

# **Service to the Blind & Visually Impaired**

## **Annual Board Report 2025**



Dear Governor Rhoden,

On behalf of the Board of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI), we would like to express our sincere appreciation for your continued dedication to enhancing the lives of South Dakotans who are blind or visually impaired. We are honored to present the 2025 Annual Report of the Board of SBVI, which highlights the dedication and accomplishments of our rehabilitation counselors, teachers, and staff across the state. The Board of SBVI remains steadfast in its mission to advocate for individuals who are blind or visually impaired by promoting access to vocational rehabilitation, independent living services, and opportunities that support full participation in community and employment life throughout South Dakota.



The Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) held quarterly meetings throughout 2025, continuing its mission to support and empower South Dakotans who are blind or visually impaired. During the year, the Board advanced meaningful initiatives that celebrated achievement, strengthened partnerships, and expanded awareness of the contributions of individuals with vision loss. Across programs, staff made remarkable progress—enhancing vocational rehabilitation services, broadening business enterprise opportunities, and expanding outreach efforts for older adults adjusting to vision changes. The Rehabilitation Center for the Blind also hosted a successful Transition Week for students, helping to prepare the next generation for greater independence and self-confidence in their daily lives.

We are deeply grateful to our dedicated Board members, whose commitment and collaboration guide our work. Each member brings valuable expertise and lived experience, ensuring our programs remain grounded in the needs and voices of those we serve. Together, the Board, staff, and community partners continue to move forward with purpose—creating opportunities, strengthening connections, and fostering independence for individuals who are blind or visually impaired across South Dakota.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryan Groeneweg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ryan" and last name "Groeneweg" clearly legible.

Ryan M. Groeneweg, Ed.S., BCBA

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## 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.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>Representation</u>
Ryan Groeneweg	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
Deb Ver Steeg	Sioux Falls	Disability Advocacy Group
Richard Crawford	Sioux Falls	Business and Industry
Krystal Stuwe	Hoven	Parent of Child with Disabilities
Cherie Gerry	Sioux Falls	Vocational Rehab. Counselor
Felicia Alspach	Pierre	Workforce Dev. Council
Ronda Williams	Pierre	SBVI Director– Ex Officio
Jeff Nelson	Garretson	Business and Industry
Nichole Nelson*	Aberdeen	Community Rehab. Program
Allison White*	Sioux Falls	Client Assistance Program
Dana Stillman	Aberdeen	Community Rehab. Program
Cole Uecker	Pierre	Client Assistance Program
Mike Hommel	Webster	Business and Industry
Kelly Deckert*	Brookings	Business and Industry
Ismael Collazo	Brookings	Business and Industry
Pamela Fisher	Rapid City	Disability Advocacy Group

\*Denotes members whose terms expired or resigned during 2025.

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 comprehensive 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.

The Board of SBVI is waiting for one appointment from the Governor's office for a member representing Business and Industry, due to a resignation in September 2025.

### **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 reporting period were held on the following dates:

March 14, 2025

June 13, 2025

September 12, 2025

December 5, 2025

Based on Board input, meetings were held via Zoom with conference sites hosted for members and the public to participate in person or remotely during the report period. Board members from the Sioux Falls area meet on-site at an accessible Sioux Falls One-Stop conference room. Meetings are open to the public and public comment period is incorporated into each meeting agenda. Meetings are announced through the State of South Dakota Board Portal and posted at the 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 Board's 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. Topics addressed by the Board of SBVI included:

- Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment results and recommendations;
- Approved financial support for the Governor's Awards Ceremony, National Disability Employment Awareness Month events, and other activities that raise awareness of vision loss and its impact on employment and independent living;
- VR Case File Review results were shared with the Board, ensuring quality services, identifying training needs, and improving casework and consistency in service delivery;
- Rehabilitation Services Administration findings/Corrective Action Plan updates and completion;
- VR Consumer Satisfaction Survey results;
- Election of officers held at the June meeting;
- Orientation of new and recently appointed Board members, including overview of RSA, the SBVI mission and services, and the role of the Board;
- Success stories were shared with the Board.

### **State Plan Goals**

Goals were approved by the Board of SBVI for the SBVI portion of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined State Plan 2024 - 2027:

**Goal 1: Increase VR client successful employment outcomes.**

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

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

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

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

**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.**



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## BOARD ACTIVITIES

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

Governor Larry Rhoden recognized the achievements of businesses, individuals with disabilities, and other South Dakotans for their contributions toward the employment of people with disabilities at the 2025 Governor's Awards ceremony on October 8, 2025, in the state capitol rotunda. Governor Rhoden, along with nomination participants, presented awards to the following 2025 recipients:

- Sandy Neyhart, Sturgis – Distinguished Service
- Shawn Lyons, Pierre– Outstanding Employee with a Disability
- Jim Hoxie, Spearfish– Outstanding Individual with a Disability
- Eagle Butte Co-op Association, Eagle Butte– Outstanding Private Employer (Small Employer)
- Ken's SuperFair Foods, Aberdeen– Outstanding Private Employer (Large Employer)
- City of Belle Fourche, Belle Fourche– Outstanding Public Employer
- Steve Hilton, Piedmont– 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 SD Department of Human Services. Two Board of SBVI members served on the Review Committee to select award recipients.

SBVI was honored to have recently retired Independent Living Program Specialist Sandy Neyhart receive the Distinguished Service Award, nominated by the SBVI Rehabilitation Teachers who she supervised, guided and mentored for over twenty years.

## 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 2025 was **"Celebrating Value and Talent."**



NDEAM events occurred in eleven communities around the state, as well as an event made available statewide through a virtual Zoom presentation. Education and awareness activities were held in person at schools, during the 2025 fall conference, and at local businesses and event centers, addressing topics related to workforce and disabilities. A member of the Board of SBVI served on the Review Committee to select activities and determine financial support for these events. The Board of SBVI sponsors NDEAM events on an annual basis.

### White Cane Safety Day

White Cane Day marches were held in October in local communities in Sioux Falls, Brookings, Rapid City and Aberdeen, hosted by blind organizations, mayor's committees, SD School for the Blind and blind peer support organizations, as well as staff at the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind to educate the public about white cane laws.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) Media Specialist and Communications Specialist worked with the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind to conduct interviews with Sioux Falls community members and SBVI staff, developing a series of videos to promote White Cane Awareness on DHS social media platforms, including the DHS Facebook page. A total of six individuals participated in the interviews, sharing their personal stories about the significance of the white cane and its impact on their lives.

### Public Relations/Education

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.



A public forum was held on April 18, 2025, in conjunction with the National Federation of the Blind of South Dakota convention in Brookings. There were approximately twenty individuals in attendance. Topics of discussion included orientation and mobility services and credential requirements; SBVI collaboration with the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired; the need for increased attention to client mental health and support adjusting to vision loss; and responses to questions raised regarding the availability and stability of funding for services in the next year.

The South Dakota Association of the Blind held their annual meeting virtually this year using Zoom on Saturday August 23, 2025. SDAB invited SBVI staff to present updates. Many SBVI staff members obtained certifications and specialized training this past year, and feedback from the participants was complimentary of SBVI's efforts to achieve specializations in the field of blindness.

The Board of SBVI 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. This year Disability Day at the Capitol was held on February 25, 2025.

On September 20, 2025, the Board of SBVI sponsored a booth at the Center for Disabilities Run, Walk & Roll event. This year, the spotlight was on Usher Syndrome, bringing awareness to the community about people who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision. The event included a 5k, 10k, and 1-mile timed events open to people of all ages and abilities to promote health and wellness for all people in South Dakota. SBVI logo was printed on event t-shirts and SBVI included signature guides, 20/20 pens, vision simulators, and contact information in the runner's bags.



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## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

The Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program provides individualized services designed to assist individuals who are blind or visually impaired in achieving meaningful and competitive employment outcomes. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors specializing in blindness and low vision deliver services statewide, ensuring equitable access to quality rehabilitation supports. Program performance data is reported in alignment with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) reporting requirements and reflects activity during the Program Year July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025, which corresponds to State Fiscal Year 2025 (SFY 2025).

### Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Performance Measures

There are six performance measures under Section 116 of WIOA. South Dakota negotiated with RSA to identify reasonable levels based on past performance and RSA's statistical adjustment model. The table below depicts the negotiated levels and how South Dakota performed in Program Year 2024.

RSA Performance Measures	Program Year 2024 Negotiated Levels	Program Year 2024 Actual	Measure Met?
Employment Rate (Second Quarter after Exit)	61.9%	61.5%	No
Employment Rate (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	56.1%	55.3%	No
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$3,600	\$3,725	Yes
Credential Attainment Rate	34.5%	43.6%	Yes
Measurable Skills Gains	50.0%	70.5%	Yes
Effectiveness Serving Employers (Employee Retention with same Employer)	N/A	87%	N/A

South Dakota met negotiated levels for Median Earnings Second Quarter after Exit, Credential Attainment, and Measurable Skills Gains. Employment second quarter and fourth quarter after exit were not met, but very close at less than 1% below the negotiated levels. Effectiveness serving employers does not have a negotiated level with RSA yet, but 87% will be considered the baseline as South Dakota strives to assist individuals to obtain and maintain long-term competitive integrated employment.

## South Dakota as a National Leader in Vision Disability Employment

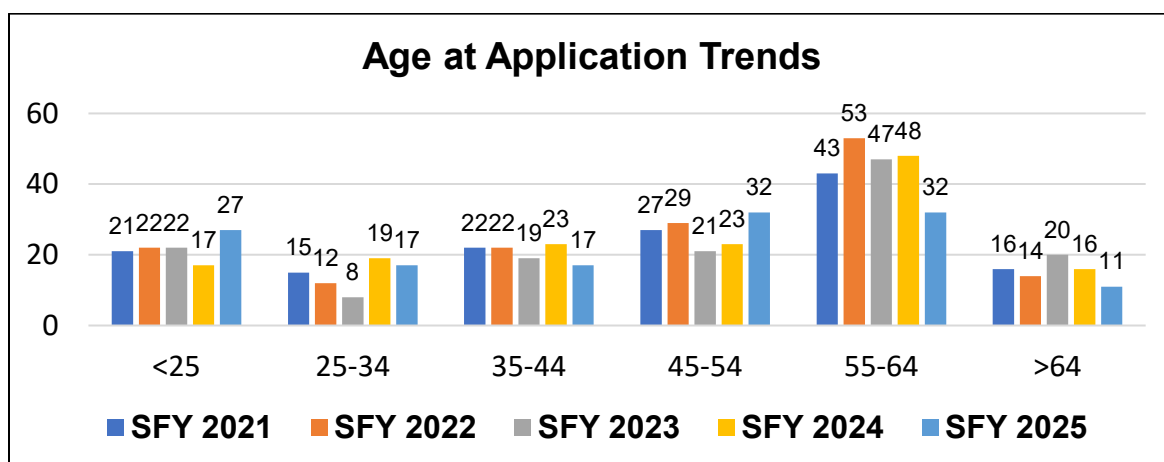
According to the 2025 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium, South Dakota is one of the strongest performers in the nation for employment outcomes among individuals with vision disabilities. While the national employment rate for this population is 52.2%, South Dakota's rate is 65.3%, ranking third in the country behind Montana and Iowa. South Dakota also shows a much smaller employment gap between people with and without vision disabilities. Nationally, individuals with vision disabilities work at about 68% the rate of those without disabilities, but in South Dakota they work at nearly 80% that rate. South Dakotans with vision disabilities are much closer to achieving the same employment rate as those without disabilities, reflecting one of the smallest employment gaps in the nation.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics also reports South Dakota's unemployment rate is 1.9%, the lowest in the nation and well below the national average near 4%. Overall, South Dakota exceeds national averages and stands as a national leader in inclusive employment for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

