

Introduction:

2015 saw another year of excellent collaboration between the SRC, DBVI, VABVI and other organizations that serve blind and visually impaired Vermonters. This report will document the many steps that have been taken this year to build on this success.

A special highlight for me as Chair was to have the opportunity to observe the DBVI LEAP program in Burlington and the VABVI Youth Independent Living Camp that was held at Jay Peak this past summer. The programs are designed to prepare the Vermont youth for their future both in independent living and employment.

I am looking forward to completing my sixth and final year as Chair of the SRC. I am proud to have been associated with the fine work of DBVI.

Robert Lanoue

SRC Chair

Election of Officers, 2015

Chair: Robert Lanoue

Vice-chair: Harriet Hall

Members-at-Large: Donna Stratton and Patty Shane

2016:

Chair: Robert Lanoue

Vice-chair: Harriet Hall

Members-at-large: Donna Stratton and Tom Frank

Committee assignments:

Membership: Tom Frank

Outreach: Peggy Howard

Policies and procedures: Kerry White and Jennifer Hart

Committee activities:

Membership: New member, Pam Schirner has begun attending meetings and a new member from the Agency of Education, John Spinney has joined as well as Nancy Breiden for CAP.

Outreach:

- Preparation for Disability Awareness Day to be held in March, 2016.
- Participation in several job fairs throughout the state.
- An ongoing group called “Great Expectations”, targeted to young adults ages 16-30 has been meeting with great success. Examples of topics discussed are Independent Living, Job Experience, Job Interviews, and Personal Relationships.

Policies and Procedures: Continuous review by Mike Goldberg, Jennifer Hart, and Nancy Breiden.

Reports:

VABVI (Steve Pouliott)

- Completed special education best practice guidelines for visually impaired students
- Adult Services numbers have increased throughout the state.
- The Technology Fair held in April was a success.
- The Montpelier and Brattleboro offices will be moving in 2016.

- Fifteen Vermont students attended the LEAP Program in June, 2015

Special Services Library (Jennifer Hart)

- Experiencing huge budget cuts.
- Announced that the library served over 70,000 patrons throughout the year.
- The local volunteer recording program now has four volunteers and is growing.
- Received a new recording booth.

Agency of Education (John Spinney)

- A focus group is reviewing teachers and education requirements.
- There is a conference called “Best Conference” to be held in June 2016

SRC Chair: (Robert Lanoue)

- Attended State Disability Awareness Day in March.
- Participated in the combined meeting of DBVI staff and SRC Council in June.
- Attended the VABVI Independent Living Camp in June for a day.

- Attended the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rehabilitation meeting:

- Attended a “Great Expectations” seminar.

- Attended a LEAP closing session and pot luck dinner in Burlington.

- Participated in the interview process of the Rehabilitation Associate for the Rutland office

DBVI Director (Fred Jones)

- Announced the appointment of a new DAIL Commissioner, Monica Hutt.

- Implementing a Federal budget with 15% shifted to pre-employment transition skills.

- Announced state budget cuts.

- Started a program called AWARE, a new automated case management system to be purchased.

- Interviews began for a new Rehabilitation Associate for the Rutland Office and an Assistive Technology Trainer.

- Implementing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, including work with the VT Department of Labor and Vocational Rehabilitation Department on a universal state plan.

- Made the Council aware of the Cogswell-Macey Act that will strengthen services for the blind and visually impaired.
- Held a combined SRC-DBVI staff meeting in June. At this meeting staff shared examples of how they work with clients. The DBVI staff will get feedback from the SRC on their programs and share outcomes and satisfaction data. Part of the meeting was devoted to the Base Accountability Survey.
- Presented updates on the new cafeteria that will open at the Waterbury state office complex in 2016.
- Presented the state plan for goals and priorities and received feedback from the Council.

Robert Lanoue

SRC Chair

Mission and Philosophy

The Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) provides and oversees specialized services for people who are visually impaired, using a rehabilitation model that starts when the person experiences vision loss. DBVI offers an array of services specifically designed for people who have lost visual function and independence.

DBVI's mission is to support the efforts of Vermonters who are blind or visually impaired to achieve or sustain their economic independence, self-reliance, and social integration to a level consistent with their interests, abilities and informed choices. Those who participate in DBVI services learn skills and become high achieving successful community members. Given appropriate adaptive skills training, and assistive technology instruction, many limitations due to blindness can be overcome. Quality of life, dignity, and full integration are the focus of DBVI.

DBVI practices a rehabilitation model that takes a holistic approach to working with the individual at the time of vision loss. The process begins with the individual and the DBVI counselor working together to develop an individualized plan aimed at helping him or her to achieve the highest level of independence and employment as possible. The rehabilitative process focuses on helping the individual to learn new adaptive skills that allow them to regain independence and self-confidence after the severe trauma of vision loss. DBVI services help people reestablish control and ability to complete independent living tasks that are usually taken for granted,

such as preparing breakfast, getting dressed and navigating familiar and unfamiliar areas at work and in the community.

