

Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Summary of DBVI's SRC Involvement for 2020

This year began with an SRC meeting in November 2019 that included important partner updates. These included representatives from the Agency of Education, Department of Labor, Special Services Library, Parent Family Network, Client Assistance Program, and the Association for the Blind. These updates are intended to keep the partners connected and informed about important initiatives.

The meeting also included a presentation from DBVI Staff about DBVI services. This agenda item was requested by the SRC to give new members a picture of the types of services that are provided. The first DBVI Counselor gave an overview of services that included:

- The importance of building a strong relationship with clients and being able to connect one-to-one.
- Keeping the focus on employment.
- Working together to discover employment goals and strengths.

The DBVI Technology Trainer also presented about the importance of technology and technology training. He described the technology evaluation and goal setting process which included:

- The process for referrals.
- Described the training available for a variety of accessible technology including screen readers and screen enlargement software.
- Training is Individualized and DBVI Counselors can have input on the content for instructional sessions.
- An explanation about working with college students which usually includes:
 - Understanding how to navigate the various aspects of academics on college learning platforms.
 - How to get books
 - Signing up for services
 - Look at course schedule and technology needs.
 - Work with student services

At the December 2019 SRC meeting planning continued for completing year three of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

The following DBVI Goals were discussed to give overall context for the services provided by DBVI. They include goals for:

- Economic Independence.
- Building Adaptive Skills (Assistive Technology, Low-Vision, O+M, Rehab Teaching).
- Deliver Service Products Well & Assist Individuals to Become Better Off.
- Program Growth.

Overview of the CSNA Timeline:

- Dec. 2019 (Discussion with the SRC about DBVI Goals).
- February and April 2020 (Continue planning with the SRC).

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- June 2020 (Hold a combined meeting with the SRC, DBVI Staff and key Partners to discuss Needs).
- Conduct Summer Surveys of Teachers of the Visually Impaired and Adult Service Providers.
- Sept. 2020 (Hold a Consumer-Driven Event).
- October 2020 (Hold White Cane Events).
- December 2020 (Initiate a statewide consumer satisfaction survey by Market Decisions).
- October 2020-Feb. 2021 (Revise DBVI Goals and Strategies with SRC input).

The SRC shared Ideas and possible Needs about the core services provided by DBVI:

- Evaluations and referrals.
- Public Education Events.
- Consumer Driven Events.
- Adjustment Therapy Sessions.
- VABVI Eval and Lessons.
- Adaptive Equipment and Eval and Lessons.
- Information and Answers.
- Expectations and Communication Products.
- Employment Guidance/Counseling Sessions.
- Progressive Employment Placements.

The SRC emphasized the importance of assistive technology training and the increasing needs for people using IOS devices. They also encouraged DBVI and the SRC to place an emphasis on public education and transportation needs.

The SRC provided input about the WIOA Performance Measures that include:

- Job retention six months post program exit.
- Job retention twelve months post program exit.
- Median earnings six months post program exit.
- Credential attainment.
- Measurable skills gains.
- Employer satisfaction.

The SRC feels strongly that there should be more opportunities for credential attainment and apprenticeships for people who are blind or visually impaired.

In February 2020, the DBVI Director met with the SRC. He reviewed the Sections of the state plan updates. There was a continued discussion and concern that people who are blind or visually impaired are being left behind with apprenticeships and other DOL opportunities because the job duties are usually visual in nature and often require a driver's license. The DBVI Director explained the idea of working with CCV to create a course about Customer Service. There was support for this idea.