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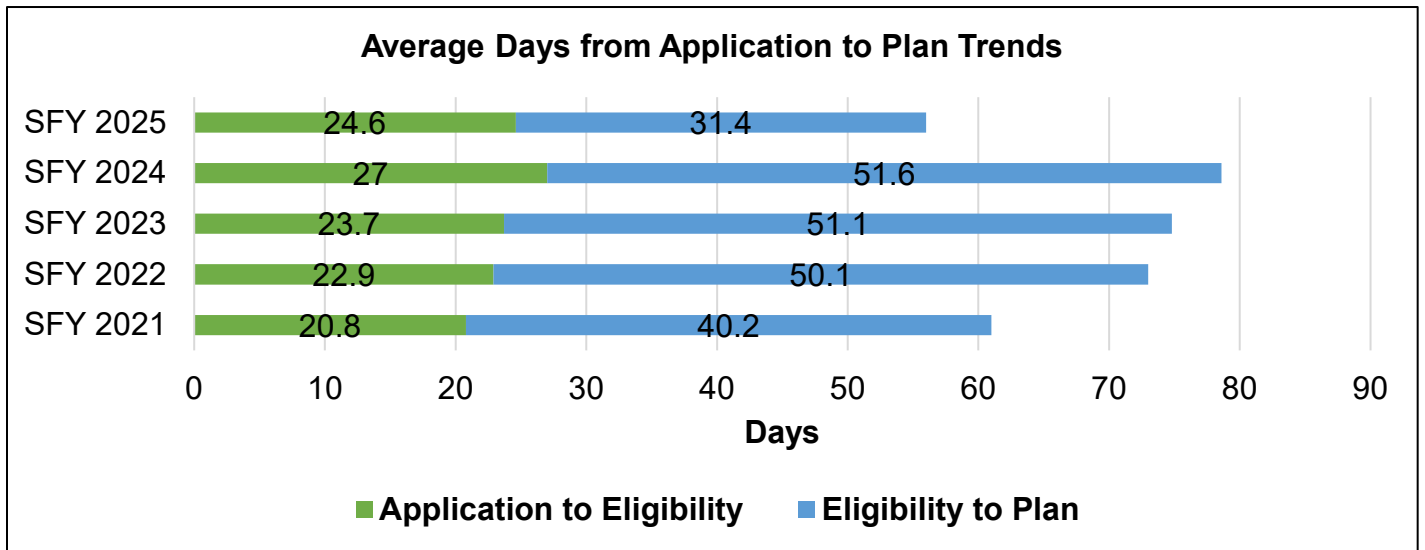
## SBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Caseload Summary

In SFY 2025, the SBVI VR Program reported 136 applications, 130 eligibility determinations, 401 individuals served, and 47 individuals successfully employed. Compared to previous years, the age distribution at application shows a clear shift toward younger and mid-career applicants. The number of youths under age 25 increased notably from 17 in SFY 2024 to 27 in SFY 2025, suggesting stronger outreach to students and transition-age individuals. Similarly, applications from those aged 45–54 rose from 23 to 32, while the 55–64 age group declined from 48 to 32, and those over 64 continued to decrease to 11. Overall, SFY 2025 reflects a stable total applicant volume with a shift toward younger and mid-career individuals entering or re-entering the workforce, and fewer applications among older adults.



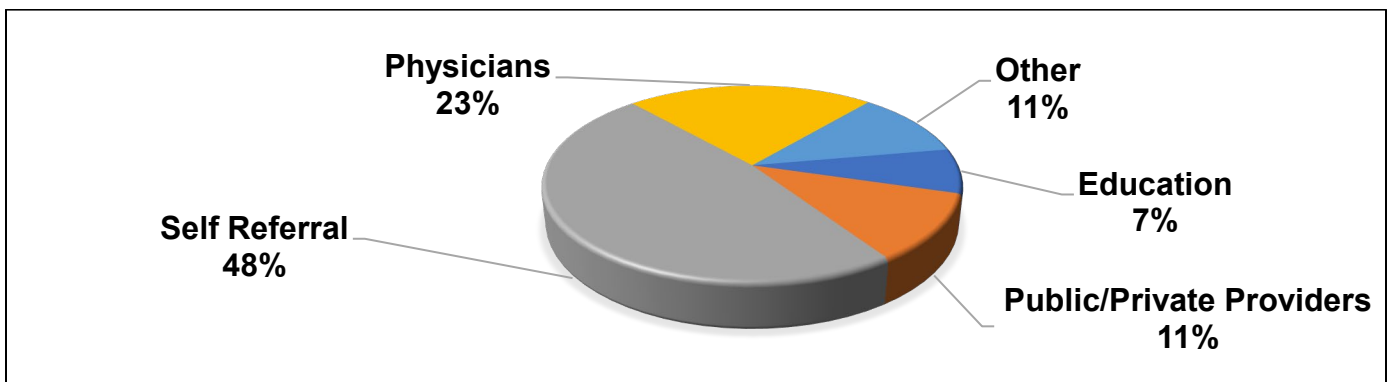
## Trends in Timeliness of Services

In SFY 2025, SBVI demonstrated notable improvement in processing timeliness compared to previous years. The average number of days from application to eligibility decreased to 24.6 days, and average days from eligibility to plan development dropped to 31.4 days, a sharp improvement from 51.6 days in SFY 2024, representing the most efficient performance in five years. The overall application-to-plan timeframe improved from 78.6 days in SFY 2024 to 56 days in SFY 2025, a 28.7% decrease. These reductions reflect SBVI's ongoing commitment to minimizing the number of days between application and plan development—an important focus area aimed at maintaining client motivation and ensuring timely engagement in services.



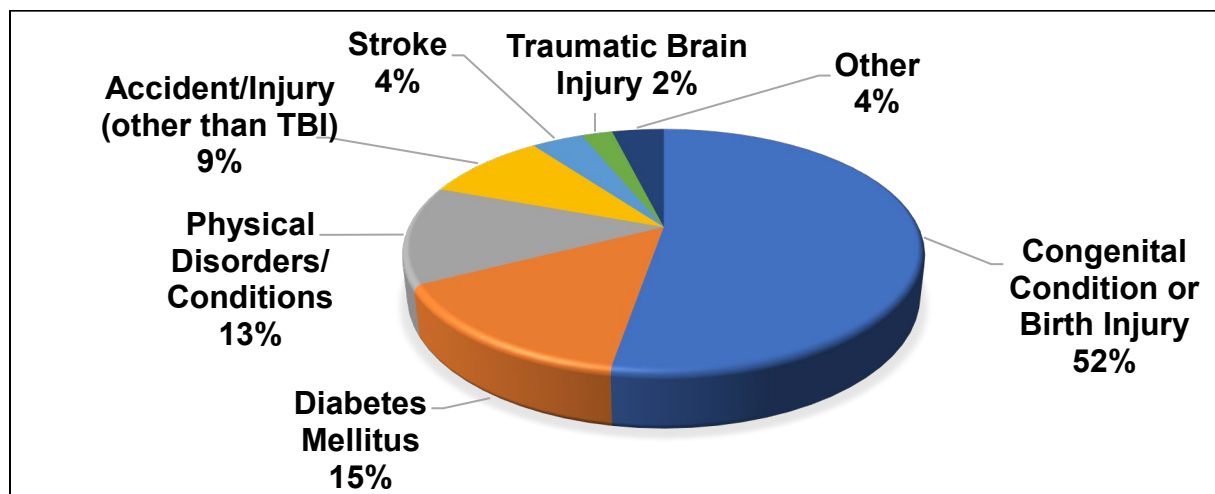
## Referral Sources

Sixty-five individuals (48%) entered the program through self-referral, highlighting strong community awareness of SBVI. Physicians referred 31 individuals (23%), underscoring the key role medical providers play in connecting people with vision loss to vocational rehabilitation. Public and private providers, and “Other” referral category, each contributed 15 referrals (11%). Education-based sources referred 10 individuals (7%), supporting early identification of students who are blind or visually impaired.



## Causes of Impairments

The largest share of participants, 68 individuals (52%), reported a congenital condition or birth injury as the cause of vision loss. Diabetes mellitus accounted for 20 individuals (15%), and other physical disorders contributed 17 individuals (13%), reflecting common causes of acquired vision loss in adulthood. Accidents or non-TBI injuries represented 12 individuals (9%), followed by stroke at 5 individuals (4%) and traumatic brain injury at 3 individuals (2%). Less common causes including cardiac conditions, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, and cancer.