Organizational Structure and Staffing

DBVI services are provided by highly qualified professionals who possess specialized training and understanding of the implications of visual loss. Services are provided from four regional field offices in Montpelier, Burlington, Springfield, and Rutland where rehabilitation counselors and Rehabilitation Associates are responsible for ensuring that timely and appropriate services are delivered to people with vision loss. One rehabilitation technology trainer covers the entire state, teaching people how to use assistive technology such as screen readers and screen enlargement computer software. The director of DBVI is located in the Department's central office in Williston.

Programs and Services

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

The goal of DBVI's vocational rehabilitation services is to help people with vision loss to retain, return, or secure employment. Each individual meets with a DBVI counselor to identify goals

and develop a plan to reduce the limitations that result from a vision loss.

Performance:

- 90 people met their employment goals in FFY2015
- ☐ Counseling and guidance
- ☐ Assessment of skills, interests, and abilities
- ☐ Transition services for students
- ☐ Assistive technology equipment, evaluation and training
- ☐ Low vision services
- ☐ Orientation and mobility services (Learning to use a white cane)
- ☐ Rehabilitation training
- ☐ Career exploration
- ☐ Vocational training
- ☐ Assistance with post-secondary education
- ☐ Job-seeking skills
- ☐ Employer assistance
- ☐ Small business development
- ☐ Job placement services

☐ Coordination of services and access to programs

Transition Services

DBVI transition services provide high school students with opportunities for learning independent living and job skills. DBVI collaborates with several partners including the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI), Vermont Youth Conservation Corps, ReSource, and the Gibney Family Foundation.

One specific transition program called LEAP (Learn, Earn, and Prosper) provides paid summer employment for youth in a residential setting. This program empowers students to take charge of their employment future by gaining early employment success that can be carried into future employment pursuits. The goal is for all graduates to enter college, obtain further training, or join the world of work. A new addition to the summer work experience is the requirement for students to secure internships in their local community. The goal of the internships is to make connections in the local community where jobs will eventually develop and to expand a summer experience into year-long career exploration. LEAP has completed its seventh successful year.

Independent Living Services

DBVI provides assistance in maintaining independence. The DBVI Rehabilitation Associate meets an individual in his or her own home to discuss the individual's goals and develop a plan for services to achieve the highest possible degree of independence in activities such as traveling independently, preparing meals, and identifying medications. Once the individualized plan is developed, services are provided through a grant agreement with Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI) which receives both federal and state funds from DAILE to provide services to adults over the age of 55 with visual impairments. Direct services include orientation and mobility, low vision training, and rehabilitation teaching.

Performance:

- 816 adults with a visual impairment served in FFY2015

Technology

Maximizing the power of assistive technology is critical to people with vision loss. DBVI invests significant effort in staying current about new assistive technology, which will revolutionize employment access and eliminate other barriers caused by vision loss. Assistive technology plays a critical role in

allowing an individual with a visual impairment to be connected with society, continue employment, and pursue a tremendous range of careers in mainstream society.

Performance Measures

Employment Rate: The percentage of people served by DBVI who have achieved an employment outcome successfully attained vocational goal for a minimum of 90 days.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
National Standard						
Employment Rate	71%	75%	77%	80%	79%	73%
						67.11%

Earnings Compared to State Average: Average hourly earnings of people who exit DBVI as a percentage of state earnings average.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	National Standard
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% of earning compared to state average 82% 75% 79% 81%
79% 59%

Customer Satisfaction:

2003 Market Decisions Survey

(Formal) 2011 Market Decisions Survey

(Formal) 2013

Closure Survey

(Ongoing

Informal) 2014

Closure Survey

(Ongoing

Informal) 2015

Market Decisions Survey

(Formal)

Overall Satisfaction with services received	93%	92%	95%
Services provided met expectations	93%	90%	85%
Staff were helpful to achieve vocational goals	98%	95%	96%
DBVI delivered services well for me	92%	91%	89%
I did get the results I wanted from DBVI	93%	89%	94%

Story Behind the Curve

DBVI's primary indicators show a strong rehabilitation rate for people who are blind or visually impaired. While these results are above the national average in all areas, DBVI's objective is to help all customers reach their employment goals. For this reason, DBVI's SFY2015 research agenda includes an analysis to determine why some individuals did not obtain employment.

DBVI also expects to help individuals get the best paying job possible. We realize that many individuals decide to develop their own small business, which meets their lifestyle needs, but may not have a strong income return in the beginning. Our research agenda also includes a look at what types of

professions individuals are choosing and the incomes they are earning.