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The SRC reviewed the updated sections of the State Plan 2020. The Goals and Priorities include:

1. DBVI will align services to support consumers in achieving the WIOA Common Performance Outcome Measures.
 - Leading Measure One: The use of career assessment tools to support exploration of higher wage and higher skill options.
 - Leading Measure Two: The use of blindness adaptive skill evaluation and training.
 - Leading Measure Three: The use of blindness assistive technology evaluation and training.
2. DBVI will increase the percentage of consumers earning more than minimum wage at closure.
3. DBVI will increase consumer opportunities to participate in post-secondary education and training and gain industry recognized credentials.
4. In partnership with VDOL and Community Partners, DBVI will create more opportunities for DBVI consumers to participate in DOL programs.
5. DBVI will improve the outcomes for students and youth.
6. DBVI will continue to expand efforts to effectively serve employers through Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS).
7. DBVI will continue to seek opportunities to expand and/or improve services for underserved populations including individuals who need supported employment.
8. DBVI will continue to track consumer satisfaction with the program's services through the Tri-annual consumer satisfaction survey.

The SRC agrees with the priorities and added emphasis in some areas. They agreed with the importance of career assessments, building adaptive blindness skills, and focusing on assistive technology training. The SRC would also like to see more apprenticeship and career training opportunities for consumers like the one being explored for customer service at CCV. There is also strong support for DBVI helping the DOL Career One Stop to become more accessible.

*The State Plan was submitted with SRC Approval in March 2020.

In April 2020, the SRC meeting included many partner updates because it was the first meeting after the state shut down due to the virus. Each agency took turns explaining the steps they have taken to provide services virtually. Some highlights include:

VABVI

- Suspension of in-person services. Everyone working from home.
- Using phone calls and video calls to provide services.
- Still ordering aids and appliances
- Students are still being served as part of their IEP plans.
- Had to lay off drivers.
- Had to lay off rehab teaching assistants.

Agency of Education

- Initial Guidance for Schools.

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- <https://education.vermont.gov/news/covid-19-guidance-vermont-schools>
- Transition assessments for students during remote learning.
<https://education.vermont.gov/documents/implementing-transition-services-during-remote-learning>

Vermont Council of the Blind

- Cancelled their fall trip.

LEAP Program

- Doing weekly retreats via Zoom that work on employability skills.
 - Weekly themes for lesson plans including examples such as motivational speakers, business owners, etc.

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- The staff have made a successful shift to working and providing services in a virtual environment.

The SRC brainstormed ideas about the combined June meeting with the SRC and DBVI Staff. Ideas included:

- Holding the meeting by Zoom.
- Have guest speakers from partner organizations.
- How are people doing their jobs in a virtual environment using assistive technology?
- How are students adapting to virtual learning?

In June 2020, the SRC and DBVI staff had a virtual combined meeting to discuss “The Future of Remote Work and Possible Opportunities for People who are Blind or Visually Impaired.” Discussion and Needs Assessment Questions included:

- How can your agency help blind and visually impaired individuals with remote work?
- What does the future hold now that remote work has become a new normal?
- What are everyone’s experiences?

Many ideas were generated by the group and there was full agreement that there will be more opportunities for remote work.

Some possible remote work opportunities include:

- Chittenden County hospitals are creating some remote positions.
- UVM Medical Center has remote positions. Hospitals moving to more remote work.
- The Sales Force company will be converting 50% of their positions to remote work.
- Many customer service positions have moved to remote platforms. For example, Wal-Mart, Target, etc. These positions will remain remote as companies are recognizing that they need to stay remote.

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- Staffing agencies are a good resource for identifying companies that are creating a remote workforce.
- There is a training program in Indiana for a 16-to-18-week program to become an admin for Sales Force. The technology is accessible and an article in Access World provides detail.
- Amazon recently settled a case that they will make their customer service positions accessible.
- Apple is creating more remote customer service positions.

The SRC and DBVI Staff Discussed the following Needs Assessment Topics:

- There was a strong interest for DBVI to continue the Annual Great Expectations consumer-driven event.
 - DBVI will plan some virtual consumer events for fall 2020 and include Needs Assessment questions as part of each session
 - DBVI will have a strong focus on Career inventories. This will help consumers to learn more about their interests and abilities.
 - The main inventories will include:
World of work inventory;
Virtual Job Shadow; and
Career One Stop.
- The Vermont Family Network has a comprehensive student transition toolkit on their website that is very helpful to students and families.