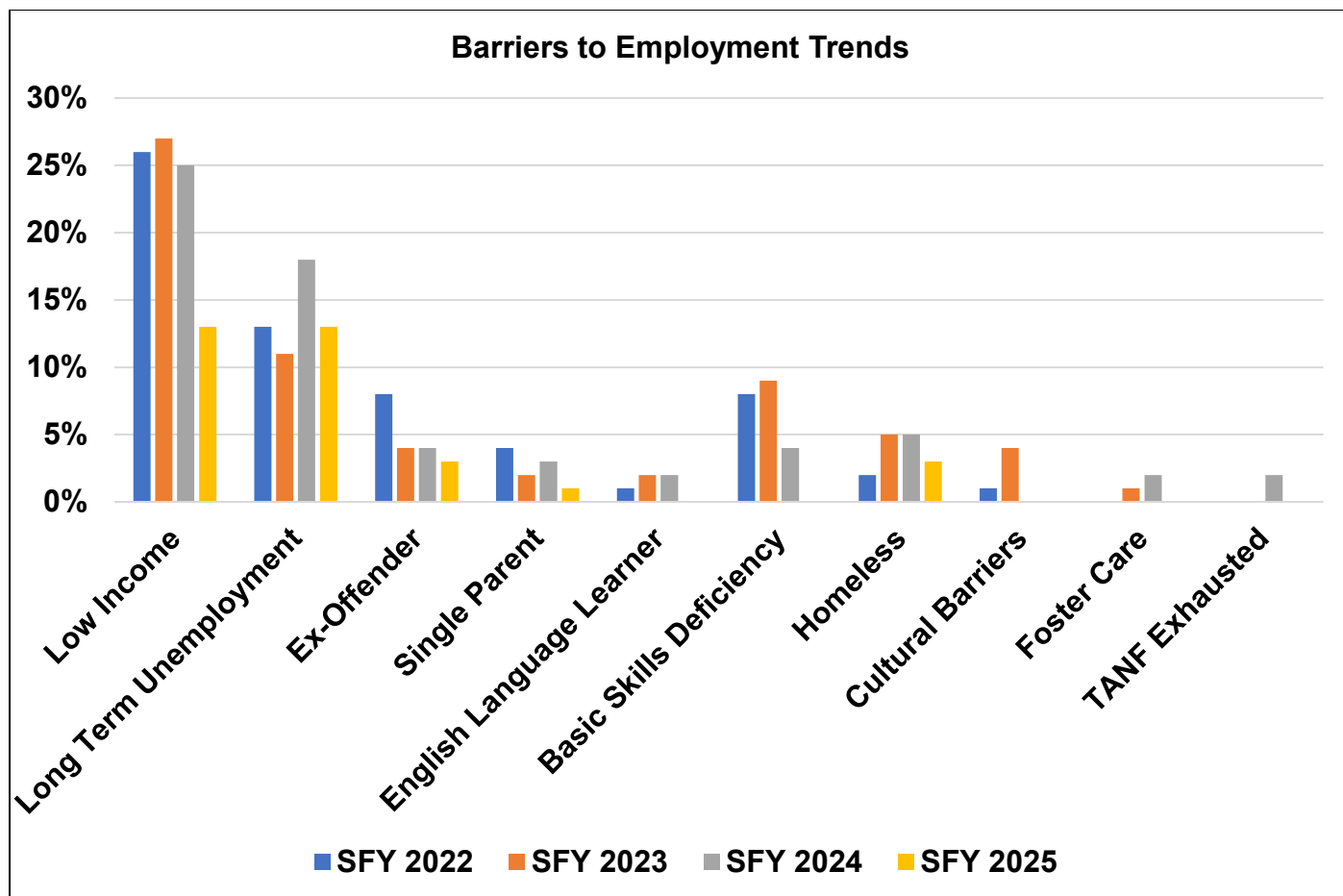


## Barriers to Employment

SBVI identifies barriers clients face at the time their Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is developed, providing insight into the socioeconomic and personal challenges that can affect successful workforce participation. In SFY 2025, the most common barriers were low income and long-term unemployment (both 13%), consistent with trends from prior years. Other barriers such as ex-offender status, single parenthood, and homelessness each accounted for about 2–3% of clients, representing smaller but important subgroups that may require specialized services or partnerships for support.

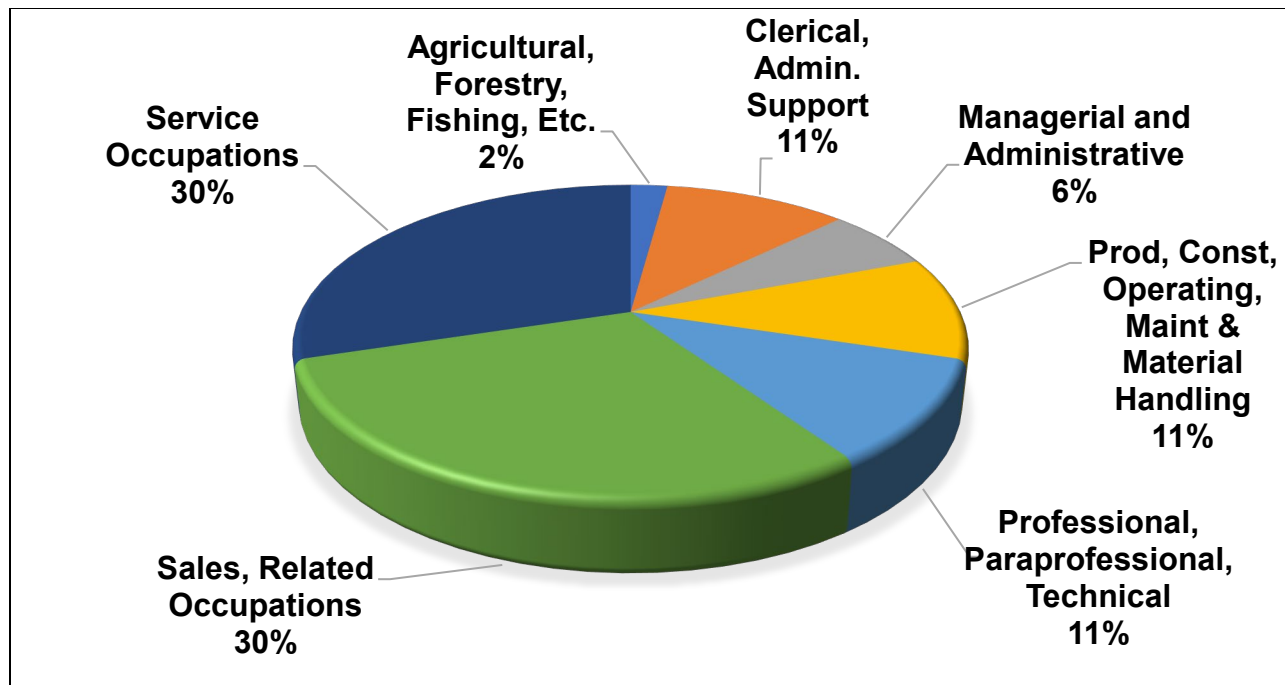
SBVI clients reported fewer barriers in SFY 2025 overall, and no barriers were identified for English Language Learner, basic skills deficiency, cultural barriers, foster care or exhaustion of TANF benefits.





### Occupations of Individuals Successfully Employed

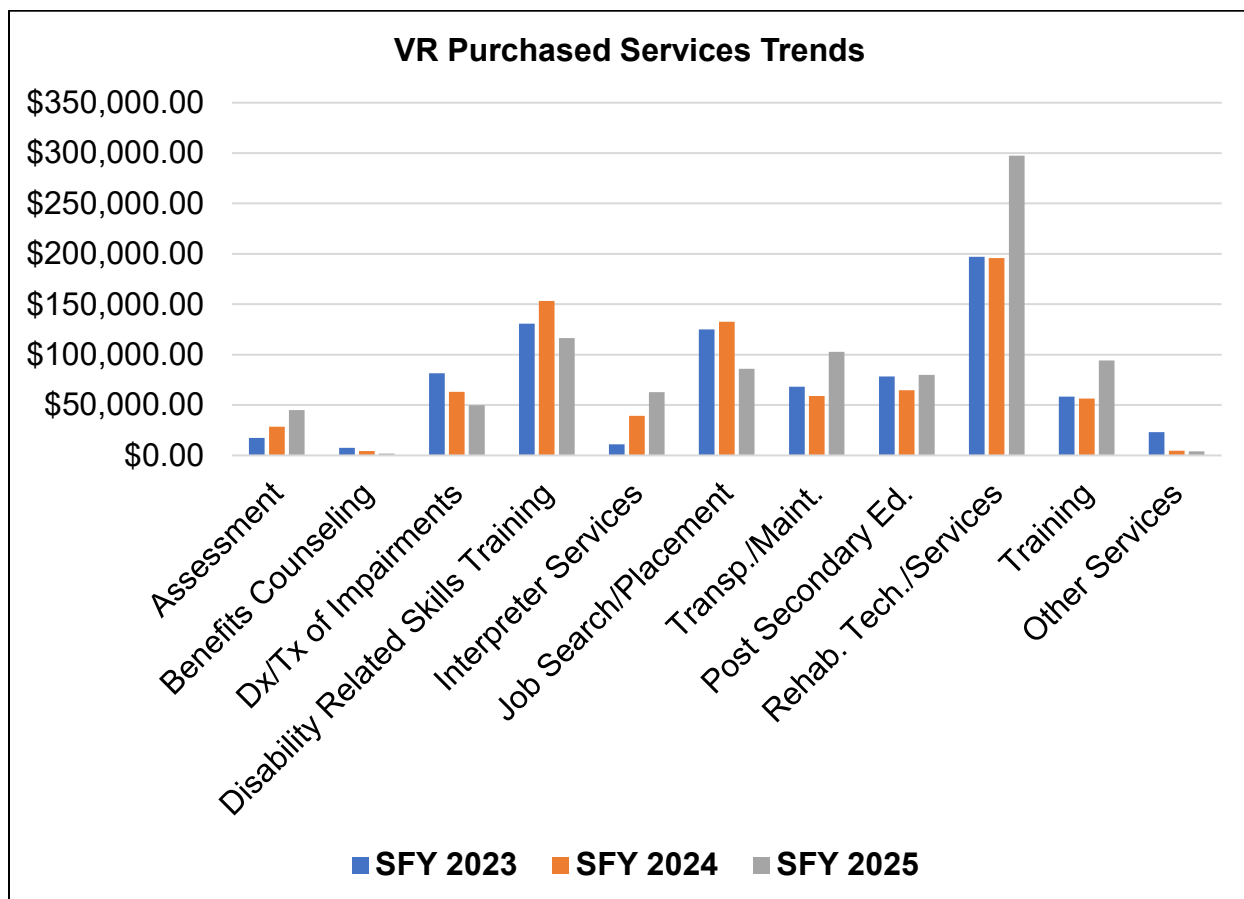
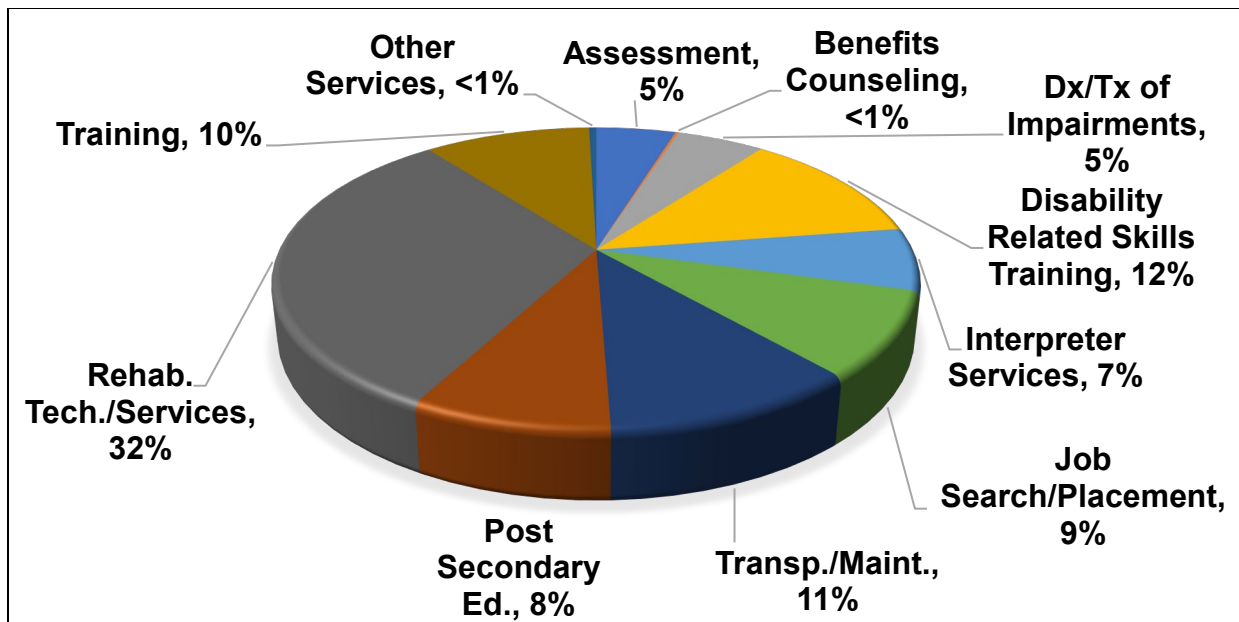
The SBVI VR program assisted 47 individuals in achieving their employment goals in SFY2025. Most job placements were in Service Occupations and Sales Related Occupations, with 14 individuals in each (30% per category). Additional outcomes included Clerical and Administrative Support, Professional and Technical roles, and Production and Maintenance-related positions, each with 5 individuals, demonstrating diversity in job types and the program's success supporting clients across both professional and hands-on fields. Smaller numbers were placed in Managerial and Administrative positions (3) and Agricultural, Forestry, Fishing, and Related Occupations (1).



