

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



## Annual Report 2021



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



## Message from Jill Kundtz, Chair of the Board of SBVI

Jill Kundtz was appointed to the Board of SBVI in July of 2017 and reappointed for a second three-year term in April of 2020. She was elected Chair of the Board of SBVI at the June 2021 meeting. Jill's experience with vision loss began at a young age as she describes in her own words.



I was born and raised in Cleveland. My mother had normal sight, however, my father and 3 of 4 siblings, were legally blind, had astigmatism, were day blind and were monochromatic. Thus, I grew up with great sensitivity to sight loss and blindness issues.

I was a premature baby and had been given 100% oxygen. I also inherited half of my father's sight impairment, so as a child, I was sent to "Sight-saving School" for my grade school years. Following graduation from a public high school, I obtained my diploma in Nursing and later my Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

I worked as a Registered Nurse for 15 years before my sight took a precipitous drop leading me to heed my call to ministry. It was at that time I received my white cane. While studying at Andover Newton School of Theology in Boston, I worked as a Nursing Supervisor at Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary where I received surgery which improved my sight. After graduation, with a Master of Divinity degree, I served a church in a suburb of Cleveland and taught nursing. I then took a residency in Clinical Pastoral Education and upon completion, worked as a Chaplain. I am currently the Coordinator, Spiritual Care Services at Monument Health Rapid City.

Several years ago, my sight, again began to fail, and I was diagnosed with pathological myopia. It was at that point that I sought assistance from Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired, first through Heather Prince, Rehab. Teacher, then with Julaine Arient-Rollman, Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, to be able to continue with my ministry to hospitalized patients. To them and the Board, I am most grateful.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Members of the Board of SBVI are appointed by Governor Noem to advise the Division of SBVI on service delivery for citizens who are blind or visually impaired. Their experience, both personally and professionally, brings an important perspective, whether it is developing state plan goals and strategies or measuring client's satisfaction with services, each member brings something unique to the table. Board members are volunteers who selflessly commit their time to ensure that SBVI's services are client centered and focus on positive outcomes.



In the 2021 Board of SBVI Annual Report, you'll find a variety of information. We added a section with biographies of members appointed in 2021. Caseloads are rebounding compared to 2020, but we continue to build, and data reflects this. Success is defined in a variety of ways. Data only tells part of the story and we've found that comments from those who have participated in services is a true measure of success. You'll find comments from satisfaction surveys throughout this report. These comments capture the true impact that services make in the lives of citizens with vision loss.

After the challenges of 2020 and an unprecedented time caused by the pandemic, we looked forward to a more normal 2021. Well, what we've learned is that there is a "new normal". Board meetings continue to be a mix of virtual and in person based on the recommendations related to gatherings due to the spread of the Coronavirus. We have learned to adapt, and that perhaps, some good has come from the new approach we've had to take to conduct business. Board meetings have evolved to allow participation virtually even when they are "in person". This approach allows participation from members who are not able to travel, and the public has easy access to participate in meetings. Employees of the Division of SBVI have developed innovative approaches to service delivery to meet client's needs when face to face training isn't possible. When inclement weather makes travel difficult, we can work from home instead of office closures leading to down time.

As we bring 2021 to a close, we are looking forward to building on our experiences to improve service delivery in 2022. We are in the process of implementing a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) to use as a basis to create new goals and strategies for the state plan. The CSNA is an assessment of SBVI's service history with an emphasis on the past three years and what is projected to be the needs for the next three years. The Board of SBVI will play an important role as we navigate gathering data and seeking input to create meaningful goals and strategies.

In closing, I would like to express my gratitude for the insight that members of the Board of SBVI provide to me and to staff who deliver the services in SBVI. Your advice makes a lasting difference in the lives of those we serve.

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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.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Hometown</b>	<b>Representation</b>
Jill Kundtz, Chair	Rapid City	Business and Industry
*Jenny Anatra	Pierre	State Education Agency
Tana Buresch	Sioux Falls	Parent Connection
Burdette Clifford	Mission	American Indian VR Services
Chelle Hart	Sioux Falls	Disability Advocacy Group
*Tami Francis, Vice Chair	Sioux Falls	Business and Industry
Elaine Fritz	Baltic	Parent of Child w/ Disabilities
*Catherine Greseth - Chair	Rapid City	Business and Industry/SILC
Ryan Groeneweg, Member at Large	Sioux Falls	Business and Industry/SILC
Kellie Hauglid – Ex Officio	Sioux Falls	Vocational Rehab. Counselor
*Marcia Hultman	Pierre	Workforce Dev. Council
Cheri Knispel	Rapid City	Disability Advocacy Group
Gaye Mattke – Ex Officio	Pierre	SBVI Director
Jeff Nelson	Garretson	Business and Industry
Nichole Nelson	Aberdeen	Community Rehab. Program
Zay Norman	Hayes	Business and Industry
*Koni Sims – Vice Chair	Sioux Falls	Disability Advocacy Group
Cole Uecker	Pierre	Client Assistance Program
*Alan Vandenburg	Sioux Falls	Vocational Rehab. Counselor

\*Denotes members whose terms expired or who resigned during 2021

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

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## Board Members

Appointments to the Board of SBVI occur on an annual basis to replace those with expiring terms. The following members were appointed in 2021.

**Kendra Ringstmeyer** started with Department of Labor and Regulation in 2011 as an Employment Representative at the Pierre Local Office. She has been promoted multiple times within the department and is now the Director of Workforce Development, with primary responsibilities to coordinate the implementation of state and federal training programs, be responsive to the needs of businesses, and assist the customers with employment and training services. She recently earned the Governor's Leadership Certificate and master's degree in administration through USD.



**Kellie Hauglid** is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) and National Certified Counselor (NCC). She has worked for SBVI for over 10 years. Kellie has a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and Agency/Community Counseling from South Dakota State University and obtained a Vision Specialist in Vocational Rehabilitation Graduate Certificate from Mississippi State University. She is the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Supervisor for seven VR counselors across the state. Kellie has in-depth knowledge of vision loss and accommodations.



**Jeff Nelson** managed a successful farming and ranching operation for many years until he lost his sight due to diabetic retinopathy. Jeff attended the Rehab. Center for the Blind where he learned skills of blindness and employment skills. He applied to the Business Enterprise Program in September 2018 and began managing the cafeteria at the EROS Space Data Center in October 2019. Jeff brings with him his firsthand experience working with SBVI's vocational rehabilitation program and lifetime of business knowledge and experience.



**Chelle Hart** attended SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired for most of her education, obtaining a degree in speech therapy before moving to California and obtaining a degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. She returned to SD in 1989 as a Rehabilitation Counselor, then worked for the last 23 years at SBVI as a Rehabilitation Teacher, retiring in 2020. She has been a member of SD Association of the Blind (SDAB) since 1972 and held numerous positions in SDAB at the state and national level. She has served on numerous boards and committees throughout her career. She continues to volunteer with peer support groups.





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## 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** – This committee provides input on strategic planning and policy development and evaluates state plan updates, consumer satisfaction surveys, 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.

**Assistive Technology Advisory Committee (ATAC)** – ATAC is comprised of individuals who are knowledgeable about the latest innovations in assistive technology. Members advise SBVI in matters concerning assistive technology.

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## Board Meetings

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

December 4, 2020, Video Conference

March 19, 2021, Video Conference

June 11, 2021, Pierre, SD

September 24, 2021, Video Conference

Meetings are open to the public and held at accessible locations or via Zoom video/audio conferences. 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 of the draft agenda. Topics are chosen based on priorities identified by the Board and the Rehabilitation Act.



Based on advice of the Executive Committee most meetings were held via Zoom during the report period. In addition to allowing members to follow CDC guidelines, this format was also convenient for the public to attend either via video conference or phone. The December 2021 meeting was held at the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind with the option of attending via Zoom.

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## 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 2021 Governor's Awards ceremony on October 5th in the state capitol rotunda.

Gov. Noem presented awards to the following 2021 recipients:

- Mark T. Sternhagen of Brookings - Outstanding Individual with a Disability
- Eric Larson of Menno - Outstanding Employee with a Disability
- TMA of Mitchell - Outstanding Private Employer (Small Employer)
- MasterBrand Cabinets/Starmark Cabinetry of Sioux Falls - Outstanding Large Employer
- Brown County Register of Deeds of Aberdeen - Outstanding Employer
- Cindy Bierman of Mitchell- Outstanding Transition Services
- Vicki Nelson of Sioux Falls - Distinguished Service



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.

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### South Dakota Disability Employment Awareness Month

The month of October is nationally recognized as National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). NDEAM aims to recognize the accomplishments and contributions of employees with disabilities to the workforce- and remind businesses of the importance of diverse hiring inclusion policies and practices. This year's theme was "America's Recovery: Powered by Inclusion" reflecting the importance of ensuring that people with disabilities have full access to employment and community involvement during our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.



South Dakota recognized NDEAM with various educational and awareness activities throughout the state including a free streaming of an award-winning documentary film "Hearts of Glass." This film showcases a high-tech agricultural start up business and the successful employment of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, while highlighting the importance of competitive, inclusive employment.

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## White Cane Safety Day

Governor Noem released a proclamation declaring October 15, 2021 White Cane Safety Day in South Dakota to recognize the capabilities and aspirations of citizens who are blind or visually impaired. A press release also acknowledged White Cane Safety Day.