Learn, Earn, and Prosper (LEAP) Update for summer 2020:

There will be 3 summer programs for students beginning July 6th. They are:

- Technology Challenge;
- Choose Your Own Adventure; and
- Work-based learning program

The meeting also included a guest speaker, April Shaw, from the Department of Libraries. Her presentation included an explanation and demonstration of the employment related resources on the “Learning Express” platform. The service is free for all Vermonters and includes many courses including:

- Career Preparation.
- Job and career accelerator.
- Tutorials for resume building, cover letters, etc.
- Descriptions of different careers.
- Practice Tests.
- Details about careers.
- Resources for College Students.
- Adult Core Skills.
- Video courses on computer skills.
- Spanish speaking lessons.
- Accessible on all devices.

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- Works with voiceover.
- Can do career assessments.
- Linked to Indeed.com

In September 2020, the DBVI Director met with the SRC Executive Committee to do final planning for the virtual Needs Assessment events. It was agreed to hold two events as described below:

Please plan to join DBVI for the “Vermont DBVI Employment Awareness Summit. “This will be a virtual event held on October 26th and November 9th from 9:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M. This will be a facilitated discussion about finding ways to match our unique strengths and talents to meet Vermont employer needs. The agenda will include some activities to help us feel encouraged and empowered as we learn about Vermont’s current and future Labor Information.

This event is for everyone who believes that individuals who are blind or visually impaired have unique strengths and talents that can meet Vermont employer needs. Here is a link to a YouTube [video from Fred Jones, DBVI Director, with more details and goals for the event.](https://youtu.be/Q-dMKeyIAfg)

<https://youtu.be/Q-dMKeyIAfg>

The Agenda for October 26th included:

1. Opening:

- Fred Jones, DBVI Director, will welcome the participants.
- David DeNotaris will introduce himself and his role as facilitator.

David is a national Consultant, Speaker, Author, and Trainer. Here is a link to his [TED Talk](https://youtu.be/ESQZl7IsZQE).

<https://youtu.be/ESQZl7IsZQE>

2. Subject:

- “Let’s Find ways to match our unique strengths and talents to meet Vermont employer needs.”

3. Agenda Topics:

- Some activities to help us feel encouraged and empowered.
- Learn about Employer Needs (Labor Market Information—from Kevin Stapleton—Vermont Department of Labor).

4. Agenda:

- Group advocacy activity, what gets your goat?
- ABC’s of blindness.
- Confidence discussion, if you don’t believe in yourself, who will?
- Labor Market Information Presentation by Kevin Stapleton from Vermont Department of Labor.
- Group brainstorming activity: How many of those jobs could a blind person do anyway?
- You don’t have to be brilliant to be resilient, bouncing forward!

5. Summary of Key Points:

- David DeNotaris will summarize the agenda activities and discussions.

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6. Main Idea:

- Individuals who are blind or visually impaired in Vermont have unique strengths and talents to meet Vermont employer needs.

7. Next Steps:

- Ask participants to continue the discussion using Google Groups.

The Agenda for November 9th included:

Matching Strengths with Employer Needs

Fred Jones (DBVI Director):

Welcomes everyone.

Opening remarks, “All of us are leaders and path finders to discover strategies to match our strengths to meet Vermont business needs.

David DeNotaris (National Consultant):

Summarize themes from the listserv discussion.

-Share other similar examples from personal or consulting work that relates to the listserv theme discussions.

Kevin Stapleton (Economist for the Vermont Department of Labor)

Share ideas about how we can all stay current with labor market trends and DOL initiatives.

-Q/A with Kevin about Vermont Labor Market Information

David DeNotaris:

Pathfinding Exercise to brainstorm ideas for:

- Create initiatives to educate employers,
- Find ways to market DBVI consumer strengths to compete for jobs,
- Find ways to demonstrate problem solving and critical thinking skills to employers,
- Form job clubs,

Both days of the Employment Summit events were well attended and included many great ideas.