### **Vocational Rehabilitation Services Provided**

In SFY 2025, SBVI spent \$940,542.86 on 90 services across eleven service categories, with overall expenditures increasing over the past three years. The largest growth occurred in Rehabilitation Technology and Services, which rose from \$197,179 in 2023 to \$297,570 in 2025, representing the biggest share of total spending at 32%, reflecting SBVI's strong investment in assistive technology, adaptive equipment, and workplace accommodations. Transportation and Maintenance costs more than doubled and represented 11% of expenditures, indicating increased client participation in training and work-related activities.

Disability-Related Skills Training slightly decreased, accounting for 12% of total spending while general Training (10%) and Postsecondary Education (8%) continued to support workforce readiness. Job Search and Placement Services declined slightly from previous years at 9%, possibly due to fewer available employment service providers or improved employment stability among clients, resulting in focus on job retention rather than securing new placements. Smaller but essential categories included Interpreter Services (7%), Assessments (5%), and Diagnosis and Treatment of Impairments (5%), while Benefits Counseling and Other Services each represented less than 1% of overall expenditures, reflecting their limited but available use within the program.

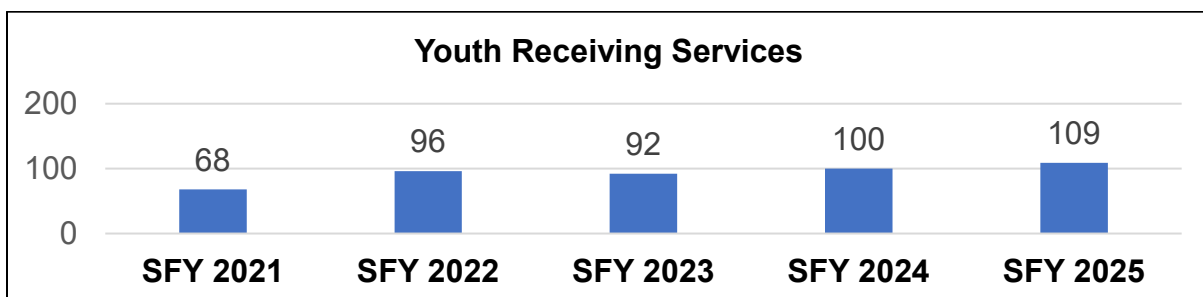
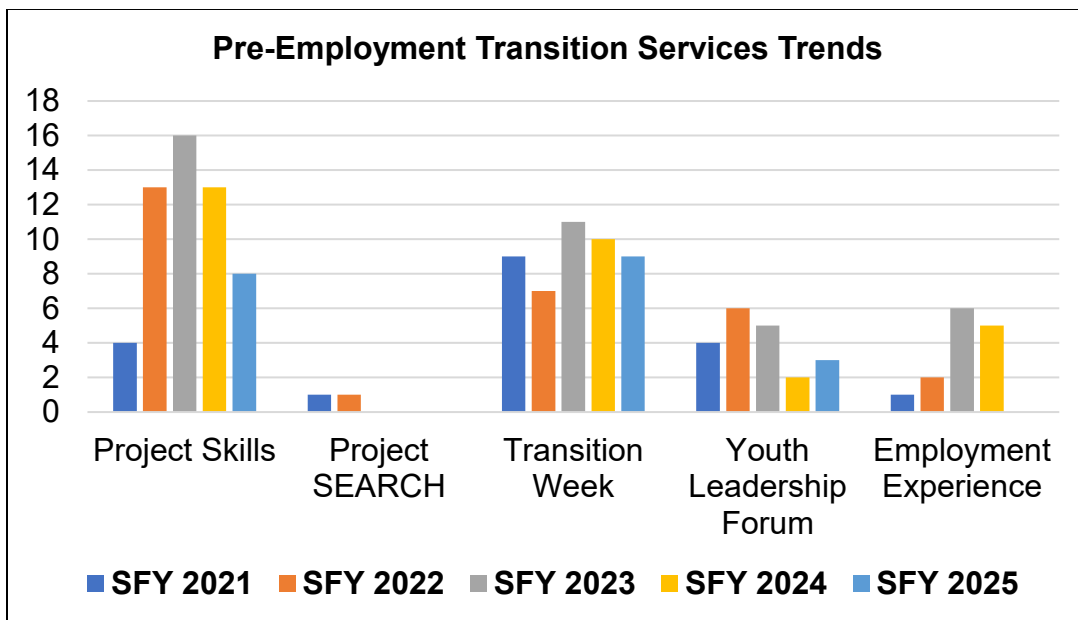


### Employment Data of Successfully Employed Clients at Closure

During the SFY 2025, 43 individuals achieved Competitive Integrated Employment, while three individuals entered Self-Employment and one State Agency Managed BEP (Business Enterprise Program) position. On average, individuals worked 28.2 hours per week and earned an hourly wage of \$19.46, resulting in an average weekly wage of \$557.91.

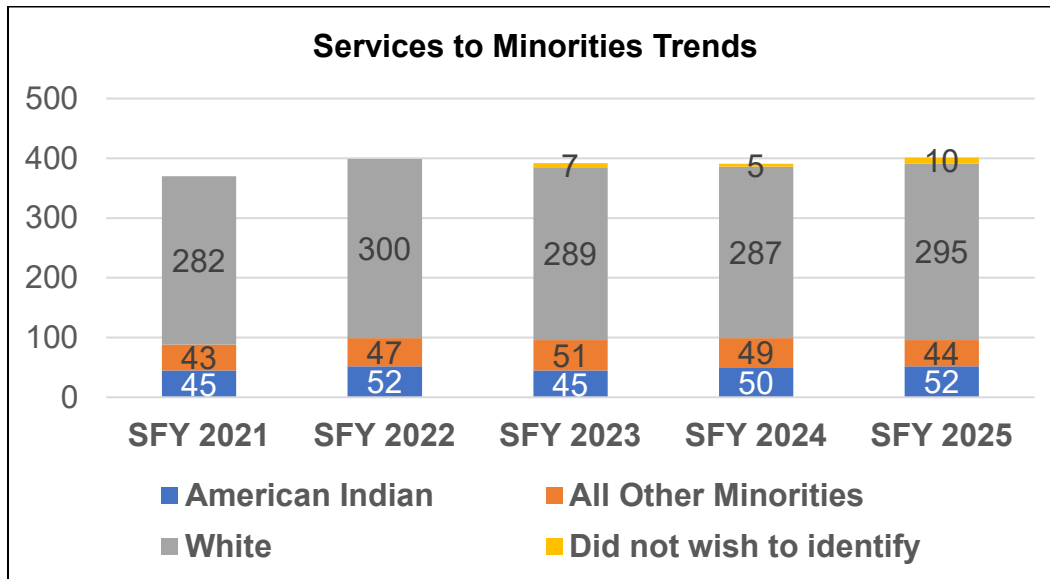
## Youth Transition Participation

SBVI provides a range of planned services for secondary school students through their Individualized Plans for Employment, including Project Skills, Project SEARCH, Transition Week, Youth Leadership Forum, and Employment Experiences. These initiatives offer students opportunities for job exploration counseling, work-based learning, counseling on postsecondary options, workplace readiness training, and self-advocacy skill development. Over the past five years, the number of youth receiving services has steadily increased, rising from 68 in SFY 2021 to 109 in SFY 2025, a 60% increase that reflects SBVI's expanded efforts to engage students in Pre-Employment Transition Services, postsecondary training, and early employment experiences. Participation in specific planned activities has fluctuated slightly from year to year due to variations in student interest, program availability, and scheduling. In SFY 2025, participation included 8 students in Project Skills, 9 in Transition Week, and 3 in the Youth Leadership Forum, with Project SEARCH not reported. While these numbers represent a modest decline from earlier years, continued strong engagement in activities such as Transition Week underscores SBVI's ongoing commitment to preparing students who are blind or visually impaired for successful transitions from school to employment or higher education.



## Services to Minorities

In SFY 2025, SBVI served 52 American Indian participants, 44 individuals from other minority groups, and 295 White participants, while 10 individuals chose not to disclose their race or ethnicity. This marks a slight increase in nondisclosure despite past efforts to reduce it. While disclosure must remain voluntary, SBVI may be able to improve data accuracy through careful observational assessments when appropriate, ensuring individuals' comfort, dignity, and the voluntary nature of demographic reporting. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, 20.4% of South Dakota's population is non-white, with American Indians representing 8.4%—the largest minority group in the state. By comparison, 13% of individuals served by SBVI in SFY 2025 were American Indian, and 24% identified as part of a minority group, indicating that SBVI serves a proportionally higher share of minority and American Indian individuals than the statewide population.

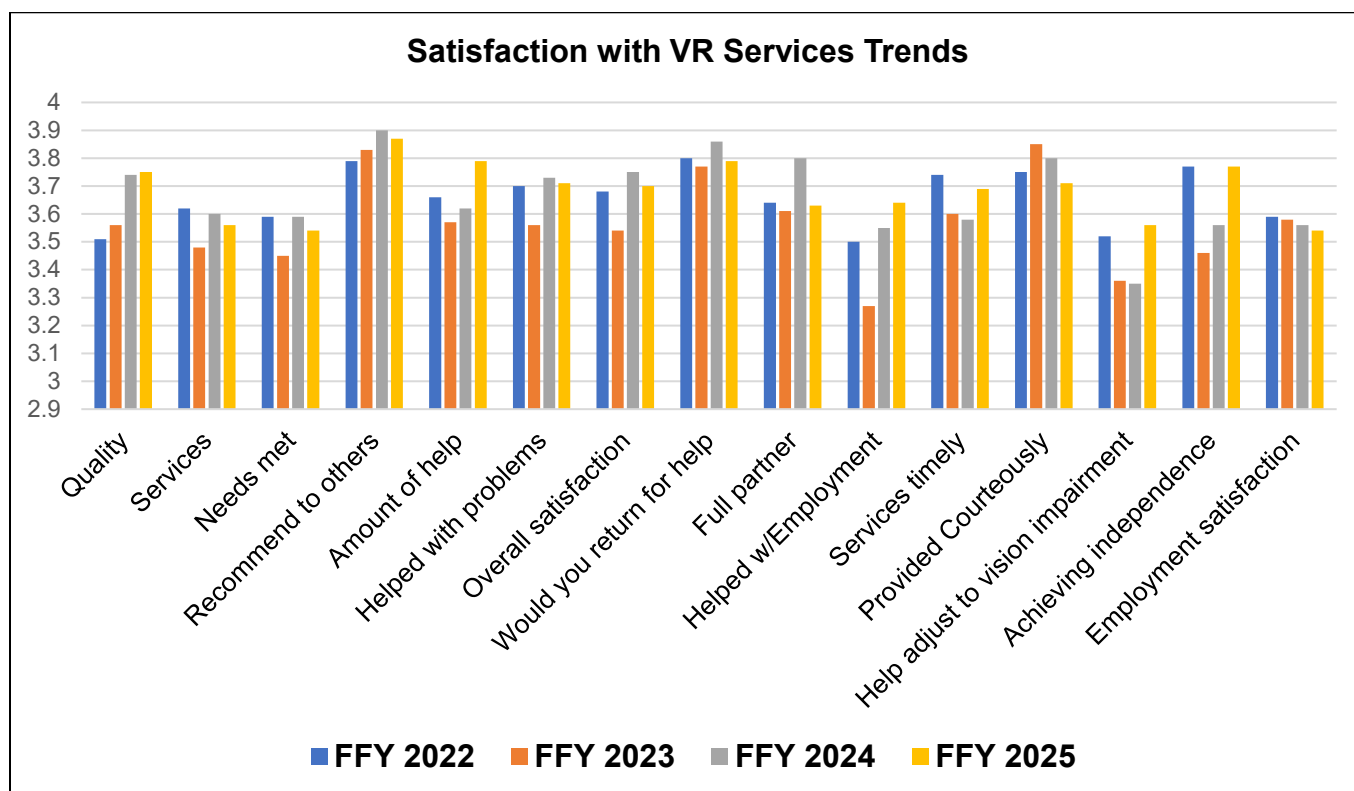


SBVI and the Board of SBVI continue to strengthen culturally relevant services through collaborative initiatives. The Director of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe Vocational Rehabilitation Program serves on the Board, ensuring Tribal representation and insight. SBVI also maintains strong partnerships with American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation programs across the state and conducts outreach to Bureau of Indian Affairs schools to identify students who may benefit from VR services. Additionally, SBVI's Annual All-Staff Training emphasizes cultural responsiveness alongside federal, state, and blindness-specific practices. This year, Tribal VR programs and partners participated in the training, toured the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, and provided cultural sensitivity training to SBVI staff, further supporting culturally informed service delivery.



