interpret English to Spanish. After leaving the Rehab Center and obtaining his current job, the center O&M instructor went to his job site and worked on the routes within the church and an emergency exit route. Hector has expressed to his teachers that he finally believes in himself and knows he will succeed in taking life on once again.

“Counting the Steps to Success”

Woodrow “Woody” Apper began in the Skills of Blindness program at SDRC. He attended Employment Skills Training before the remodel of SDRC, during it, and afterward! He learned to use the Microsoft Office programs and QuickBooks as he requested as much training as possible in bookkeeping and accounting. He noted on his resume he had been a volunteer financial officer for 3 years and had been in the Navy for 6 years which involved office supplies as a part of his job as a Sonar Technician. He noted his experience in accounts receivable, accounts payable, and payroll in QuickBooks, invoices in QuickBooks, monthly reconciliation of bank statements in QuickBooks, and processing payments on time. Woody loved working with numbers. He always requested additional homework to create spreadsheets with formulas in Excel so he could advance in his field. Woody searched for a job on his own with ideas from his SBVI counselor. He landed a job as a secretary at the Westport Office in Sioux Falls for the SD Department of Corrections, Parole Services Division.



A photo of Woodrow Apper at his job with the South Dakota Department of Corrections.

Rehabilitation Center Staff



From left to right: Chad Ray, Bailey Terry, Cherie Gerry, Mary Tommeraasen, Danielle Bartlett, Jo Marie Laughlin, Kama Kwiecinski, Laurie Megard, Ione Carlson, Mary Carrell, and April Schulte.

Business Enterprise Program (BEP)



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.

Two vendors were licensed with the Business Enterprise Program in January 2023.

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 2023 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 completed the Revitalization Plan for the rest areas in 2022.

Current 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 commission rates paid to the Business Enterprise Program range from 54 to 68 percent. Income from rest area commissions for June 1, 2022, to May 31, 2023, was \$61,762.00 for I-90 rest areas and \$16,332.00 for I-29, totaling \$78,094.00.



The revenue from rest area commissions remained stable as compared to previous years.

Tourism numbers decreased during 2022; however, spending was up 8 percent, according to the South Dakota Department Tourism Annual Report 2022.



of

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.

Earnings and Expenses					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Gross Sales (Total Income)	\$350,259	\$251,625	\$137,960	\$123,784	\$167,379
Merchandise Purchases	\$182,530	\$109,779	\$52,277	\$57,532	\$81,491
Gross Profit	\$167,729	\$141,846	\$85,683	\$66,231	\$85,887
Total Operating Expenses	\$137,289	\$89,628	\$68,468	\$17,451	\$23,084
Net Proceeds	\$30,819	\$43,515	\$21,818	\$48,723	\$57,562
Levied Set Aside Funds	\$7,785	\$6,104	\$5,464	\$8,399	\$5,688
Net Profit to Vendors	\$23,034	\$37,411	\$16,354	\$40,324	\$51,874

Total Gross Income has improved from 2022 to 2023. The cost of goods has increased due to inflation and low product availability. Price and availability have impacted Gross Profit totals. Operating expenses decreased this year due to reduced labor costs in some locations. Overall, vendors' income has increased this year compared to the past two years. Expenses and product availability have negatively impacted vendor net income.

The impact of the pandemic and price increases continue to contribute to the loss of income. Facilities continue to be slow to return from remote work in facilities with cafeterias and vending routes. The vendor's proceeds benefited from commission sales and lower operational costs.

Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired Offices

SBVI State Office

Gaye Mattke, Division Director
3800 E. Hwy. 34
c/o 500 East Capitol Ave.
Pierre, SD 57501-5070
Phone/TTY: (605) 773-4644
Fax: (605) 773-5483
Toll Free: 1-800-265-9684
Email: DHS-infoSBVI@state.sd.us

Aberdeen Office

1707 4th Avenue SE, Suite A
Aberdeen, SD 57401
Phone/TTY: (605) 626-2395
Fax: (605) 626-3089
Toll Free: 1-800-439-3417

Sioux Falls Office

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

Rehabilitation Center for the Blind

April Schulte, Manager
2900 West 11th Street, Suite 101
Sioux Falls, SD 57104
Phone/TTY: (605) 367-5260
Fax: (605) 367-5263
Toll Free: 1-800-658-5441

Rapid City Office

2330 N. Maple, Suite 2
Rapid City, SD 57701
Phone/TTY: (605) 394-2261
FAX: (605) 394-1659
Toll Free: 1-800-439-8861

Pierre Office

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

For more information go to the SBVI website at: <https://dhs.sd.gov/en/sbvi>



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