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

Respectfully Submitted,
DBVI SRC

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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 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, Rutland, and Springfield. Each office has a Blind Services Rehabilitation Counselor and a Rehabilitation Associate who deliver individualized services. One Blind Services 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 Therapy. For other DBVI partners please visit

www.dbvi.vermont.gov

Recent Developments and Accomplishments

This year the DBVI White Cane event was held virtually. This was very different from previous years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Typically, there would be several in-person events held in each of the DBVI regions. The intent is to educate the public about White Cane Safety Awareness. The white cane is a symbol of strength and independence, used by people who are blind as they travel independently. Many members of the public and community leaders usually attend to participate in a simulated walk in the community facilitated by an Orientation and Mobility instructor to increase the awareness of what it is like to travel with the white cane.

Since in-person participation was not possible this year, an educational video was produced and widely distributed throughout social media and email groups. The theme included the history of the white cane in Vermont and included stories and information

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beginning from the 1920s with the first person who traveled with a white cane in Burlington. The video includes the [History of the White Cane in Vermont](#).

The Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired received \$100,000 of CRF funding to reduce social isolation of older Vermonters using smart phone technology with accessibility features. Ninety percent of all clients who completed services from July 1, 2020 to September 30, 2020 reported feeling less socially isolated and better off for having received SMART Services. Of those who did not report a change in their feelings of social isolation, the causes were due to extenuating circumstances not related to their vision or receipt of the training. Clients who received benefit were able to accomplish at least one or more tasks, such as video conferencing with their doctor, video/teleconferencing with the PALS Groups, communicating with family and friends through various modes of technology, having groceries delivered, and more.

The importance and impact of the SMART program might be best understood by one of the success stories. A woman in her late 70's was given a smartphone and iPad from her daughter. In her words, she knew the devices could help her, but her daughter did not have the patience to teach her how to use the devices. We often hear this as a common complaint from our clients that their children and grandchildren have the knowledge of how to use these devices, but they just do not know how to explain it to their senior relatives effectively. The reason for this is two-fold. First, we often have the least patience with those who are closest to us. Second, and most important, the family members often know the software or app, but do not have a knowledge of how to use accessibility features like enlarging text, contrast and text to speech features native to the devices. There are many success stories and VABVI will finalize the second quarter of the training and funding from October through December 2020.

DBVI also partnered and assisted with the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Vermont Transition Core Teams Virtual Conference. This statewide event brought together Transition Core Teams from schools and employment service providers to share ideas about how to assist students with disabilities with their employment goals. DBVI specifically hosted one of the concurrent sessions about how to find and use career assessments that are accessible for individuals who use assistive technology.

DBVI has a commitment to ongoing training of staff to deliver services well. This year one staff member began a certificate program at Mississippi State to gain a specialized credential for vocational counseling in the blindness specialty. Another staff member applied and was chosen to participate in the Vermont Agency of Human services Leadership Development Program.

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 help our customers achieve their employment and independence goals. One recent technology is a new portable closed-circuit television that allows a person with low vision to use a camera to enlarge text and also has a text-to-speech synthesizer, so the text also has high quality

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voice output. The portability of this new device is a great breakthrough for people to use as they travel between meetings.

DBVI staff recognize the importance of helping consumers learn more about their own interests and strengths for employment. DBVI recently established a workgroup called the Investigation Empowerment Improvement Team. The purpose of this group is to provide DBVI consumers with increased opportunities for self-knowledge through assessment tools. This initiative will help participants to:

- Learn about interests, skills, and abilities for future career direction.
- Increase knowledge of Visual Impairment.
- Identify adaptive skills training that will decrease functional limitations.
- Increase self-knowledge.
- Provide information for consumer career decision making.
- Identify transferrable skills.

This year the team evaluated the accessibility of several career assessments that recently moved their content to online platforms due to the pandemic. The team has discovered that many of the career assessment companies are only in the beginning stages of making the content accessible for assistive technology. The team has identified some that are accessible and some that are not accessible, and recommendations have been made for improvements. DBVI believes that the approved instruments will help individuals gain self-knowledge and assist them as they pursue their employment goals. The team also established a fully accessible assessment workstation at the DBVI Montpelier office. This includes all the adaptive technology necessary for consumers to complete assessments independently.