## Vocational Rehabilitation Program Client Satisfaction Survey Analysis

SBVI partnered with the Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired to conduct an annual client satisfaction survey. The survey includes eight standardized questions from the *Client Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ-8)*, developed by Larsen, Attkisson, Hargreaves, and Nguyen (1979), along with seven additional questions created in collaboration with the Board. Respondents rate their satisfaction for each item on a four-point scale from 1 (Poor) to 4 (Excellent). SFY 2025 marks the 16th year SBVI has administered this survey.



Between October 1, 2024, and September 30, 2025, the survey was sent to 97 individuals whose vocational rehabilitation cases closed during the federal fiscal year. Thirty-five individuals responded, resulting in a 36% response rate. Results show consistently strong satisfaction with SBVI services. Overall satisfaction remained high at 3.70, while ratings for quality of services (3.75) and amount of help received (3.79) reached the highest levels in four years. Clients also continued to report positive interactions with staff, including courteous service (3.71) and likelihood of recommending SBVI to others (3.87). Employment-related ratings improved as well, including helpfulness of services in obtaining or maintaining employment (3.64) and timely access to services (3.69). Measures related to adjusting to vision loss (3.56) and achieving greater independence (3.77) also strengthened, reflecting ongoing progress in supporting client confidence and self-sufficiency.

Satisfaction Survey Questions	Average Rating
1. How would you rate the quality of service you received?	3.75
2. Did you get the kind of service you wanted?	3.56
3. To what extent has our program met your needs?	3.54
4. If a friend needed similar help, would you recommend our program to him/her?	3.87
5. How satisfied are you with the amount of help you received?	3.79
6. Have the services you received helped you to deal more effectively with your problems?	3.71
7. In an overall, general sense, how satisfied are you with the service you received?	3.70
8. If you were to seek help again, would you come back to our program?	3.79
9. Were you a full partner in the process to determine your employment goal and services to be provided?	3.63
10. Do you feel that the services provided by your counselor were necessary to obtain or keep your employment?	3.64
11. Were information and services provided to you in a timely manner?	3.69
12. Were information and services provided to you in a courteous manner?	3.71
13. Did the services help you adjust to your visual impairment?	3.56
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?	3.54

Respondents were invited to provide open-ended comments to help inform program improvements. Below are comments from surveys returned to the agency:

- *“I’m very happy with the services I received.”*
- *“It’s a great program and I hope it continues.”*
- *“I want to thank Rob Jonas for the ability to help me with my eyesight. I also want to thank Rob for the help in finding me someone to help me with employment.”*
- *“It worked, I got a job and am still working. Good job!”*
- *“Mike Webb was absolutely a valuable asset in getting me to where I am. My success is because of the assistance I received from SBVI.”*
- *“This is an extremely helpful program. It’s empowering to obtain the assistance needed without having to ask for special treatment (items) from your employer. It truly helps maintain integrity and independence.”*
- *“JoLynn said if in need of service again, they would reopen case. JoLynn was wonderful!!”*

### **A Fresh Start**

Janet spent over 30 years working her way up within financial institutions, like Citibank, and had no plans to change her career. However, Janet’s life took an unexpected turn when her relationship turned abusive, an incident of domestic violence that led to new physical limitations and vision loss.

Suddenly, the career she had built over decades became difficult to continue. She could no longer read fine print, work long hours at a computer, or complete detailed tasks. Her vision is “like a shade is pulled down” and gets worse in bright light and at night. Her low vision leads to eye fatigue and difficulty navigating indoors, often bumping into things. With limited access to assistive technology, Janet made the difficult decision to leave her job and receive Social Security Disability benefits. Janet moved to Sioux Falls to be closer to family. With natural supports in place, she decided to try working again. Janet realized she needed a different path forward and connected with SBVI.

Janet was still working through the complex feelings that come with the adjustment to acquired physical and vision limitations, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder from the incident that caused them. She worked closely with her vocational rehabilitation and mental health counselors to prepare to move forward. Janet received a low-vision exam, explored new career options, and completed skills of blindness and employment skills training through the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. Low vision aids and Social Security benefits counseling helped her envision what her future could be like.

Janet partnered with Volunteers of America Employment Specialist to begin her job search. Before long, she found the perfect fit: a front desk manager/ assistant at a local chiropractor office. This allows Janet to use her strong interpersonal and organizational skills in a setting that accommodates her needs. Her employer provided specialized training so she could assist with additional services in the office and now Janet is able to help patients with ultrasound and electric stimulation services, in addition to the typical front desk duties.

Janet's journey is a powerful example of perseverance, adaptability, and the impact of the right supports at the right time. Through collaboration, training, and determination, Janet not only found meaningful employment but also rediscovered her confidence and independence.

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

South Dakota's Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired Older Individuals who are Blind Independent Living Program (ILB) is built around the needs of older adults and others experiencing functional vision loss that affects daily life. To qualify, a person must be age 55 or older, live in South Dakota, and have a documented visual impairment that creates a barrier to independence. The impairment must limit day-to-day functioning enough to warrant rehabilitation training. People under 55 can be served when the vision loss is significant enough to interfere with basic daily tasks and there is a clear need for independent living skills training rather than vocational rehabilitation services. Eligibility is based on practical impact, so the focus stays on what the person can and cannot do safely in their home and community.

Rehabilitation Teaching services support individuals with vision loss in maintaining or regaining independence in their homes and communities. Rehabilitation Teachers provide individualized instruction in compensatory skills and assistive technology that enhance safety, confidence, and quality of life, blending adaptive rehabilitation, adult learning, and person-centered support. Core areas include home and personal management, communication, daily living activities, leisure participation, and orientation within the home or immediate environment, with services tailored to each person's goals, preferences, and lifestyle. Working collaboratively with participants, Rehabilitation Teachers emphasize practical techniques and adaptive devices that support independent, dignified living and foster empowerment, resilience, and self-sufficiency.

### **Service Delivery**

In FFY 2025, the ILB program served 407 individuals with vision loss, an increase from 387 in FFY 2024. Staff closed 195 cases in 2025 compared to 191 in 2024. The chart below shows how services were delivered across core areas such as communication, daily living skills, low vision, counseling, advocacy training, assistive technology, and home-based orientation and mobility. In addition, 275 individuals received information and referrals to other service providers or programs to help them meet their needs.

<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.	340
Daily Living Skills – training in the use of adaptive aids and assistive technology for daily living	282
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.	367
Counseling – Peer, individual, or group counseling to assist with adjustment to visual impairment and blindness	67
Low Vision Exams – Evaluations to identify strategies and devices for enhancing visual performance	122
Advocacy Training – participation in advocacy training activities such as consumer organization meetings and peer support groups	9
Referral to Other Agencies – Referral to other service providers, programs, and agencies.	275
Orientation and Mobility – Travel training and learning to access public or private transportation to travel safely and independently.	79

### **Primary Cause of Vision Loss for People Served**

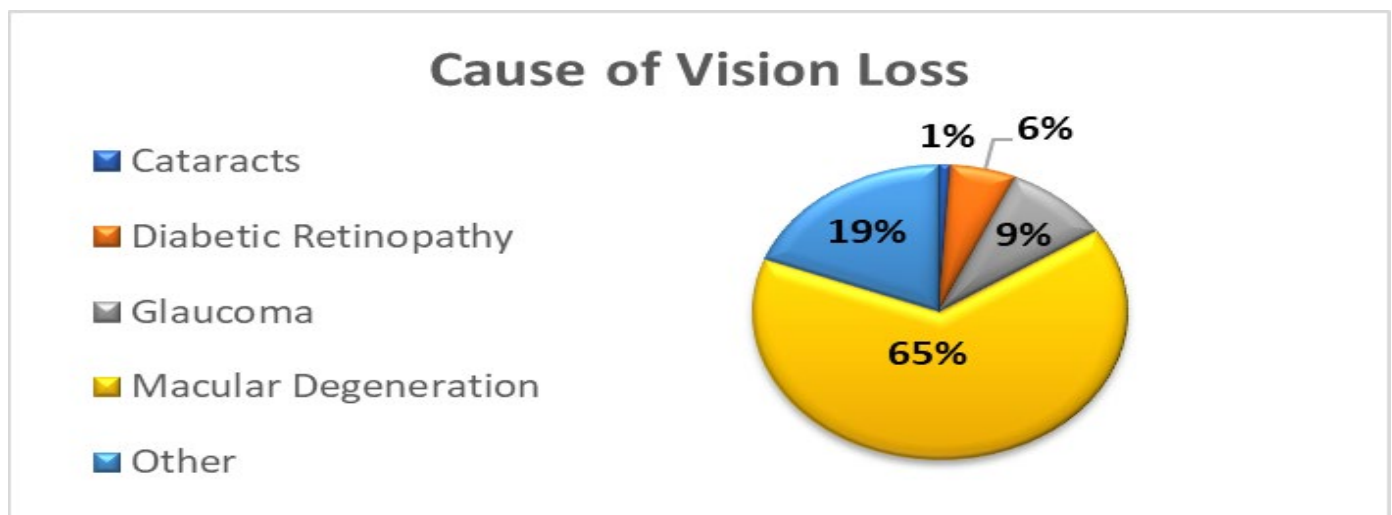
Macular degeneration is the leading cause of vision loss for individuals seeking support through the ILB program in 2025. Accounting for 65% of the 407 individuals served in



2025, this progressive condition reduces sharp central vision needed for recognizing faces, reading, and sewing.

Glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and cataracts are the next most common causes of vision loss reflected in the data. Glaucoma is often detected after years of unnoticed peripheral vision loss, leaving many clients with significant field restrictions by the time they enter services. Diabetic retinopathy is common for individuals managing long-term diabetes and often brings fluctuating vision and retinal changes that affect daily functioning. Many clients receive cataracts surgery, but a notable number continue to experience vision loss afterward due to additional retinal disease or age-related changes.