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

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## 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 the pandemic the event was scaled back in 2021. Nine organizations attended and five others sent information for gift bags. The Center for Disabilities emailed a video to legislators. Gift bags were distributed to legislators with a variety of items promoting organizations. South Dakota Association of the Blind contributed a folder which included a bookmark, information on the white cane, a Braille card, and a newsletter regarding blindness. The next Disability Day at the Capitol is scheduled for Wednesday, February 23, 2022, in the Rotunda.

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## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

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The Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program provides individualized rehabilitation services that result in optimal employment outcomes for citizens who are blind or visually impaired. Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors provide specialized services throughout the State of South Dakota. The VR program reporting below reflects data that the Rehabilitation Service Administration tracks based on a Program Year, July 1, 2020–June 30, 2021 (PY20), also considered the state fiscal year.

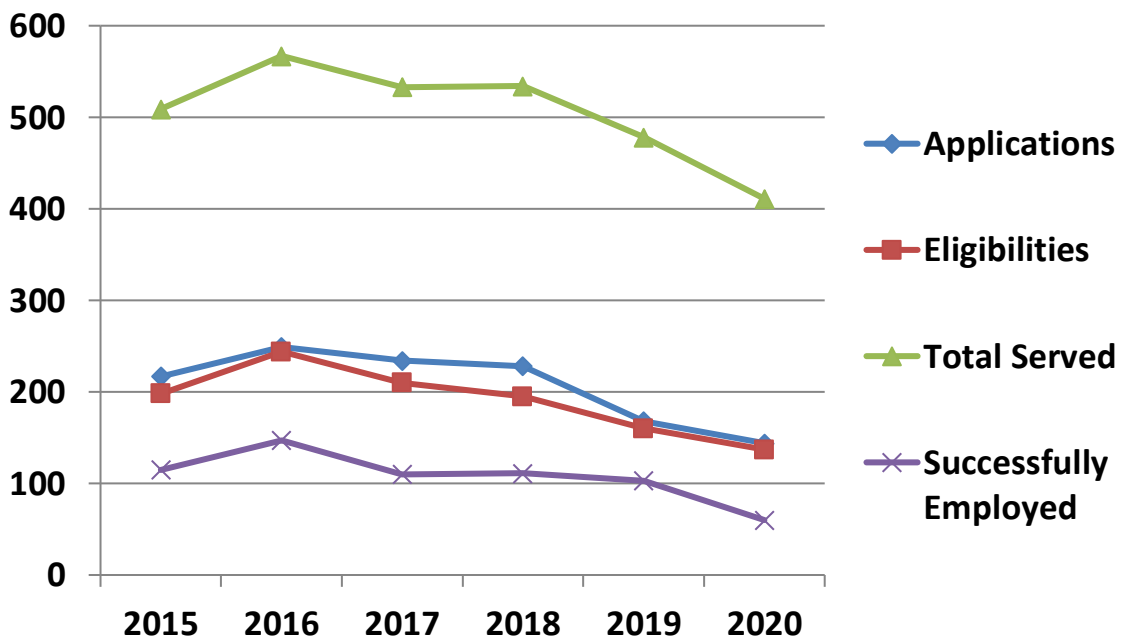
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### Program Year Performance

- 411 people were served through the SBVI VR Program in the most recent Program Year, compared to 478 people the previous year.
  - 60 people were successfully rehabilitated through the vocational rehabilitation program, compared to 103 the previous program year.
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### SBVI Vocational Rehabilitation Caseload Summary

The chart below illustrates the number of people who have applied for and received services from the SBVI Vocational Rehabilitation program over the past six years. SBVI counselors saw a decrease in the number of vocational rehabilitation cases in the most recent Program Year. There were 144 applications, 137 eligibilities, a total of 411 individuals served, and 60 clients were successfully employed.

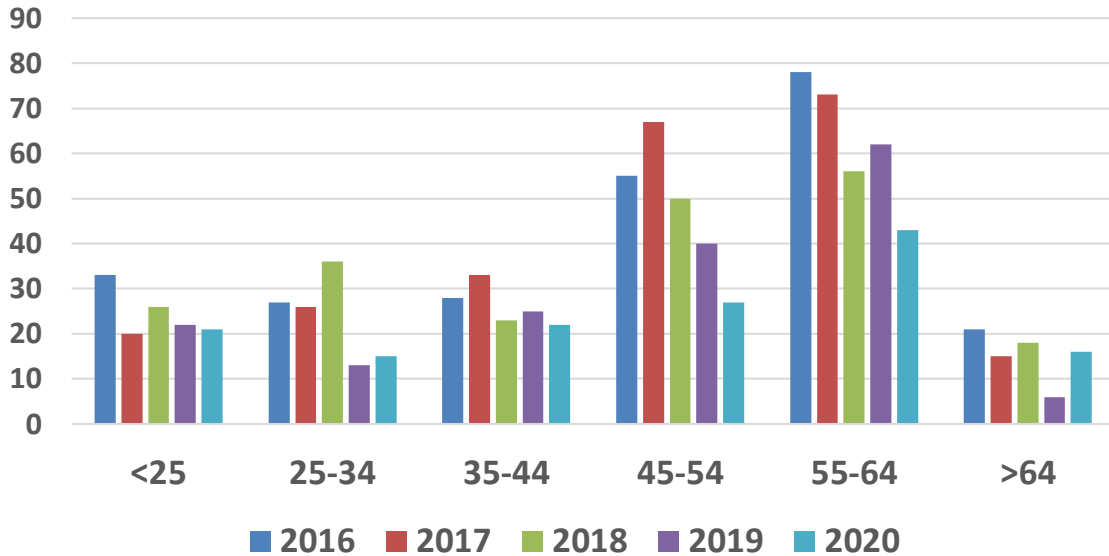


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*“I felt that everyone was interested in what I had to say and was easy to get along with, and easy to talk to.”*

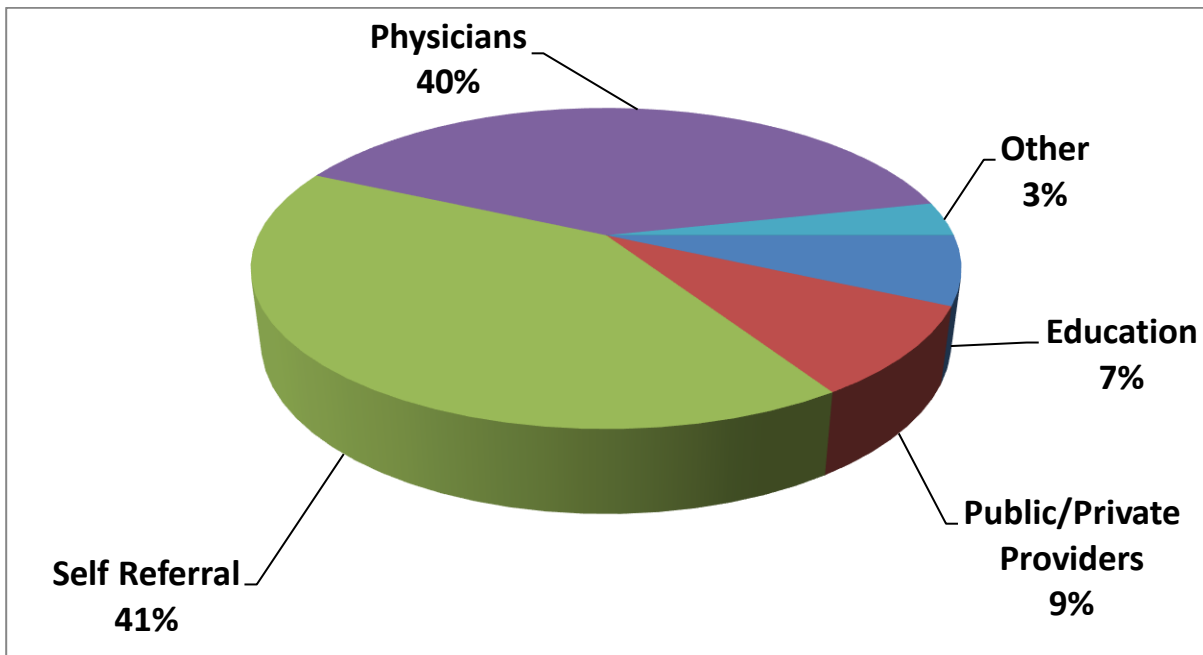
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### Age at Application



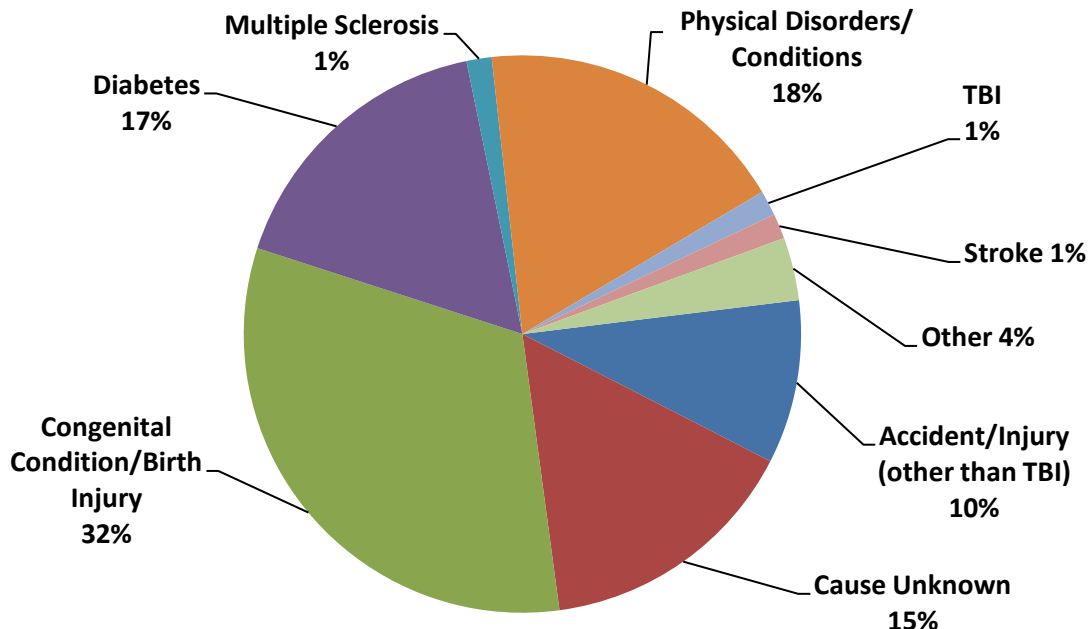
Although SBVI takes applications from individuals starting at age fourteen, historically most applicants who apply for services are between the ages of 45-64 due to the progressive nature of their vision loss.