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; and
- Provide technology and training that allow people to access printed materials and complete work tasks.

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DBVI is exceptionally proud of the accomplishments of our consumers. 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 job readiness, self-advocacy, and independent living 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 contract 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.

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 find employment, participate in their communities, and eliminate other barriers caused by vision loss.

Results

Performance Measures

How many people did we serve (SFY2020)?

- 244 individuals received services to assist them to maintain or find employment as a result of their vision loss. 248 received services in FFY 2019.

The main reason for the 11 fewer people served in FFY 2019 is due to the new WIOA regulations that no longer allows "Homemakers" to be served in the DBVI VR program. These individuals are now being served in the DBVI IL and Older Blind program.

- 778 individuals over the age of 55 received specialized vision rehabilitation services.
- 74 individuals under the age of 55 were served by the Independent Living Program.
- 4 individuals served in the Business Enterprise Program.

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- Total for SFY 2020= 1,100 (Includes DBVI VR; DBVI Independent Living; and Older Blind programs).

How well did we serve them?

Customer Satisfaction: The most recent results of the 3-year statewide random survey of all participants in the DBVI Vocational Vision Rehabilitation program (Conducted by Market Decisions in 2017; the next statewide survey is scheduled for summer 2021).

- 93% of respondents said they are satisfied with the DBVI vocational rehabilitation program.
- 93% of respondents said overall, they are better off as a result of the services they received from DBVI.
- 95% of respondents said that DBVI staff treated them with dignity and respect.
- 94% of respondents said that DBVI helped them achieve their vocational rehabilitation goals,
- 92% of respondents said that DBVI services met their expectations.
- 89% of respondents said that DBVI vocational rehabilitation services helped them become more independent.
- 84% of respondents said that DBVI helped them reach their job goals.

Our approach in assisting individuals who are blind or visually impaired on their path to employment and independence begins with the belief that each person can achieve their goals. We know that the “voice of the customer” is important, and our strategies are geared to meeting those needs. Each staff member is committed to delivering services well and to making a difference in the lives of the people we serve.

How are people better off?

- 29 blind or visually impaired individuals closed their DBVI case in SFY 2020 with successful employment.
- 62% had a wage above 125% of the minimum wage.

Vermont’s DVR and DBVI programs also received data for the first time, on the WIOA Common Performance Measures and how we compared to national averages. This data combines the outcomes for both DVR and DBVI programs because it is measured as a single program by the federal government. This data shows that:

- Vermont DVR/DBVI consumers are achieving measurable skills at a much higher rate than the national average.
- The employment rate two quarters post exit improved from 49% in SFY 2019 to 51.1% in SFY 2020.
- The median earnings two quarters post exit increased from \$3,516 in SFY 2019 to \$3,900 in SFY 2020.

Measure	National Average SFY 18	Vermont Results SFY 18	National Average SFY 19	Vermont Results SFY 19	National Average SFY 20	Vermont Results SFY 20
Measurable Skills Gains	21.1%	37.8%	23.4%	54.9%	31.4%	49.3%

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Measure	National Average SFY 18	Vermont Results SFY 18	National Average SFY 19	Vermont Results SFY 19	National Average SFY 20	Vermont Results SFY 20
Employment Rate 2 Quarters Post Exit	NA	NA	50.4%	49.0%	51.3%	51.1%
Employment Rate 4 Quarters Post Exit	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Median Earnings 2 Quarters Post Exit	NA	NA	\$3,875	\$3,516	\$3,931	\$3,900
Credential Attainment	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

In annual closure surveys DBVI participants shared examples of how their new skills have helped them adapt to vision loss, maintain employment, and improve their quality of life. They reported being better off because they can now:

- Obtain their employment goals.
- Access printed material with the use of specialized blindness 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.

The federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires DBVI to use 15% of our federal grant award to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). This new federal requirement created an opportunity for DBVI to expand Pre-ETS services in the core areas:

- Job exploration counselling;
- Work based learning opportunities;
- Counselling on post-secondary educational opportunities;
- Workplace readiness training; and
- Instruction in self-advocacy.