The chart also identifies a group of clients whose vision loss falls into an “Other” category that includes optic neuropathies, macular and retinal conditions such as macular holes, choroidal neovascular and epiretinal membranes, and inflammatory diseases like panuveitis. Some individuals experience vision loss related to stroke, while others have inherited or degenerative conditions, including Reiter’s Disease and Retinitis Pigmentosa. Corneal disease, dystrophies, and scarring from injury or infection also contribute to functional limitations. These diagnoses vary widely, often involve sudden or unpredictable changes in vision, and require individualized rehabilitation planning. They reflect the diverse needs within the ILB caseload and reinforce the importance of flexible, person-centered service approaches.

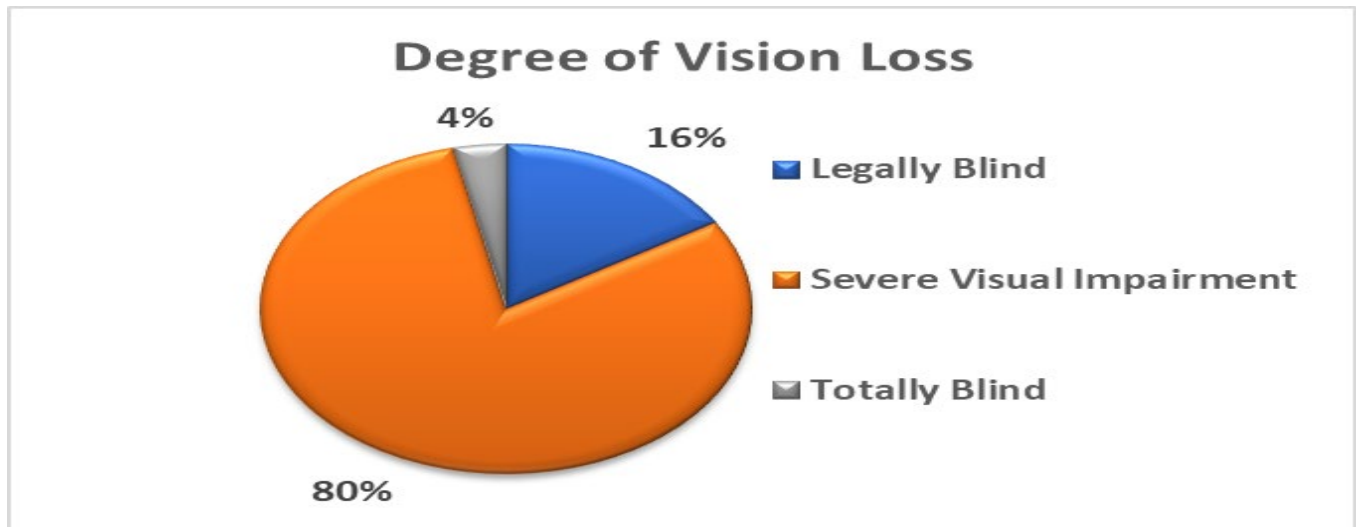


### **Degree of Vision Loss**

Degree of vision loss refers to how much a person’s sight is reduced and how it affects independent functioning. Understanding these degrees helps determine the level of training, adaptive equipment, and support provided through the Independent Living Program. Individuals who are legally blind have central visual acuity of 20/200 or less

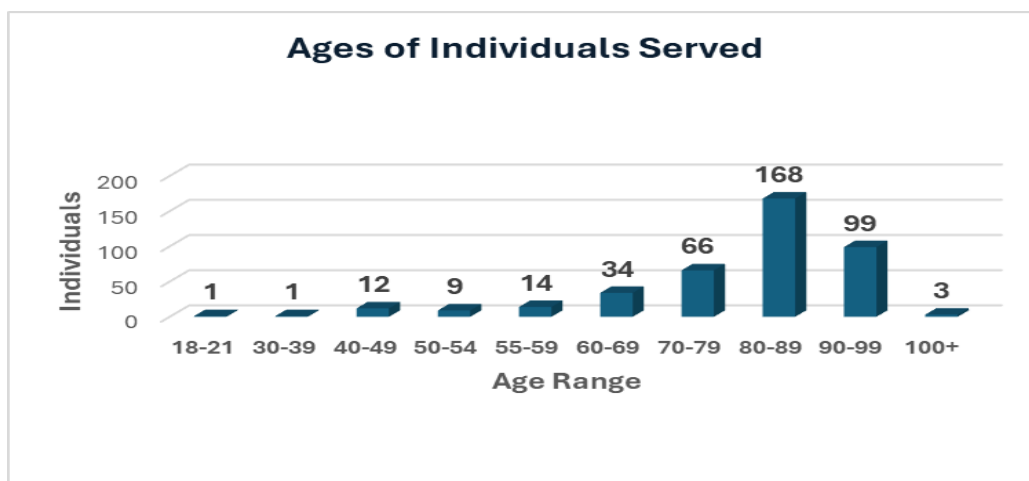
in their better eye with correction, or a visual field of 20 degrees or less. Severe vision impairment describes significant loss that limits daily activities such as reading, recognizing faces, or moving safely, even with corrective lenses.

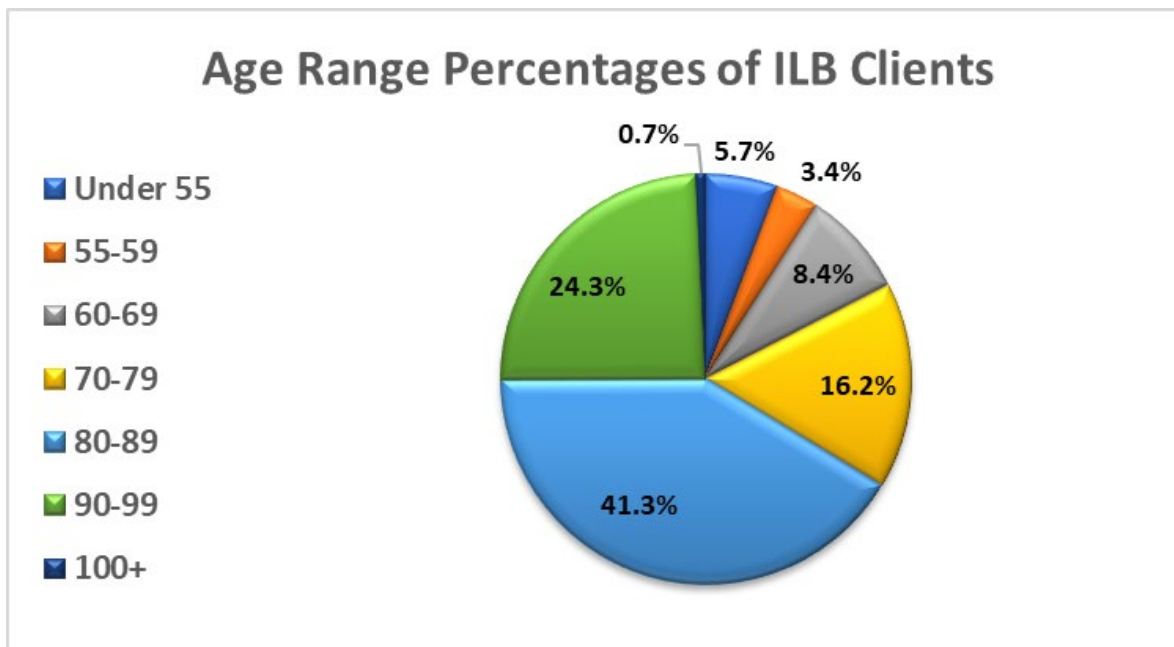
The chart below shows the degree of vision loss for individuals served through ILB in 2025, with 80% experiencing a severe visual impairment, 16% who are legally blind, and 4% of individuals experiencing total blindness, with no light perception.



### **Age Range of ILB Individuals Served in FY 2025**

Individuals served through the Independent Living for the Blind program in 2025 ranged in age from 21 to 101. While the program primarily supports older adults experiencing age-related vision loss, younger individuals may also qualify when their vision impairment limits their ability to live independently. This year, Rehabilitation Teachers served 23 individuals under age 55. As reflected in the charts below, 66.3% of participants were over age 80, including three individuals aged 100 or older. This underscores the demand for in-home vision rehabilitation and the importance of maintaining statewide access to trained staff who can deliver services in rural areas.



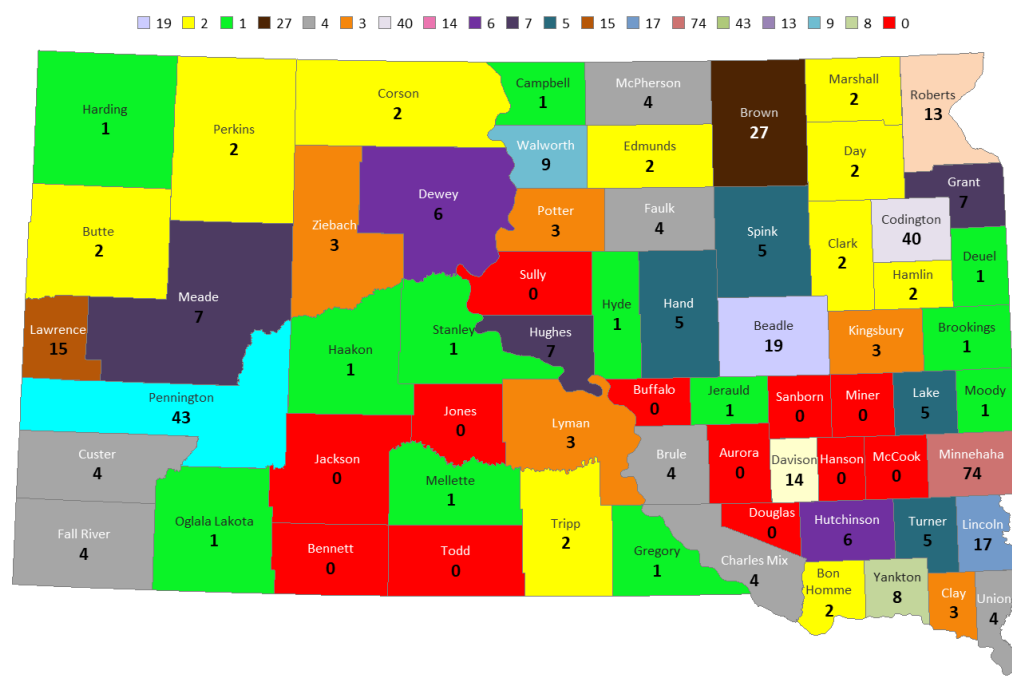


### **Counties Served**

Independent Living for the Blind services reached individuals in 54 of South Dakota's 66 counties during FFY 2025. County totals ranged from 1 to 74 participants, with the highest numbers in Minnehaha (74), Pennington (43), Codington (40), Brown (27), Beadle (19), Lincoln (17), and Lawrence (15). These areas continue to function as referral hubs due to higher population density, established provider networks, and greater concentrations of older adults with vision loss.

Counties with little or no participation will be priorities for focused outreach and provider education to ensure residents are aware of available services. ILB staff will continue strengthening connections with medical providers, senior centers, tribal programs, and community partners in these regions, using targeted materials, direct contact, and planned rural travel routes to increase referrals and support equitable access to vision rehabilitation statewide.