### Referral Sources

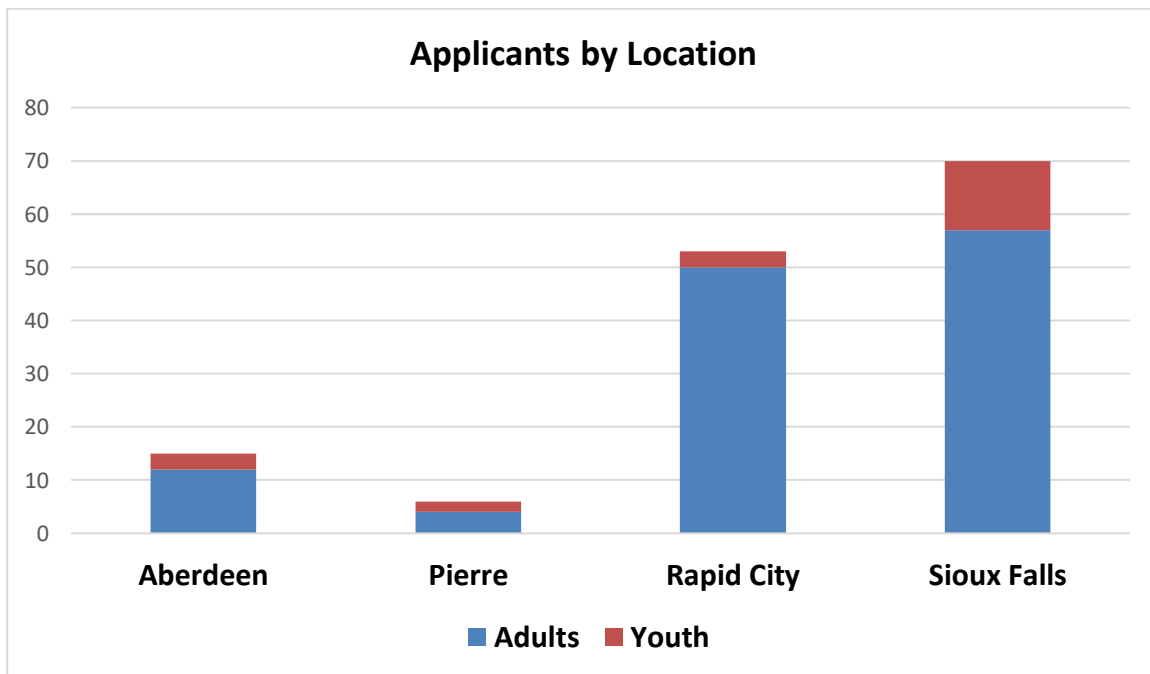


Referrals from self/family/friends have increased this year, with referrals from physicians as a close second for referrals. With a focus on transition services to students, SBVI staff will continue to increase outreach efforts to school personnel and parents to inform them of the availability of transition 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 a congenital condition/birth injury (32%), a physical disorder/condition (18%) or diabetes (17%).



SBVI saw a total of 123 new applications from adults and 21 applications from students and youth. Youth is defined as individuals in the vocational rehabilitation program under the age of 25. Average age of youth that applied for services was 19 years old. Average age of adults that applied was 51 years old.

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## Impacts to Employment

SBVI assisted 60 clients to successfully obtain employment. Those clients had a visual impairment as their primary disability, but fifty-seven percent of them were also diagnosed with a secondary disability, which also impacts their ability to work.

It is common for SBVI Counselors to work with clients who have multiple disabilities that affect more than their vision. SBVI increasingly works with clients with multiple disabilities as reflected in the following table.

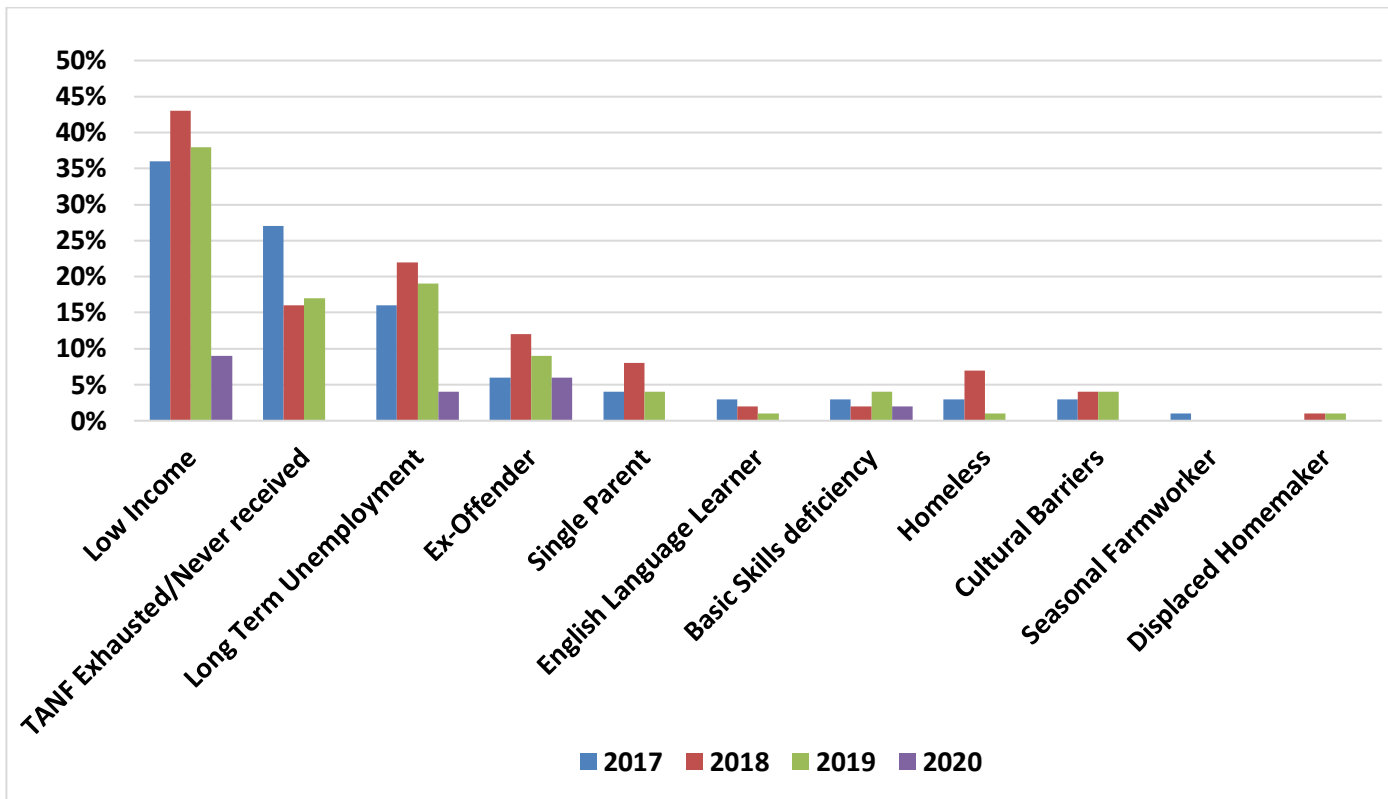
Secondary Impairment	Closed Cases
Diabetes Mellitus	10
Physical Disorders/Conditions	4
Cause Unknown	4
Congenital Conditions/Birth Injury	2
Accident/Injury (other than TBI or SCI)	2
Cardiac and other Conditions	2
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)	2
Arthritis and Rheumatism	2
Specific Learning Disability	1
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	1
Intellectual Disability IQ $\leq$ 70	1
Multiple Sclerosis	1
Immune Deficiencies excluding HIV/AIDS	1
Anxiety Disorder	1

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*“Without the services I received I would not have been able to continue working, as my eyesight was getting so bad my far away vision was bad enough that I could only see a couple feet away and my close vision (trifocals) was bad enough that I had to be right on top of something to read it. Everything was provided as soon as I got an appointment and follow-up was also great. Everyone I worked with were great and friendly and seemed to care about what I was going through. It was very helpful knowing what to expect when I saw the eye doctor and getting information on what to expect after the surgery and beyond. It's very hard on someone who works and is expected to do certain things and you can't do them good because you can't see good. I can also now sit at the table and read like a normal person and I also feel safer while driving. Thank you so much. I am still working for the same place and have now taken on more responsibility on the job.”*

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## Barriers to Employment



SBVI identifies barriers clients are experiencing that impact their ability to obtain work without assistance. The above chart shows the percentage of clients who are experiencing these barriers when SBVI first develops a plan of services with them. This year, there were 109 initial plans created with clients. Low income, long-term unemployment and ex-offenders are the top barriers to individuals obtaining employment.

