

Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Summary of SRC Involvement--Submitted by Harriet Hall, SRC Chair

FFY 2017 was an exciting and productive year for the work done in partnership with the SRC and DBVI. The SRC met in-person every other month and held executive meetings on the alternate months. The entire SRC and DBVI staff met for an all-day combined meeting in June.

The year began with a presentation about the successes of the summer Work Based Learning Experience for students called LEAP (Learn, Earn, and Prosper). This gave the SRC the opportunity to see a video of the students at work and to hear summaries and student success stories. Each student received weekly reports of their progress towards skills they will need in the workforce. The SRC had an opportunity to share ideas about potential businesses for future internship sites.

The next meeting was focused on a review of the closure survey results conducted annually by a neutral source. The SRC was pleased to learn that 89% of individuals closed felt that they did get the results they wanted from DBVI. The survey also indicated that 85% of the individuals closed felt that services were delivered well by DBVI. These results and other open-ended responses lead to meaningful discussions with the membership about the best ways to meet the needs of DBVI consumers related to employment. The biggest challenges are attitudes of employers about blindness and the lack of transportation options in our rural state.

At the February meeting, the SRC reviewed the accessible Client Assistance Program brochure and recording. CAP has representation on the SRC membership and requested assistance and feedback to make their materials accessible. There was also a presentation from the Vermont Family Network about statewide student focus groups about vocationally related needs. The SRC had many ideas about ways to include blind and visually impaired students in these discussions. The remainder of the meeting was spent discussing the new WIOA Performance Measures.

In April, the SRC brainstormed ideas about the best ways to collaborate with the Vermont Department of Labor. The DOL has many partners and potential employment related opportunities for DBVI participants. A strong partnership between DBVI and DOL is important. We also gave input and helped plan the June combined SRC and DBVI full-day meeting. This was followed by a discussion about planning the Town Meeting focus groups that will be part of the Statewide Needs Assessment later in the year.

The June meeting was a combined meeting of the SRC and DBVI staff. It included a presentation from each DBVI region about the realities of their caseload with stories to give examples of participant needs. Each DBVI region also discussed key initiatives to assist DBVI consumers with

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their employment goals. This was followed by a presentation from an SRC member about the assistive technology he uses to be successful in his job. This included a demonstration of the technology and explanation of the tasks he was able to complete at his employment. The afternoon was spent on a discussion about goals and status for WIOA, students, and employment. This included discussions about the current state and how to set goals for the new performance measures. The overall context was guided by Vermont's approach to continuous improvement using the Results-Based Accountability model. This directs us to answer the questions about how our consumers are "Better Off" and that services are Delivered Well."

In fall, the SRC regrouped and began by reviewing the new WIOA Performance Measures. The SRC learned how the new AWARE case management program will capture most of these data to meet the new reporting requirements. The DBVI AWARE system went "live" in September 2017. We also reviewed upcoming goals for the year including a Town Meeting event and a statewide consumer satisfaction survey.

The December 2017 SRC meeting included a review and revision of DBVI Goals and Strategies. The membership had many ideas about connecting with partners including the Department of Labor and the Agency of Education. Ideas included continuation of DBVI initiated work experiences with employers. Current results include many individuals bridging from a work experience to employment. Other people learn new skills for their resume. It is also a great way to educate employers about the abilities and assistive technology used by people who are blind. There was also a strong recommendation to collaborate with the DOL work experience and on-the-job training programs. DBVI was also encouraged to find employers who are interested in job carving opportunities where a person can bring their strengths to the employer. The Agency of Education representative also offered many tools available to staff about personalized learning plans and graduation requirements. The Chair of the Policy Committee also updated the SRC about WIOA related DBVI policy revisions that are in process. The meeting ended with a recommendation to have fewer strategies and keep them focused on the key goals.

The SRC looks forward to the upcoming year where DBVI participants are "Better Off" with improved circumstances and services are delivered well.

Respectfully Submitted,

Harriet Hall, SRC Chair

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Division Philosophy

DBVI assists individuals who are blind or visually impaired to meet their employment and independence goals. DBVI uses a holistic rehabilitation approach that helps people to meet their goals, build new skills, and improve their circumstances. The goal is for all participants to achieve or sustain economic independence, self-reliance, and social integration consistent with their interests, abilities, and informed choices.

Division Overview

DBVI helps working age individuals achieve economic independence by obtaining livable wage jobs and income. This involves training to improve employment skills and higher education that leads to degrees or certificates. DBVI helps transition high school students from school to the world of work. DBVI's statewide approach for younger students helps to ensure that all blind and visually impaired high school students have pre-employment transition skills. DBVI also helps individuals of all ages to build adaptive skills related to their visual impairment through assistive technology, low vision, orientation and mobility, and independent living skills.

Staff and Partners

DBVI services are provided by highly qualified professionals who possess specialized training and understanding of the implications of visual loss. Services are provided by ten staff from regional field offices in Montpelier, Burlington, Springfield, and Rutland. Each office has a rehabilitation counselor and a rehabilitation associate who ensure that individualized services are delivered. One rehabilitation technology trainer covers the entire state teaching people how to use assistive technology. The Director of DBVI oversees the statewide program.