## ILB Counties Served- 2025



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## Satisfaction with Independent Living Services

Citizens who receive services through the Independent Living for the Blind program are invited to share their experiences through a satisfaction survey sent quarterly. The feedback helps SBVI evaluate how effectively services support individuals in maintaining or regaining independence. When a respondent indicates a need for more assistance or has questions about adaptive devices, staff follow up by phone to provide support and maintain continuity of care. During the 2025 fiscal year, 166 surveys were distributed to participants whose services had ended. Seventy-five were returned, reflecting a 45% response rate. Follow-up calls are offered to individuals who do not return a survey to strengthen participation and capture a more complete picture of outcomes.

The overall satisfaction rate on a four-point scale remained high at 3.57. Respondents consistently reflected strong satisfaction with staff courtesy, the quality of services, and the support that helped them remain living independently at home. Many noted they would recommend the ILB program to others. Comments throughout the surveys highlighted appreciation for the personalized instruction, patience, and kindness shown by Rehabilitation Teachers.

A small number of respondents rated timeliness lower than other items. Contributing factors include extensive travel across rural regions, weather limitations, device procurement and shipping times, and the coordination required for in-home training. A few clients reported difficulty scheduling visits or expressed a desire for more frequent

follow-up. Rehabilitation Teachers continue to strengthen case management practices, scheduling consistency, and documentation. Regional travel planning, shared calendars, and improved device inventory tracking support more efficient visit scheduling and reduce service delays.

Some respondents noted they wished they had known about ILB services sooner, underscoring the ongoing need for outreach. SBVI will continue to expand visibility through low-vision-friendly printed materials, timely referrals responses, and on-request digital resources, including the Time to Be Bold website. Staff continue to deepen relationships with optometrists, ophthalmologists, senior centers, hospitals, and other community partners through provider packets, routine presentations, and accessible brochures.

Clients shared positive comments that reflect the skill and commitment of the Rehabilitation Teachers:

- *“Stacey helped me a lot with my iPhone, emergency calls, texting, and photos.”*
- *“Nancy was good and great for my mom. Thank you so much for your help with my mother.”*
- *“Amanda was most appreciated and helpful to be able to make my life better.”*
- *“When you are losing your eyesight there are factors that will affect your daily life that talking to a counselor can't help you with. She did as much for my husband as humanly possible. Very kind and sympathetic. Great overall.”*
- *“Without your service I would be in a nursing home after I had my 3rd stroke. I am in the wheelchair and am blind in 1 eye and very low vision in the other. I use the visual magnifying machine for all reading or writing. I recommend it to all. It is great and thank you.”*
- *“Tricia and Chad were very kind and understanding. I hope I will be able to reconnect if and when I need your services.”*
- *“Trisha was most appreciated and helpful to be able to make my life better.”*

Overall, survey results show a program that delivers strong, valued services while still having room to improve timeliness and outreach. Client feedback will continue to guide ILB practice so Rehabilitation Teachers can protect what is working well and address gaps before they grow.

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

Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired launched the CCTV Lease/Loan Program in 2004 using designated memorial funds to provide high-cost magnification devices for older adults. Video magnifiers deliver enlarged, high-resolution images that support reading, writing, medication management, and other daily tasks. The pilot began with 24 units and has grown into a statewide resource that many residents use every day. As technology advanced, SBVI expanded offerings to include models with optical character recognition that both magnify and read printed text aloud. Some stand-alone readers provide speech output without a display for users who benefit from audio only. Units may be leased for \$30 per month or loaned at no cost for individuals who meet financial-need criteria.

Since its inception, the CCTV Lease/Loan Program has purchased more than 425 units and provided sustained access to magnification systems for an estimated 1,565 older South Dakotans with low vision. This year, the program maintained an active inventory of 191 machines, a decrease from 201 in 2024 due to machine depreciation.

## **Stirring Up Independence**

Rob's story began in September 2024, during a season of his life that felt more like survival than progress. His Vocational Rehabilitation file said he was "active," but most days he was just trying to hang on. He slept at the Cornerstone Mission while he waited for housing assistance and tried to navigate a world that had grown dimmer and less predictable after recent vision loss.

Before his sight changed, Rob worked in busy kitchens around town. Now, even the idea of standing at a stove felt risky. He wore through cane tips faster than anyone expected, signaling how hard he pushed himself to move while his vision shifted the now unfamiliar streets under his feet. Rob knew he wanted to work again, maybe even study, but he also knew he could not build a future while unsure of some basic skills. He needed a way to live safely and confidently with his vision loss. Independent Living services became the foundation that gave him enough stability to focus on more than just getting through his day.

When Rob finally received his Section 8 approval and opened the door to his own apartment, the space felt like an uncertain victory. Together, he and his Rehabilitation Teacher identified tasks that felt uncertain and made small adjustments that reshaped his space into something workable. Bump dots went onto his appliances and tools including a high-contrast cutting board, talking scale, and large-print measuring cups

returned several skills he'd thought lost. An iPhone update with accessible features gave him access to recipes and organizational tools. Together these things made the kitchen feel safe and usable again.

Instead of avoiding the space, Rob began cooking again. For someone who once moved confidently through restaurant kitchens, being able to prepare his own meals again meant more than convenience. It meant returning to something familiar. When his building announced a potluck for the residents on his floor, he made a dish and carried it downstairs. That wasn't just about sharing food for him, that moment marked a return to community after homelessness, vision loss, and months of rebuilding.

As his confidence grew at home, ILB services helped widen his world. Rob started attending the local peer support group to stay connected and share his story to inspire others struggling with their vision loss.

With newly rebuilt skills and confidence, Rob is ready to move forward with the vocational goals he set aside during the most difficult period of his life. Rob's progress reflects the true purpose of Independent Living Blind services. We meet people at the hardest point in their story and walk with them until they are standing strong enough to write the next chapter themselves.

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## **REHABILITATION CENTER FOR THE BLIND**

The South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind (SDRC), located in Sioux Falls, SD, offers essential services to South Dakota residents who are blind or visually impaired, facilitating the development of adaptive skills necessary for achieving independence and employment. Within the Center, South Dakota Vocational Resources serves as a specialized employment program that assists individuals with disabilities in acquiring job skills. Together, these programs provide comprehensive tools, training, and technology, empowering individuals to overcome the challenges posed by vision loss or other disabilities that affect their ability to work and live independently.



## **Adaptive Skills of Blindness**

In 2025, the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind continued to provide daily, hands-on training in adaptive skills for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. A total of 49 individuals (26 men and 23 women) participated in training throughout the year. This included nine high school students preparing for adulthood through the Center's weeklong *Transition Week* event. Trainees ranged in age, with an average age of 32. Participants represented a range of vision levels: 35% were classified as blind, 20% legally blind, 17% visually impaired, and 28% were new staff members completing employee training. In addition, 25% of all trainees had at least one secondary disability. The most common secondary conditions included congenital disabilities or birth injuries, autism, diabetes, arthritis and rheumatism, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and other unspecified conditions. Referrals for training came from various district offices. Most referrals were from the Sioux Falls office (62%), followed by Aberdeen (29%), Rapid City (6%), and Pierre (3%).



## **Low Vision Clinics**

Low vision evaluations with Dr. Nick Wenande were held on the second Wednesday of each month throughout 2025. A total of 11 clinics were conducted, serving 46 individuals, a slight decrease from 51 participants in 2024, largely due to last-minute client cancellations. Of those who received services, 76% were referred through the Vocational Rehabilitation program, while 24% were referred by the Older Blind Independent Living program.

## **Assistive Technology (AT) Walk-in Clinics**

Assistive technology continues to be a key resource for helping individuals with visual impairments work independently and stay connected. In 2025, 151 individuals received assistive technology training, a substantial increase from 96 participants in 2024. This growth is largely attributed to the addition of a new assistive technology instructor who restarted walk-in clinics and expanded outreach efforts. Support was delivered in a variety of flexible formats, including in-person sessions, phone calls, FaceTime, email, and video conferencing tools such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom. This adaptable service model ensures that individuals can access the tools and support beyond the regularly scheduled classes offered at SDRC.

## Transition Week 2025



Transition Week 2025 provided high school students with visual impairments a dynamic, hands-on experience focused on preparing for life after graduation. Centered around the theme “*Level Up*,” the week included sessions on employment skills, independent living, and advocacy. Highlights included visits to Dakota News Now to explore media careers, and Augie Access, a post-secondary program supporting social, career, and daily living skills. Students also learned about

entrepreneurship through the Business Enterprise Program and developed self-advocacy skills in partnership with Parent Connection. Additional activities included Skills of Blindness classes, mock interviews, résumé and cover letter writing, and participation in the World of Work peer group, which addressed topics such as disability disclosure and workplace readiness.



## South Dakota Vocational Resources

### Employment Skills Training (EST):

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) to support a wide range of employment-related goals. These include workplace readiness, task-specific training, self-advocacy, confidence building, career exploration, interview preparation, and planning next steps with vocational rehabilitation support. EST is designed to help individuals prepare for employment or further education, emphasizing collaboration between the individual, their VR Counselor, and Center staff to identify and implement the most effective strategies for achieving employment goals.

In 2025, Employment Skills Training (EST) supported 82 individuals, a slight increase from 80 participants in 2024. All participants received in-person training, and 79% had two or more disabilities. This modest growth can be attributed to stronger coordination

with referral sources and increased participant engagement. However, transportation barriers remain a significant challenge. One contributing factor may be due to reduced access to public transit, including the removal of the bus stop near the Center, a reduction in city bus routes, and limited availability of Sioux Area Metro On Demand transportation services.

The EST program also provides specialized services for individuals with brain injuries. In 2025, the Employment Skills Supervisor, a Certified Brain Injury Specialist, supported nine individuals with brain injuries. This work included collaboration with 93 different organizations, families, and service providers to help individuals access necessary resources and supports.

### **Job Placement Services:**

Job placement services were provided to 42 individuals in 2025, down from 51 in 2024. This decline is attributed to the increased complexity of needs among participants, 71% of whom had two or more disabilities, with 67% of secondary disabilities related to mental health. These factors require more time to identify appropriate employment opportunities and develop effective workplace accommodations.

Additionally, the local labor market has presented challenges. Sioux Falls reported a 1.7% unemployment rate in 2025, significantly lower than the national average of 4.3%. While this indicates a strong economy, it also means fewer job openings overall and increased competition, making it more difficult for individuals with disabilities to secure competitive employment.

### **Summary of Services**

<b>SDRC Service</b>	<b>FY 2022</b>	<b>FY 2023</b>	<b>FY 2024</b>	<b>FY 2025</b>
Transition Students	7	10	8	9
Low Vision Patients	50	48	51	46
Employment Specialist	47	49	51	42
Skills of Blindness	50	64	52	49
Employment Skills Training	82	57	79	82
AT Walk-in Clinic & First Friday Classes	104	119	96	151
<b>Total</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>337</b>	<b>379</b>

## 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 3.67 on a 4.0 scale, falling 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?"

*"Learning how to be independent. Orientation & Mobility helped me learn good hand techniques. Home Management helped make cooking easier and quicker. Communications helped me learn how to rent an apartment. Communications also helped me learn critical thinking skills." and "Team environment. It opened my mind to things I never thought possible."*

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 3.69 on a 4.0 scale, falling between the ratings of (3) Agreed and (4) Strongly Agreed.