### Employment Data at Closure

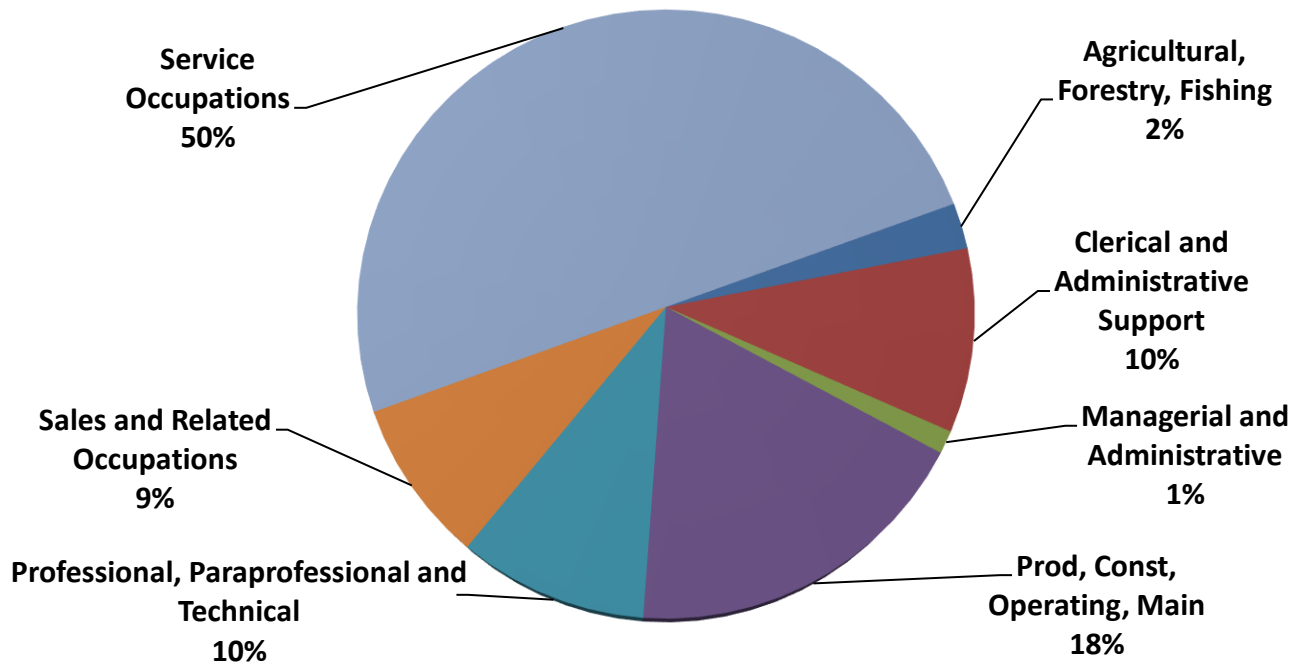
Employment Category	Total Cases	Average Weekly Hours	Average Weekly Wage	Average Hourly Wage
All Employment	60	32	\$470.11	\$14.68
Competitive Integrated Employment	53	33	\$491.50	\$15.01
Self-Employment	7	26	\$308.18	\$11.66

SBVI clients average a 32-hour work week, with an average hourly wage of \$14.68. Those in competitive integrated employment saw an average hourly wage of \$15.01 per hour, which is a substantial increase from the previous year average wage of \$12.76 per hour.



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## OCCUPATIONS OF INDIVIDUALS SUCCESSFULLY EMPLOYED



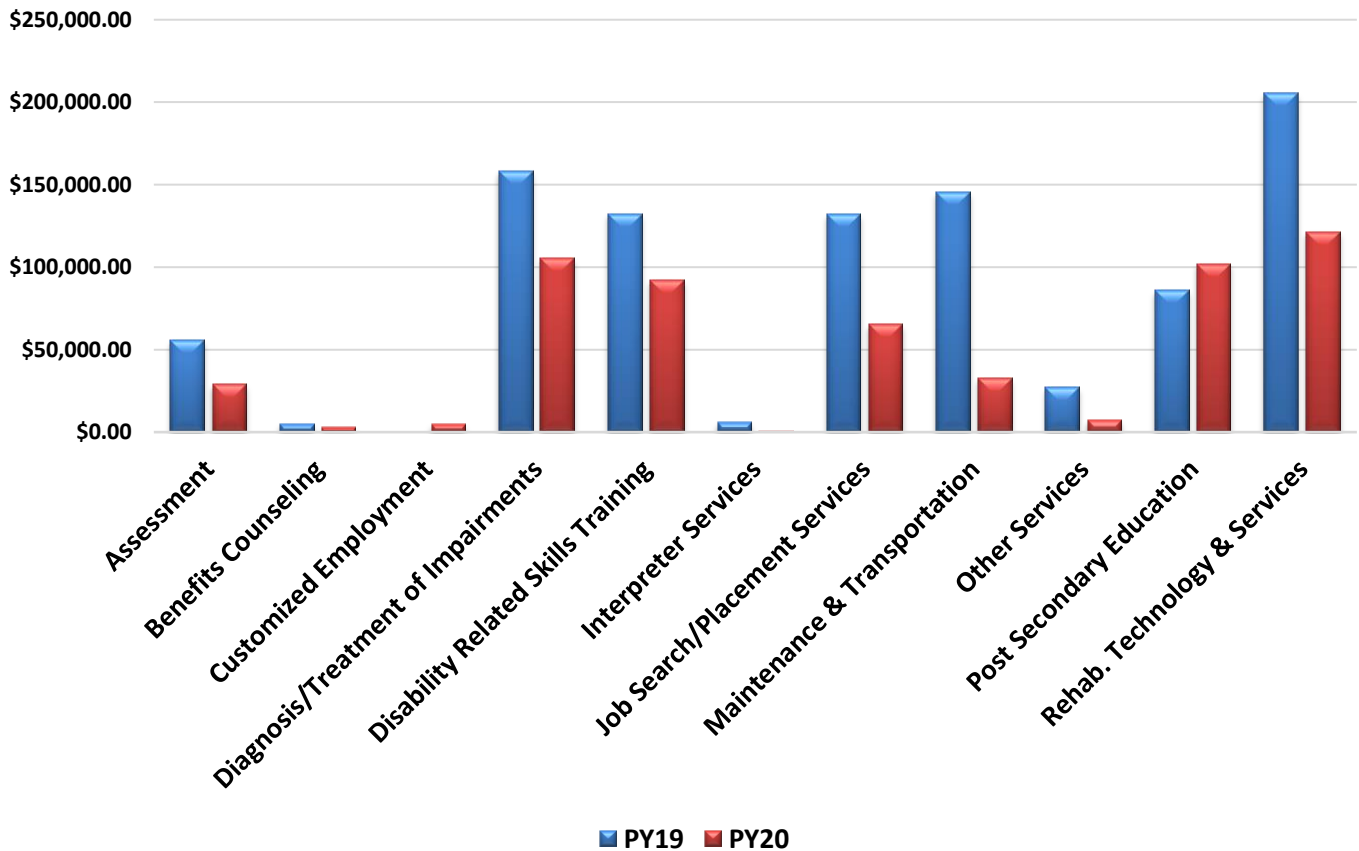
The Vocational Rehabilitation program helped 60 people to achieve their employment goals. This chart reflects the occupations of people successfully employed, with half of the jobs in service occupations.

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*"It really is a great program. Even just a phone call rewards me every time. It is obvious that your staff is in a place in which they can be caregivers and guide as well. They were all a blessing- I needed more than I knew. At different times during phone classes I was greatly uplifted and comforted in continuing forward on days I faced a sense of darkness or lowness. Instructions help me grow and step into confidence on my jobsite. Always prompt, courteous, timely and gracious to help me in any way possible motivating me forward into "I can do this..." mode. Every personality gifted me. Everyone was kind and courteous in every session. I was guided through the slump in COVID, and they all blessed me and held me up. However, I do stress on cloudy days. I "feel" like I am losing my light. Your staff are quite beautifully geared to "take care" of that deeper emotional need and to combat that fear of blindness. I believe they offered a "life belt" to help me stay afloat. Helping me to focus on each and every important step instead of how high the mountain really is. I am quite content with working at the church in an atmosphere of love and blessing and still have the opportunity to gain ground on the computer training that I so desired. I experience more independence and willingness to learn more. At some point we have talked about spending classes at the school to continue to combat and be refreshed with what I have learned. I am not sure when as COVID kind of put a lid on that. Right now, I am seeking medical to get to a lesser state of pain to do more."*

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## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PURCHASED SERVICES ANALYSIS



SBVI spent \$603,500.68 on client services for VR participants, a decrease of \$463,607.64, or 43% less than the previous year. Assistive technology services and devices are an integral service for accessing information in a wide variety of occupations, as well as for post-secondary education.