Vision loss causes a sharp initial decrease in independence and ability to do regular tasks previously done with normal vision. The DBVI program provides the opportunity for people to learn new adaptive skills to overcome functional limitations due to vision loss; the process may take months or years. Informal closure surveys show the top two services that help 'turn the curve' in building skills are Low Vision and Assistive Technology equipment and instruction. After individuals learn skills and use adaptive equipment, they can resume many activities and function more independently in the community and at work. Over 90% of DBVI customers surveyed at closure identified their attainment of new adaptive skills as the most important factor in their success. Customers share many examples of how their new skills have helped them adapt to vision loss, maintain employment, and improve their quality of life. They are better off because they can now:

- Obtain their employment goals.
- Access printed material with the use of assistive technology.

- Travel independently on the job and in the community with the use of the white cane.
- Use special magnification and lighting to access information on the job and at home.

Quotes include:

- “The best thing that happened to me while working with DBVI was that I got a CCT V to help me with my written material that I need to access for my job. I also learned how to use magnifiers as well.”
- “I learned how to use a laptop and screen magnification to help me access information I need. It is great to have this new skill for my job. “
- “Without the DBVI assistance with surgery I would have lost my vision and my job.”
- “I learned to use assistive technology that allowed me the freedom to continue to run my business.”
- “I learned how to adapt and adjust to being a newly blind person. I can’t begin to tell you how valuable this experience was for me.”

Results of a statewide random survey (conducted by Market Decisions) of all DBVI customers in 2015 indicated:

- o 95%--Overall, percentage of customers satisfied with the DBVI program.
- o 95%--Customers satisfied with the services they received.
- o 96%--Customers indicated that the staff were very or somewhat helpful in helping them to achieve their vocational rehabilitation goals.
- o 94%--Customers indicated that the services they received helped them become more generally “Independent.”
- o 94%--Customers agreed that they were “Better Off,” overall, as a result of the services they received from DBVI.

Partners

DBVI considers the people we serve as partners. This year we conducted Town Meeting events in each of our 4 regions. The goal was to hear the “Voice of the Customer” about the results they expect from our program.

We also work closely with the State Rehabilitation Council, appointed by the Governor. The SRC partners with DBVI to evaluate data and to develop goals and strategies.

DBVI is encouraged that our partnership with the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired is helping customers to build the adaptive skills they need on the job and in the community. We are also encouraged that progressive employment strategies and our partnership with the Vermont Association for Business, Industry, and Rehabilitation (VABIR) is helping DBVI to partner effectively with businesses to provide opportunities for blind or visually impaired workers to demonstrate their abilities in the workplace.

The DBVI partnership with ReSource and the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps is helping students and young adults build the skills they need in the workplace. VYCC helps DBVI run a summer youth employment program that provides the opportunity for students to learn employment skills and Independent Living Skills. These early employment experiences help build the confidence needed to succeed in college, in vocational training, and in the workplace.

What Works

DBVI's customer satisfaction is a strength. These ratings consistently exceed 90% each year. Staff are described as

responsive, easy to reach, and helping people meet their goals. Comments at each of the 4 Town Meetings acknowledged that DBVI staff and services “gave them hope.”

Individuals who experience vision loss need to learn new adaptive skills, and DBVI strategies are designed to help people build these skills. In most situations, assistive technology is the key to opening the door for employment. Specialized software and hardware are often needed to access print, and specialized skills (including the use of specialized magnification and lighting) are needed to use the technology successfully. The combination of technology and the skills to use the technology helps individuals return to their jobs and community activities.

Our customers have used work experiences as a way to show employers that they can do the job. Many employers cannot conceive of how a blind person can do a particular job, until they learn that some simple low cost accommodations make it possible. This is also a great opportunity for people to build employment skills and to learn about jobs they like or don't like.

DBVI also makes a strong commitment to help individuals succeed in post-secondary and vocational training programs. These degrees and certificates usually lead to better paying jobs.

For students, DBVI's process involves strong communication with a team including the student, families, school staff, and teachers of people with visually impairments. Each DBVI counselor guides students and teams to develop specific action steps depending on the path they will take toward either more training or directly into work. Our role is to help students make a smooth individual transition into the world of work.

Action Plan

DBVI staff and the State Rehabilitation Council have reviewed the 2014 Town Meeting results, the 2015 statewide customer satisfaction survey, and other performance data and have revise goals and strategies that were approved by the SRC in December 2015.

Our research agenda continues to include a close look at data about customers who did not achieve employment in FFY 2015. Staff will be investigating what new strategies might be needed

for those who were not successful. This may include strategies to educate employers about the skills these individuals can bring to the workplace. It also may involve finding new strategies to help individuals build the specific skills that are needed by employers.

DBVI has a commitment to customer-centered culture that continues to guide staff in making continuous improvements: listening to the voice of our customers, using this information along with performance measures to improve our current products and develop new ones. The new plan with updated goals and strategies was completed and approved by the SRC in December 2015.

*Please Visit DBBI's website for more success stories at:

www.dbvi.vermont.gov