DBVI partners with several organizations to accomplish our mission. The major provider of direct instruction for teaching blindness related skills is the non-profit Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI). Their staff include certified blindness professionals who are highly trained in the areas of Orientation and Mobility, Low Vision and Rehabilitation Therapists. For other DBVI partners please visit www.dbvi.vermont.gov.

Recent Developments and Accomplishments

This year DBVI organized several events around the state to educate the public about White Cane Safety. The white cane is a symbol of strength and independence for blind and visually impaired people, used by people who are blind as they travel independently. Members of the public received training in safe travel techniques from an Orientation and Mobility Instructor, increasing awareness of what it is like to travel with the white cane.

The main events were in Burlington, Montpelier, and Rutland. Each included a walk guided by an Orientation and Mobility Specialist to demonstrate proper use of the white cane and safe travel techniques. These events are great opportunities to educate the public and to have meaningful discussions about how blind and visually impaired individuals travel within their communities independently.

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DBVI staff worked closely as a team this year to accomplish major initiatives. This included updating several policies to reflect the intent of the recent Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This Act represents a significant shift towards serving students transitioning to work. This year DBVI staff participated in several regional and statewide events to collaborate and share resources about helping students successfully prepare and enter the workforce.

Another major initiative was the successful rollout of the AWARE automated case management system. This initial design phase was followed by pilot testing, training, and full implementation. This system moves DBVI into compliance with the new WIOA reporting requirements, and will help DBVI staff to efficiently complete their work.

Future Directions

DBVI believes the best path forward includes a solid foundation in technology. Relevant new technologies emerge every day, and our staff stay current to determine the solutions that help our customers achieve their employment and independence goals. Several new products have emerged this year. For example, a new free application was launched this year that allows users to read text by pointing the camera of their phone towards the text. It also can read the bar code on items in a store and read back the contents of the item. Technology helps people to accomplish tasks independently, and DBVI will maintain a strong foundation in new innovations.

New technologies are exciting and open many new doors; however, DBVI is committed to the importance of the basics such as touch typing and the importance of Braille. These skills are essential for students transitioning to higher education and job training. The Job Readiness Workshops will incorporate opportunities to use these skills in the upcoming year.

DBVI will be piloting some exciting work from home opportunities this year. Our goal is to identify the skills and service products needed by Vermont employers. We will then support specialized training and technology to meet those business needs.

Programs and Services

Vision Rehabilitation Employment Services

The goal of DBVI's vocational rehabilitation services is to help people with vision loss to retain, return, or secure employment. Individuals meet with a DBVI counselor to identify goals and develop a plan to improve their functional independence.

DBVI counselors provide guidance related to employment and help people explore interests and abilities. On their individual path to employment, most people who work with DBVI:

- Build and strengthen vocational skills
- Learn new adaptive skills to remain independent regardless of vision loss
- Learn to use specialized technology needed to do their jobs
- Receive services to maximize visual function
- Help with a job search and provide training in job skills
- Assist with attending college

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- Provide technology and training that allow access to printed materials and completing work tasks

DBVI is exceptionally proud of the accomplishments of our customers. To read some success stories of our customers and their experiences with DBVI, visit our website:

www.dbvi.vermont.gov.

Services for High School Students

DBVI's 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 (DVR), VABVI, ReSOURCE, and the Gibney Family Foundation. DBVI is also working with partners to make sure that all blind or visually impaired high school students are building solid pre-employment skills.

The LEAP (Learn, Earn, and Prosper) program provides paid summer employment for youth in a residential setting. LEAP empowers students to take charge of their employment future by gaining early employment success, and helps students make a successful transition from school to work.

Independent Living Services

DBVI helps individuals maintain independence. A DBVI rehabilitation associate meets an individual in his or her own home to discuss the individual's goals and develop a plan to achieve the highest possible degree of independence in activities such as traveling, preparing meals, and managing medications. Direct instruction is provided by certified blindness professionals through a grant agreement with the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI). VABVI also administers the Older Blind Program to provide specialized vision rehabilitation services, serving 820 individuals over the age of 55 in FFY 2017.

Technology

Effective use of assistive technology is critical for many people with vision loss. DBVI invests significant effort to stay current in new assistive technology to help people with employment, participate in their communities, and eliminate other barriers caused by vision loss.

Results

Performance Measures

Better Off: Our focus is to help our consumers to become better off by building new skills and improving their circumstances.

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

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	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	National Standard
Employment Rate	77%	80%	79%	73%	75%	80%	67.11%

Deliver Services Well: We also have a strong focus on delivering services well. Customer satisfaction is measured regularly in the following key areas. Results from the 2017 statewide customer satisfaction survey:

- 93% responded being Better-Off because of services from DBVI.
- 89% responded that services met their expectations.
- 90% responded that DBVI staff were helpful to achieve their vocational goals.
- 93% responded that services helped them become more Independent.
- 93% responded that they were satisfied with the services from DBVI.
- 89% responded that DBVI delivered services well.

Our approach for assisting individuals on their path to employment and independence begins with the belief that each person can achieve their goals and DBVI can help. We also know that the “voice of the customer” is important and our strategies are geared to meet the needs of the individual customer. Each staff member is committed to delivering services well and knows that their job makes a difference in the lives of people we serve. Please visit the success story link on the DBVI website at www.dbvi.vermont.gov to see real examples of people reaching their goals.