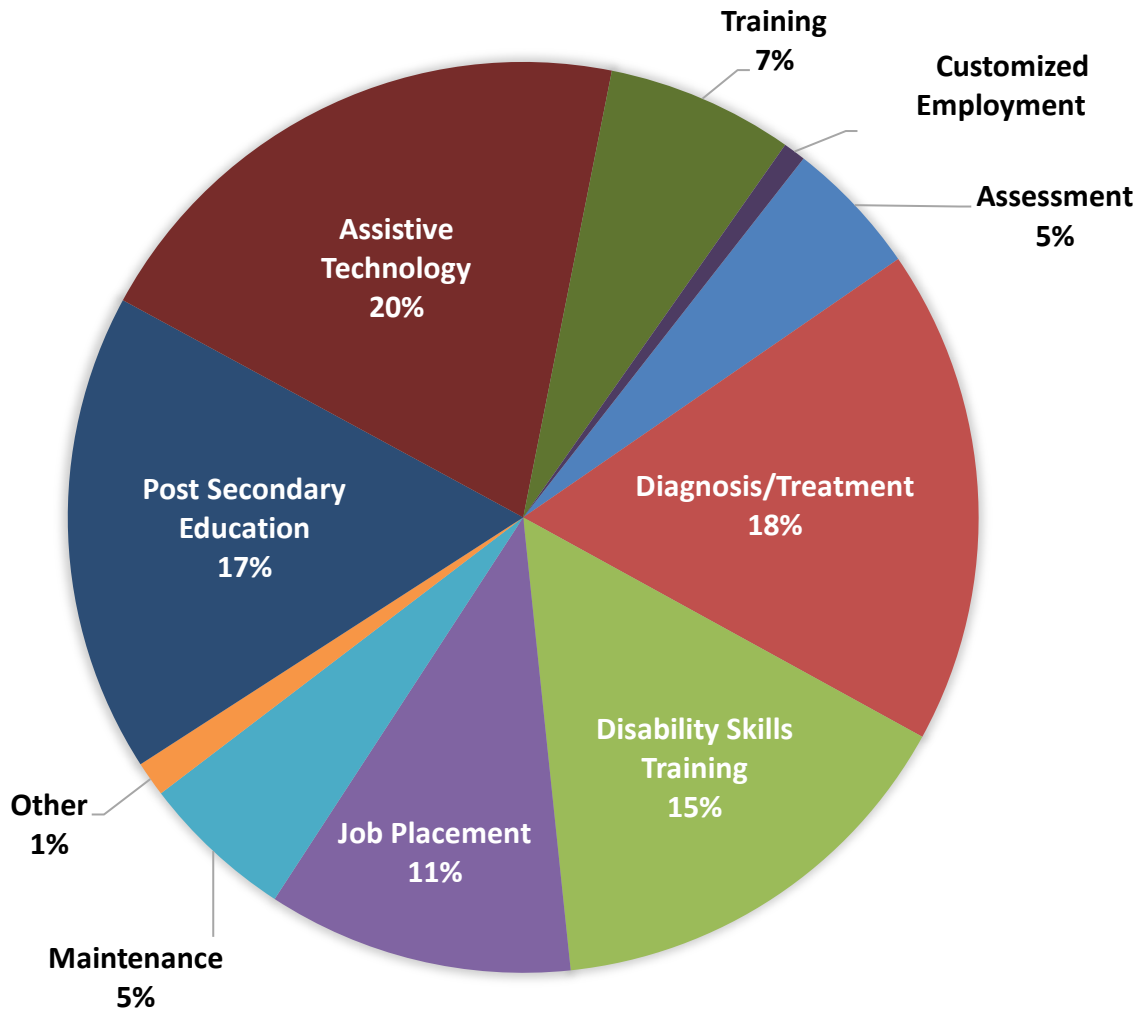
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*“If there is a 5-star rating- I would give Mike a ten. Mike went above and beyond to help him as much as he could. Mike has a heart of gold and is the most understanding person in this world, and he is so easy to talk to. I wish everyone had a heart of gold like Mike. I am forever in debt to him. I have offered to take Mike to supper many times, but Mike thanked me for my gesture, but he was not able to do that. I wish there was a way to repay him for how much he has positively impacted my life.”*

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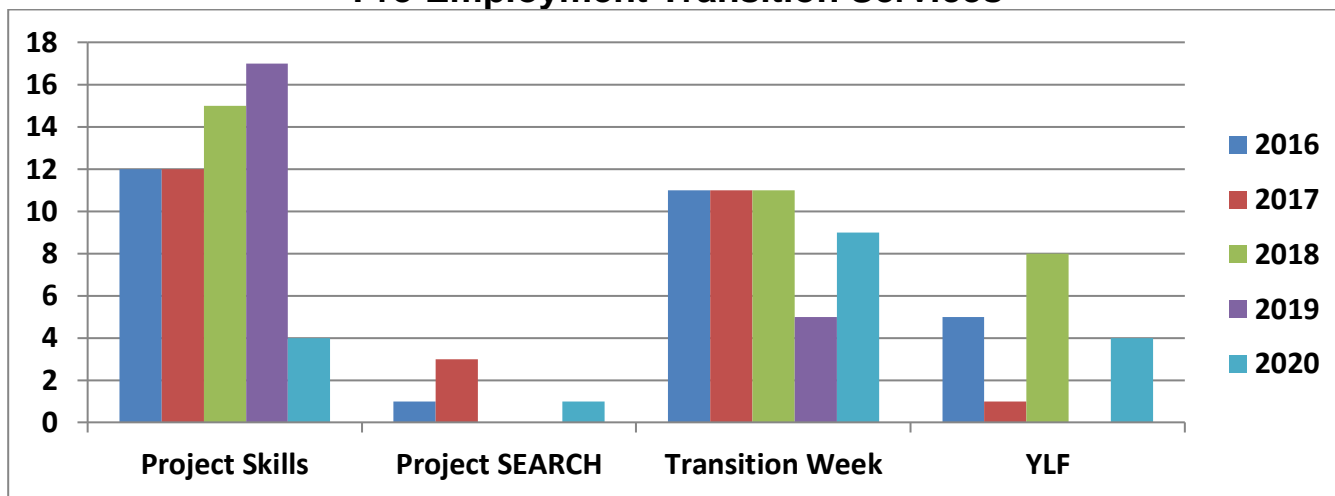
## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES PROVIDED



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 their employment barriers and increase independence. Vocational training, post-secondary education and job placement services result in clients obtaining competitive integrated employment in their community.

The most common services provided included assistive technology, diagnosis and treatment, disability skills training and post-secondary education, which totaled 70 percent of all services provided.

## Pre-Employment Transition Services



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

Most Common Planned Services for Youth	Percent of Plans
Counseling and Guidance	86%
Assistive Technology Devices	34%
Room & Board	25%
Transportation	16%
Tuition & Fees; 4 yr. College	16%
Assistive Technology Services	14%
Project Skills	12%
SBVI Transition Week	11%
Follow Along Services	7%
Job Coaching	7%

Rehabilitation Counselors focus on counseling and guidance with youth and work closely with them to provide pre-employment transition services including determining ways to overcome their barriers to employment. The counselor and the student agree on an employment goal based on the student's interests, skills and abilities and plan services to help obtain their employment goal. Counseling and guidance are the most common service provided at 86 percent, followed by Assistive Technology devices at 26 percent, then room and board at 25 percent. Counselors continue to participate in Individual Education Plans with the local school districts.

*“Great staff! Thank you so much!”*

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## South Dakota School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Transition Specialist



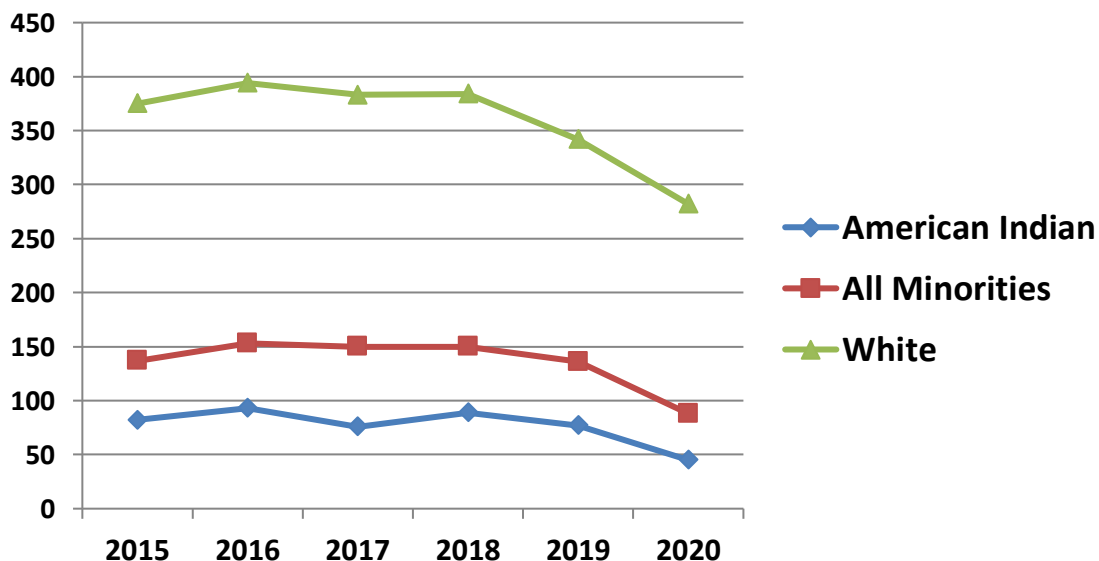
SBVI contracts with the SD School for the Blind & Visually Impaired for a Transition Specialist position. The Transition Specialist provides statewide transition services and outreach to schools and students with vision loss and blindness. This year SBVI scheduled an All-Staff Training in Aberdeen

August 10-12, 2021. The agenda included a tour of the SD School for the Blind and Visually Impaired and introductions of the new superintendent, Dan Trefz.