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

*"Mary really tailors the program to the clients' needs. Mary will also take the time to listen to the client about why something does or does not work for the client. Mary is always willing to learn new things."; "The teacher is very good at what she does and the staff as well are friendly funny and very perfection. Highly recommend."; "I liked way my trainer handled the training and prepared me with knowledge and mastery of programs that are essential in the job market."; and "Mary is very good about understanding people and their needs. Makes it relaxing for learning."*

## Program Income Revenue

In 2025, program income revenue at the Rehabilitation Center increased by 24% over the previous year, marking the highest annual revenue on record. This growth reflects the continued dedication, innovation, and outreach efforts of Center staff, whose work has enhanced service delivery across programs. The increase is also attributed to a rise in the number of Division of Rehabilitation Services clients served within the Vocational Unit, as well as the addition of several out-of-state clients. This milestone is



a direct result of the staff's ongoing commitment to meeting the evolving needs of individuals with disabilities and strengthening community impact.

### **Dining in the Dark: Friendsgiving Event**



Skills of Blindness students showcased their culinary and organizational skills by planning and hosting a Dining in the Dark Friendsgiving event. Students took the lead in preparing, serving, and coordinating a traditional Thanksgiving meal, applying key independent living and employment readiness skills such as meal planning, food preparation, and event cleanup. Guests, including Employment Skills students, district office staff, and Center employees, wore blindfolds

during the meal to experience dining without vision. This immersive activity provided insight into the daily challenges faced by individuals with visual impairments and highlighted the practical skills students are gaining. The event also promoted community connection and awareness, reinforcing the Center's mission to prepare individuals for greater independence and workforce participation.



### **Fire Safety Training**

Sioux Falls Fire and Rescue delivered an interactive fire safety presentation at the Center, with a focus on kitchen fire prevention and response. Skills of blindness students actively participated, asking thoughtful questions and engaging in discussion. As a result, many reported increased confidence in cooking independently, having gained practical knowledge and strategies for managing fire-related emergencies safely.



### **Vocational Evaluation Services**

This past year the Center's Program Specialist earned the Certified Vocational Evaluation Specialist (CVE) credential. This nationally recognized certification enhances the Center's ability to deliver comprehensive vocational evaluations, supporting clients in identifying their strengths, career interests, and training needs. These evaluations play a key role in helping vocational rehabilitation counselors

develop Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs) that promote job satisfaction and long-term success. The Program Specialist administers several key assessments, including the Career Occupational Preference System (COPS), Career Orientation and Placement Evaluation Survey (COPES), Wide Range Achievement Test – 5th Edition (WRAT-5), and the Career Ability Placement Survey (CAPS). These tools evaluate vocational interests, work values, and abilities relevant to entry-level jobs across multiple career clusters. Assessment results provide detailed comparisons with peers at similar educational levels and help identify learning barriers that may affect post-secondary education, career planning, and support service needs.

### **Inclusive Transit Training**

Home Management Instructor and the Orientation and Mobility Specialist gave a presentation to Sioux Falls Transit staff during their monthly safety meetings. The training was delivered in four separate sessions, with about 30 Sioux Falls Transit staff attending each session. The focus of the training was on disability etiquette, especially when working with individuals who have visual impairments. Staff also learned best practices and were shown how to provide proper sighted guide assistance.



### **SBVI Trainings and Workshops Page**

The Center Manager collaborated with the DHS Communications Administrator to develop a "Trainings and Workshops" page for the SBVI website. This page features recorded quarterly workshops that cover various classes offered at the Center, providing individuals with a valuable resource for reference. The page aims to educate users on how to assist individuals with visual impairments and highlight the tools available to help people with low vision perform activities of daily living. Additionally, it serves to raise awareness about the services offered by the South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. The page has been completed and is live on the SBVI website: [SBVI Trainings and Workshops Page](#).

## Chalk the Walk for Suicide Awareness Month

Skills of Blindness clients and SDRC staff participated in Chalk the Walk for Suicide Awareness Month. Inspiring messages and pictures were placed around the Rehab Center to support anyone struggling with their mental health. Pictured below are the SDRC staff and Skills of Blindness clients that participated in Chalk the Walk. Clients and staff are standing and holding a piece of chalk.



## Exploring Art and Accessibility: SDRC's NDEAM Acrylic Pour Experience



SDRC hosted an acrylic pour painting activity with participation from the National Disability Employment Awareness Month committee, Rehab Center staff, and field SBVI Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living staff. NDEAM committee and staff members wore blindfolds during the activity to better understand what it would be like to complete the task without vision. This activity is

commonly offered to Skills of Blindness students at the Center, allowing them to create a piece of art that they can share with others as a part of their training experience. The project has received positive feedback from past participants. Each painting is unique, shaped by the choice of colors, mixing techniques, and how the paint is applied to the canvas. Completed artwork was displayed at the annual fall conference.





## Vision for Success



Lourdes came to the South Dakota Rehabilitation Center (SDRC) motivated to return to work after being on disability. With 15 years of prior experience at JC Penney's, she was determined to re-enter the workforce and regain her professional independence.

At SDRC, Lourdes participated in the **Skills of Blindness training**, where she learned to use adaptive tools, including ZoomText, CCTV, writing guides, and bold line paper. She explored Braille, accessibility features on the computer, and completed training to build essential skills for daily living and employment.

Lourdes advanced to the **Employment Skills Training (EST) program**, attending classes for four weeks. She strengthened her computer proficiency across Microsoft Office applications, including Word, Excel, Access, PowerPoint, Publisher, and Outlook, and also explored QuickBooks. Through World of Work classes, she improved her interview skills and, with support from her Employment Specialist, developed her resume and a structured job search plan. Lourdes started her job search, completing applications for clerical and receptionist positions and participating in mock interviews to build confidence. She received guidance on highlighting her strengths.

Lourdes was hired by Lutheran Social Services (LSS) and successfully completed her first 90 days of employment. She reported enjoying her work, feeling supported by her employer, and benefiting from accommodations provided through DakotaLink. Concurrently, JC Penney's reached out to offer her a part-time position—fulfilling her initial goal when she first received training at SDRC. Lourdes was working full-time at LSS and part-time at JC Penney's, exemplifying the impact of personalized training, adaptive tools, and dedicated support in achieving meaningful, competitive employment.

Recently, due to organizational layoffs at LSS, Lourdes' position was affected. JC Penney's, however, has offered her a full-time role. Lourdes' journey highlights resilience, determination, and the transformative power of support in overcoming barriers to employment.

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## BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM

The South Dakota Business Enterprise Program (SDBEP) is a source of pride, providing individuals who are blind the opportunity for self-employment in food service, including operating cafeterias, coffee shops, and vending routes. The Randolph-Sheppard Act, a federal law that 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, is the legal backbone of the program. In South Dakota, SBVI is the state licensing agency, empowering these individuals to conduct specified activities in facilities through permits or contracts.

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.

**South Dakota Bureau of Administration** interagency agreement for vending machines in multiple State buildings in Pierre and Sioux Falls One Stop, newly opened in 2025 and features eight vending machines and a micro market.

### Vendors

Two vendors were licensed with the Business Enterprise Program in January 2025. 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 2025 through teleconference. Jeff Nelson is the Chair of the Vendor Committee, and Dan Munce is the Vice-Chair.

### Sioux Falls One Stop

SDBEP has expanded its reach by opening a new location at the Sioux Falls One Stop. This State of South Dakota facility, which hosts an assortment of State agencies to serve the public in one area, now also houses eight vending machines and a micro market installed by SDBEP. This expansion has not only been beneficial for the vendor but has also further developed the program's footprint in the Sioux Falls area, promising a bright future for the program.

## **Aberdeen Vending and Pre-ETS**

The Aberdeen Vending and Pre-Employment Training Skills project, a testament to our commitment to education and community involvement, kicked off by engaging students from the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Aberdeen. These students, paid through the Project Skills employment experience program, played a crucial role in the vending operations at the Aberdeen Federal Building location. Their tasks included cleaning, maintenance, and assisting with the ordering of product for the vending machines, making a significant impact on the project.

## **New Vendor Training**

As part of our ongoing commitment to skill development and entrepreneurship, the SDBEP is training two new vendors. These vending Trainees are equipped with the necessary skills to own and operate their own business. The comprehensive training process includes learning the Skills of Blindness, the BEP Training Curriculum, and four weeks of on-site training in an active facility. Additional lessons on Management Services, SERV Safe, and the Vendor Manual further enhance their understanding and preparedness.

## **Interstate Rest Area Vending**

Through an agreement with the South Dakota Department of Transportation, the BEP is responsible for vending at the South Dakota rest areas along Interstates 29 and 90.

Current contracts with third-party vendors for designated rest areas began in June 2022; contracts were awarded to vendors who bid the highest commission percentage on sales to the BEP.

Current commission rates paid to the Business Enterprise Program range from 54% to 68%. Income from rest area commissions for June 1, 2024, to May 31, 2025, was \$71,010.00 for I-90 rest areas and \$20,451.00 for I-29, totaling \$91,461.00. Revenue



from rest area commissions has remained stable, providing a consistent source of income for the Business Enterprise Program. This stability is a testament to the program's resilience and adaptability in the face of changing economic conditions, instilling confidence in the program's ability to navigate future challenges. The rest area commissions are utilized to support the Business Enterprise Program, including purchase and repair of equipment and to cover other expenses, such as insurance, bookkeeping, and initial vendor inventory.

<b>Earnings and Expenses</b>					
	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>
Gross Sales (Total Income)	\$137,960	\$123,784	\$167,379	\$151,962	\$236,974
Merchandise Purchases	\$52,277	\$57,532	\$81,491	\$64,102	\$121,564
Gross Profit	\$85,683	\$66,231	\$85,887	\$87,859	\$115,409
Total Operating Expenses	\$68,468	\$17,451	\$23,084	\$46,952	\$65,028
Net Proceeds	\$21,818	\$48,723	\$57,562	\$40,908	\$50,382
Levied Set Aside Funds	\$5,464	\$8,399	\$5,688	\$5,029	\$8,018
Net Profit to Vendors	<b>\$16,354</b>	<b>\$40,324</b>	<b>\$51,874</b>	<b>\$35,879</b>	<b>\$42,364</b>

BEP Total Gross Income increased 56% from 2024 to 2025. The Merchandise Purchased almost doubled due to many Federal locations returning to on-site work. Gross Profits reflect the increased earnings. Total Operating Expenses kept pace with an increase in the number of employees needed to operate the locations. Net Proceeds increased slightly from last year, leading to more Set Aside assessments. Overall, Vendor Net Profits increased from the previous year but were not enough to surpass FFY2023 profits.

Despite the current challenges, the Business Enterprise Program remains steadfast in its commitment to growth and sustainability. While net income has improved, the program has been working with vendors to expand current operations by adding more machines and updating third-party vendor agreements. This proactive approach demonstrates the program's unwavering commitment to its stakeholders and the future of the program.

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## SERVICE TO THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED OFFICES

### **SBVI State Office**

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### **Rehabilitation Center for the Blind**

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



Please contact the SBVI state office in Pierre [DHS-infoSBVI@state.sd.us](mailto:DHS-infoSBVI@state.sd.us) to request alternative formats.