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### 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, which has not changed in the past ten years census. This year, 12 percent of individuals served by SBVI were of American Indian descent, and 24 percent of all individuals served reported coming from a minority background. SBVI experienced a decrease in clients served in Program Year 2021.



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. There are six American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation programs in South Dakota.

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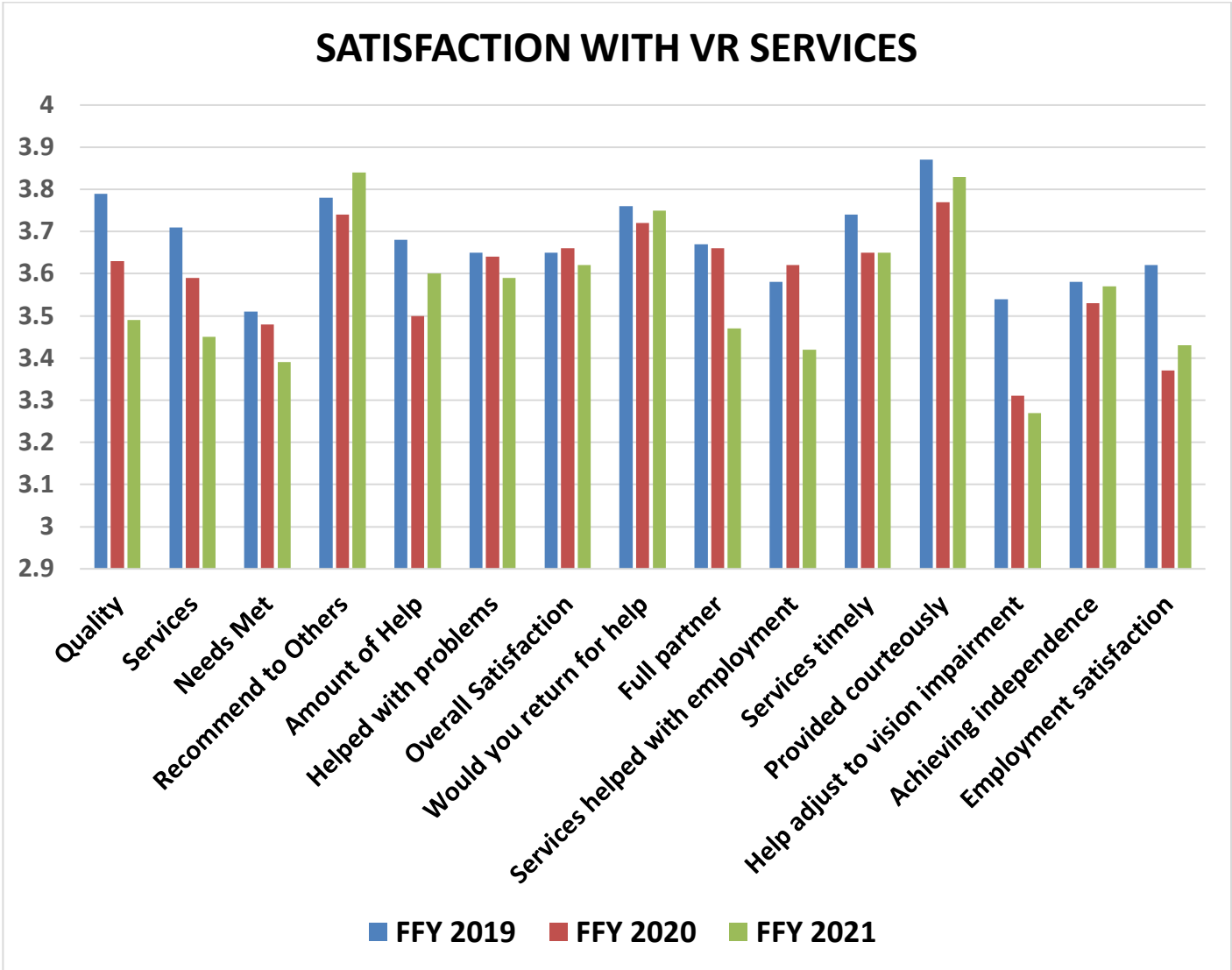
## **Vocational Rehabilitation Program Client Satisfaction Survey Analysis**

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 12<sup>th</sup> year that SBVI has conducted this annual survey.

Between October 1, 2020 and September 30, 2021, the survey was mailed out to 138 individuals who received services and were closed from the SBVI vocational rehabilitation program during the past federal fiscal year. This is a 25.4 percent decrease in the number of surveys mailed out this year compared to 185 surveys mailed last year. Of the 136 questionnaires mailed, 66 questionnaires were returned, which is a 49 percent response rate. The responses were submitted to Survey Monkey this year and average ratings identified over the course of four quarters. This data gets shared with the Board of SBVI on an annual basis. Along with the survey ratings, previous clients have an opportunity to provide comments and feedback. Many of those comments are found throughout the Board's annual report.

<b>Satisfaction Survey Questions</b>	<b>Average Rating</b>
<b>1. How would you rate the quality of service you received?</b>	3.49
<b>2. Did you get the kind of service you wanted?</b>	3.45
<b>3. To what extent has our program met your needs?</b>	3.39
<b>4. If a friend were in need of similar help, would you recommend our program to him/her?</b>	3.84
<b>5. How satisfied are you with the amount of help you received?</b>	3.60
<b>6. Have the services you received helped you to deal more effectively with your problems?</b>	3.59
<b>7. In an overall, general sense, how satisfied are you with the service you received?</b>	3.62
<b>8. If you were to seek help again, would you come back to our program?</b>	3.75
<b>9. Were you a full partner in the process to determine your employment goal and services to be provided?</b>	3.47
<b>10. Do you feel that the services provided by your counselor were necessary to obtain or keep your employment?</b>	3.42
<b>11. Were information and services provided to you in a timely manner?</b>	3.65

12. Were information and services provided to you in a courteous manner?	3.83
13. Did the services help you adjust to your visual impairment?	3.27
14. How beneficial were services in assisting you in achieving more independence?	3.57
15. How satisfied are you with the employment that you obtained as a result of Vocational Rehabilitation Services?	3.43



Compared to the previous two years, results show a slight decrease in overall satisfaction and increases in satisfaction in the areas of courteous service provision, employment satisfaction, and the amount of help they received. This increase resulted in increased positive responses to recommend the service to others, returning if they need additional help, and increased independence.

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## The Journey – Eric Rippentrop

The journey of 100 miles begins with a single step. Each step gets one closer to the optimal goal or finish line. I have found this to be true in both the life I have lived and the profession I am in.

The day of my accident I was working as an electrician. After work I was riding in the front seat of a truck, we hit a pile of loose gravel, went into the ditch, and rolled several times. I was not wearing a seatbelt. Upon arrival, the paramedics assessed the scene and gave me a 4% chance of survival! The next few months I spent in the hospital with a collapsed left lung, severed left carotid artery, traumatic brain injury, no left eye and a shredded optic nerve on my right eye. Learning to walk, speak, and move were all chores I had to learn again. While still in the hospital a Senior Rehabilitation Counselor spoke with me about services from Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired. The Dr. told me, “Yes, Eric, you are now blind.” My old life gone and now my new life was on its way.



Eric working on computer

I eventually started my journey at the South Dakota Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. My time there was incredible! The caring and instruction was just what I needed when I needed it. I felt the compassion and drive to better equip me in the world. This time also instilled in me the sense of motivation and drive again by witnessing the help I received. With this drive and the knowledge my mother instilled in me, I enrolled in college to pursue a degree, relying on all the tools taught at the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. I completed my internship, volunteered for four years, earning the 2016 Sioux Falls Volunteer of the Year, and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in Human Development and Family Studies in August 2019.

My wife and I moved to Aberdeen in 2020 and my SBVI counselor suggested completing a paid work experience with an employer in the community. This would allow me to work in a setting to determine a job fit and allowed me to gain some experience and build on my resume. My experiences volunteering and education tied together for my work experience at The Journey Home. The Journey Home is a supportive housing program. All food and clothing are given out at no cost to the citizen, donated by the public. Here both men and women can pick themselves up again and prepare for life on their own. I interviewed for the work experience and they were kind enough to give me a chance! My primary tasks would be greeting people, answering the phone, helping citizens drop off donations, and assisting people wanting a food box or finding an outfit to wear. Once my employment experience hours were complete, I asked “Could I continue this role as a volunteer?” They replied, “That won’t be possible because we want to hire you and become part of the Journey Home staff.” I was relieved and full of joy! I continue to work at The Journey Home and my coworkers are amazing! I often ask myself: “Who is getting more help here, the people I help or me?” You will never “work” a day in your life when doing something you love!



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

People who acquire vision loss later in life are often less able to perform their activities of daily living, tend to be less mobile, and often experience isolation which can have a significant impact on the physical and mental well-being of an older person.

The services from the Independent Living Blind Program are intended to help people achieve their personal goals so they can resume their daily activities despite their vision loss experiences. Through training and provision of magnification devices, the individual can learn to use their remaining vision which leads to an improvement to their quality of life.

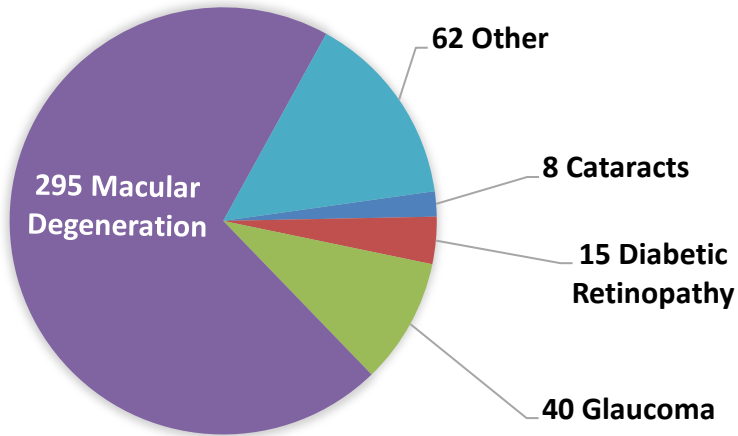
In FY 2021, the ILB program provided one or more of the services listed below to 420 individuals with vision loss compared to 362 in FY 2020. Staff closed 197 cases in 2021 compared to 173 in 2020.

<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.	299
Daily Living Skills – training in the use of adaptive aids and assistive technology for daily living	318
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.	411
Counseling – Peer, individual, or group counseling to assist with adjustment to visual impairment and blindness	205
Low Vision Exams – Evaluations to identify strategies and devices for enhancing visual performance	171
Advocacy Training – participation in advocacy training activities such as consumer organization meetings and peer support groups	16
Referral to Other Agencies – Referral to other service providers, programs, and agencies.	331
Orientation and Mobility – Travel training and learning to access public or private transportation to travel safely and independently.	61

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## Types of Eye Diseases for People Served

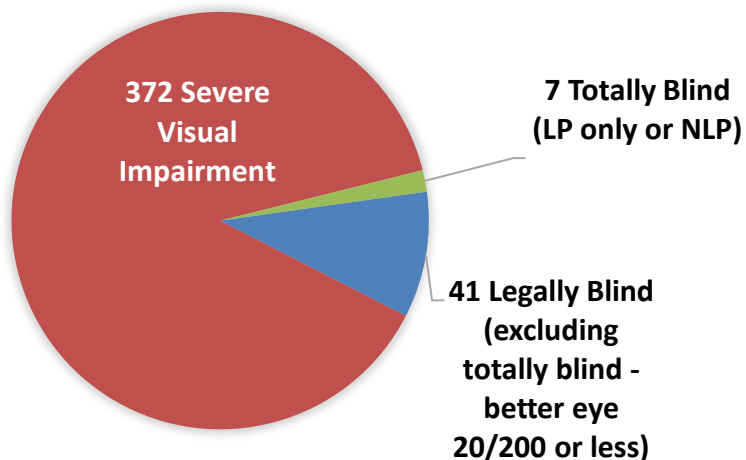
Macular degeneration was the primary cause of vision loss in 295 (70%) of the 420 individuals who received services in 2021 as reflected in the following chart. When reviewing the primary types of eye diseases among the people served in the IL program, macular degeneration occurs more frequently than others listed. Macular degeneration results in blurring of the sharp, central vision needed for straight-ahead activities such as seeing faces, driving, reading, and sewing. It affects an individual's ability to see fine detail but causes no pain which means it can be undetected for a period of time.



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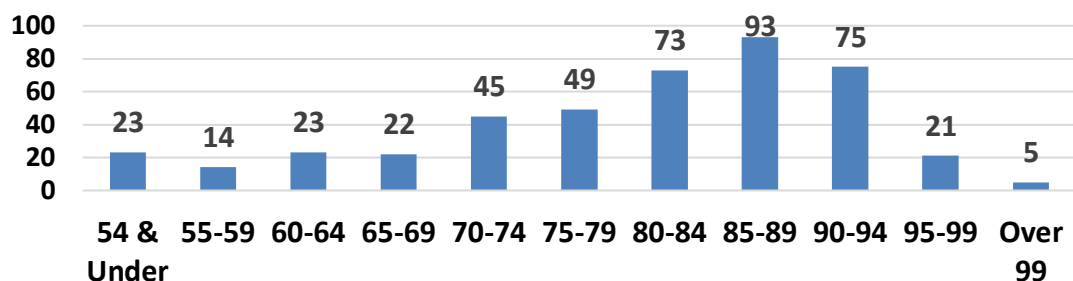
## Degree of Vision Loss

The following chart explains the degree of vision loss experienced by the 420 individuals (over age 55) served in 2021. Only 7 people served in the program (2%) experienced total blindness. Individuals who have some remaining vision which can be used to complete activities of daily living often experience severe visual impairment, which makes up 372 or 89% of the people served.



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## Age Range of ILB Individuals Served in FY 2021



The target population for the ILB program is individuals over the age of 55; however, Rehabilitation Teachers also served 23 individuals under age 55 who are experiencing vision loss. As reflected in this chart, 267 or 60% percent were over the age of 80, with five people over the age of 100.

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### Satisfaction with Independent Living Services

Citizens who receive services from the ILB program can provide feedback through a satisfaction survey which is sent to them a few weeks after the end of their services. Survey responses assist SBVI to assess whether services are effective in helping citizens to maintain or regain their independence. One hundred eighty-five surveys were sent out to those whose services ended during the 2021 fiscal year. One hundred eleven people responded to the survey, which is a 60% response rate. SBVI encourages individuals to use the survey to provide feedback about their services. Here are several comments from surveys returned to the agency:

- *I have a magnifier and a CCTV so I'm good for now. Heather did a good job.*
- *People have responded in a timely manner which has been very helpful. The Braille and Talking Book Library service has been great.*
- *I've been given good advice. I have magnifier & CCTV and now I'm using the audio books – Fun! I've attended peer support meetings and plan to attend again.*
- *I'm doing well at this time. I sure appreciate the help I received from your program. I'm able to do my crafting and enjoy my products.*

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

SBVI created the CCTV Lease/Loan Program in 2004 with memorial funds donated specifically for providing devices for older citizens which could not be purchased using the limited Older Blind grant funds. The program began with 24 units as a start-up to determine if we could address a need for older program participants who could not acquire the devices using insurance or Medicaid. Since then, SBVI has purchased over 395 machines for the CCTV program that have high definition (HD) screens which provide a magnified image that has a substantially higher resolution for individuals with low vision.

As technology changed, SBVI expanded the selection to include CCTVs that have optical character recognition (OCR) that magnifies and provides auditory output of the printed information. CCTV units may be leased for \$30 per month or loaned at no cost for those who meet financial and economic need criteria. In 2021, SBVI purchased twenty-five new units for the program and periodically remove ten-year-old machines due to breakage and aging technology. The CCTV Lease/Loan Program has two hundred sixteen units which are rotated to older citizens with vision loss as needed throughout the year. SBVI is proud of this program which has demonstrated a significant service to 1,136 older citizens with low vision since 2004.

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### **Collaboration Between Agencies - Key to Jerome's Success**

Jerome applied for the Independent Living program because he was struggling with his visual changes from macular degeneration and glaucoma. He was also a veteran, so he was informed of the VA's Vision Impairment Service Team and their Low Vision Clinic. Jerome had many independent living goals to achieve. He wanted to feel safer while traveling, use his appliances, make writing easier, use his telephone and computer, and find magnification for reading print.

Through a combination of working with his rehabilitation teacher and the VA low vision services, Jerome found that he could regain a lot of independence by incorporating learned skills, methods, techniques, and devices into his daily routine. Jerome benefited from training on the use of a white cane, using sighted guide with his wife, and the stair technique. He greatly enjoyed the Talking Book service from the library for reading books. The VA provided Jerome with a Merlin CCTV and a Portable Electronic magnifier for reading printed materials, especially his Bible and prayer books. He also got the ZoomText program and a low vision keyboard to help him use his home computer. Jerome was given a large button telephone, which allowed him to visually see the number pad so he can place calls to his grandchildren.

After two years passed, Jerome came back to SBVI for more training. He realized that there were more skills to learn and how beneficial they were to maintain independence. Through a referral by the rehabilitation teacher, Jerome attended the SD Rehab Center for the Blind. He was provided in-depth training on cooking and cleaning techniques, computer training, more O&M with his white cane, and he learned that there were crafts and leisure activities that he could still enjoy.

Jerome expressed much gratitude for the support that SBVI and the VA provided to him. He told many people about his positive experiences with SBVI, and his story lives on through them. His brother and a sister-in-law have contacted SBVI for services, because they had heard of what Jerome was able to accomplish and achieve with guidance from SBVI. Submitted by Amanda Jones

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# REHABILITATION CENTER FOR THE BLIND

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## Adaptive Skills of Blindness



The Rehabilitation Center for the Blind provides daily classes to teach adaptive skills of blindness. During 2021, there were 22 men and 22 women who attended training at the Center. In addition, there were 9 high school transition-age students who attended Transition Week. The demographics of students attending training were 50 percent women and 50 percent men, with an average age of 34 years. Twenty percent were blind, 27 percent were legally blind,

and 27 percent were visually impaired, with the rest of the trainees being staff in new employee training. Secondary disabilities affecting students included diabetes, deaf, hearing impaired, learning disabilities, mental health, brain injury, and other conditions. Trainees were referred from all district offices, with 54 percent of all referrals from the Sioux Falls office.

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## Assistive Technology (AT) First Friday Clinics

Computers using assistive technology are vital to assist people with visual impairments to work remotely and stay connected. A lower number of people participated with in-person assistive technology training in 2021, but a significant number of people received services through remote contacts from the assistive technology specialist. In 2021, 87 people participated in several different options for assistive technology training including First Friday classes, walk-in clinics, telephone, FaceTime, email, or Skype. This assistance allows people to obtain technical assistance as they need it, not just while they are attending classes at SDRC.

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## Low Vision Clinics



Low vision evaluations with Dr. Nick Wenande occur the second Wednesday of each month. In 2021, there were 9 clinics serving 48 people, an increase from 2020. The number of people served last year was unprecedented and lower because of the turnover in SBVI staff, which resulted in fewer referrals, as well as the pandemic reducing the number of people attending appointments.

Individuals referred from the Older Blind Independent Living program made up the greatest percentage of referrals to the clinic.

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## Transition Week 2021

Transition Week was held June 13–17, 2021 with nine students attending. Students participated in Skills of Blindness classes, Employment Skills Training, toured Southeast Technical College, met with the Department of Labor, and learned about the importance of soft skills for maintaining employment. In the final session, Keith Bundy shared his inspirational story and discussed the importance of advocacy. Fun nightly activities were held to build social interactions with peers.



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## South Dakota Vocational Resources



Employment Skills Training (EST) assisted 83 individuals in 2021, as compared to 38 in 2020; 41 attended in-person EST, 12 participated in virtual one-on-one training, and 30 participated in the virtual World of Work class. There was a slight increase of in-person EST with numbers still being lower, largely due to the Coronavirus pandemic. To compensate for lower in-person training, virtual training continued for people outside of the Sioux Falls area. This was a great option to reach more clients statewide with employment needs. A virtual World of Work class was provided via Zoom for people with varying degrees of experience. Topics

included employer expectations, how to search and apply for jobs, develop a resume, gather references, and practice interview questions.

Job placement services were provided to 26 individuals in 2021, the same number served in 2020. Fewer referrals for job placement services occurred because people who were at a higher risk for Coronavirus were unsure of the safety of certain workplaces settings and their risk of infection because of underlying health conditions.

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## Summary of Services

SDRC Service	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Transition Students	11	11	5	9
Low Vision Patients	85	59	23	48
Employment Specialist	26	32	26	26
Skills of Blindness	72	67	34	36
Employment Skills Training	90	68	38	83
AT Walk-in Clinic & First Friday Classes	105	45	150	87
Total	389	282	275	289

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## Satisfaction Survey Responses

Participants in the adaptive Skills of Blindness program are asked to complete a survey regarding their satisfaction with services. SBVI staff are not asked to complete a survey. The overall rating was 3.7 on a 4.0 scale, which falls between the ratings of (3) Agreed and (4) Strongly Agreed to the questions about the quality of services. With seasoned staff and a good understanding of teaching the skills of blindness, they are often praised by participants that they provide an environment where students are encouraged and helped to build their confidence.

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

*“I liked that every day I got to do something different” and “I learned how to walk properly with my cane, which made me more independent. They told me what to do, and then actually showed me how to do it and what I was doing right/wrong.”*

The **Employment Skills Training** (EST) area uses a similar format of questions and narrative responses to obtain information about the quality of services. The return rate for EST surveys was 92%. The overall rating was a 3.5 on a 4.0 scale, which falls between the ratings of (3) Agreed and (4) Strongly Agreed.

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

*“They were willing to help me learn how to type more and help me find confidence I didn’t have before”; “the quiet work environment, getting plenty of help, and encouragement when I did well”; “World of Work class”; and “independent learning with assistance”. “Mary and Ron were so helpful and patient. Couldn’t have asked for better support and training”, “Interview practice and questions”, “World of Work class”; “being motivated, working with hands, moving around”.*

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## USD Medical Students

Four USD medical students participated in three days of cultural immersion at the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, August 18-20. The cultural immersion program provides unfamiliar experiences to students to learn about different disabilities, cultures, and organizations to gain a deeper understanding. The students expressed how they loved the hands-on activities and learned so much, including available resources. This annual event helps new groups of doctors learn about services provided by SDRC.



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## Spreading the Word

Whenever we can spread the word to others, more opportunities are opened to people who need services. Some organizations who toured the Center to learn more about our services included Disability Rights South Dakota, Young Professional Network group, South Dakota School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach Vision Consultants, Long Term Services and Supports, Division of Developmental Disabilities, counselors from Rehabilitation Services, as well as clients referred to the Center for training. Everyone tours the program and meets the teachers prior to their first day. Upon request, a virtual tour of the Center can also be provided.

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## Molly Reaches Goal of Working with Kids



Molly attended SDRC and participated in skills of blindness classes and EST. Molly attended training to increase her independent living skills, prepare for employment, and practice for the ParaPro test needed to achieve her employment goal. Two instructors at the Center helped Molly increase her reading, writing, and math skills for the test. Molly studied diligently and passed the ParaPro Assessment test by the end of October. With this achievement, she was able to start working as an educational assistant in Aberdeen school system in November. Molly said her favorite part of her job is helping students. Through perseverance and hard work, Molly was able to reach her employment goal!



## Business Enterprise Program

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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. The act authorizes a blind individual, licensed by the state licensing agency, to conduct specified activities in facilities through permits or contracts. In South Dakota, SBVI is the state licensing agency.

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

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

Three vendors were licensed with the Business Enterprise Program in January 2021. First, Celeste Centenaro manages the café at the Federal Building in Aberdeen and vending in federal properties. Second, Dan Munce operates a vending route with machines in various locations in Huron. Finally, 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 2021 through teleconference. Celeste Centenaro is the Chair of the Vendor Committee, Jeff Nelson is the Vice-Chair, and Dan Munce is the Member-at-Large.

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### Interstate Rest Area Vending

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

The SD Departments of Transportation and Tourism developed a Revitalization Plan for the rest areas. In 2021, the Belvidere Westbound, Vivian Westbound, and Salem Westbound locations underwent renovations.

Current contracts with third-party vendors for designated rest areas began in June 2019; contracts were awarded to vendors who bid to contribute the highest commission percentage from sales to the BEP. Current commissions paid to the BEP range

from 53 to 68 percent. Income from rest area commissions for June 1, 2020 - May

31, 2021, was \$62,797 for I-90 rest areas and \$12,540 for I-29 rest areas, totaling \$75,338.

The overall total from the rest areas increased from the previous year. I-29 experienced the most income growth compared to the prior year. The new commission rates and the reopening of rest areas have stabilized rest area income. Tourism numbers began to rise in 2020 during the pandemic and continued into 2021.



The rest area commissions are utilized to support the BEP 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.

### Vendor Financial Summary

Following is a breakdown of sales and net profits earned by BEP vendor operators.

<b>Earnings and Expenses</b>					
	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
Gross Sales (Total Income)	\$368,890	\$432,909	\$350,259	\$251,625	\$137,960
Merchandise Purchases	\$200,472	\$240,724	\$182,530	\$109,779	\$52,277
Gross Profit	\$168,418	\$192,185	\$167,729	\$141,846	\$85,683
Total Operating Expenses	\$101,416	\$115,735	\$137,289	\$89,628	\$68,468
Net Proceeds	\$79,138	\$65,921	\$30,819	\$43,515	\$21,818
Levied Set Aside Funds	\$11,361	\$11,034	\$7,785	\$6,104	\$5,464
Net Profit to Vendors	\$67,778	\$54,887	\$23,034	\$37,411	\$16,354

The gross profits continued to decline for BEP vendors during 2021. The impact of the pandemic contributed to the loss of income. There were facility closures and agencies moving to remote work in facilities with cafeterias and vending routes.

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## SERVICE TO THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED OFFICES

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<p><u>Aberdeen Office</u> 1707 4th Avenue SE, Suite A Aberdeen, SD 57401 Phone/TTY: (605) 626-2395 Fax: (605) 626-3089 Toll Free: 1-800-439-3417</p>	<p><u>Rapid City Office</u> 2330 N. Maple, Suite 2 Rapid City, SD 57701 Phone/TTY: (605) 394-2261 FAX: (605) 394-1659 Toll Free: 1-800-439-8861</p>
<p><u>Sioux Falls Office</u> 811 East 10th Street, Dept. 22 Sioux Falls, SD 57103-1650 Phone/TTY: (605) 367-5330 Fax: (605) 367-5327 Toll Free: 1-800-265-9679</p>	<p><u>Pierre Office</u> 912 E. Sioux Ave. c/o 500 East Capitol Ave. Pierre, SD 57501-5070 Phone/TTY: (605) 773-3318 Fax: (605) 773-5161 Toll Free: 1-877-873-8500</p>

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



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