DBVI has been very successful in expanding Pre-ETS services for students who are blind or visually impaired by providing work-experiences, internships, and job readiness training to build skills necessary for career development. Learn, Earn, and Prosper (LEAP) is a program developed by DBVI to achieve these goals. Most students participate by living and working in the Burlington area in the summer. Other students participate to build job readiness skills during school year retreats and work experiences

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in their local communities. Our efforts to include more students led to a higher increase in the number of participants and in the number of training hours:

2020 presented new challenges. Typically, LEAP offers a slate of residential programs throughout the year. In March of 2020 when it became clear that residential programs could not be run due to COVID-19, LEAP dramatically changed the way programming was delivered.

Despite the uncertainty, LEAP was quick to identify the need and respond, effectively creating virtual programming that connected and continues to connect youth who are blind visually impaired when they've felt more isolated than ever.

When the stay-at-home order went into effect March 25th in Vermont, LEAP was able to pilot its first Friday Retreat in which 14 students attended by April 10th. Ever since that first Friday, LEAP has offered weekly virtual retreats to students across Vermont. Our virtual retreats allow students access to training, peer interactions, supervision, and structured breakout sessions that support enhanced learning.

Summer and Fall programs focused on the same skills as residential programs including teamwork, independence, time management and self-advocacy. The virtual environment demanded new and creative ways to deliver these topics. For example, for a virtual class on culinary skills, boxes were mailed to students with ingredients and kitchen tools. Cooking and technical skills were taught while online together with a Certified Vision Rehab Therapist (CVRT) and a locally trained Chef.

Students also received specialized services online necessary to develop adaptive skills related to their blindness including Orientation and Mobility (O&M), Vision Rehabilitation Therapy, and Instruction in Assistive Technology.

Since April 10th, LEAP has offered a total of 98 workshops online and provided 1632 total training hours.

Training Hours, LEAP 2020:

- LEAP's Winter Retreat: 360 hours
- Friday Retreats: 175 hours
- Work Based Learning Program: 580 hours
- Orientation and Mobility with a COMS: 81 hours
- Independent Living Skills with a CVRT: 192 hours
- Assistive Technology with a CATIS: 46 hours
- Social, Leadership and Self Advocacy: 198 hours

*Other than the first set of training hours which was our early February in person Winter Retreat on Networking, all other hours, students were engaged in training were virtual.

We were fortunate to provide so many hours in Vision Rehab Therapy due to our partnership with the University of Massachusetts, Boston. We work with their graduate

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Interns in Vision Rehab Therapy. These Interns develop lesson plans and facilitate workshops online to students in Independent Living Skills. They are supervised by Dan Norris, Program Coordinator for UMass Boston's Vision Rehab Program and a CVRT himself.

DBVI has successfully expanded and maintained our services overall to youth. The percentage of population served who were under age 22 at entry into DBVI services has grown from 17% of people served in SFY 2014 to 29% of people served in SFY 2019, and remains substantial at 27% in SFY 2020.

In 2020, COVID gave LEAP the unique opportunity to completely rethink our partners in the community. In our residential program, we partner with businesses and organizations to provide in-person work experiences and internships. In the new and exciting virtual world, LEAP had the opportunity to connect with people across the country. Students experienced meeting and engaging with professionals who are blind or visually impaired and succeeding in their individual careers. They include:

- Professional blind YouTuber and Advocates.
- Professional blind videographer and YouTubers.
- Director of Advocacy and Governmental Affairs of American Council for the Blind.
- Policy Director at the American Foundation for the Blind.
- Blind and visually impaired Paralympians.
- Blind Product Specialist for Apple.
- Adaptive Technology Experts.
- Executive Director of New England Adaptive Sports and Paralympian.
- The Gibney Family Foundation.
- Professional storytellers from The Vermont Moth.
- The Executive Director of the National Civilian Conservation Corps.
- Global Learning Partners.
- Vermont Community Garden Network.
- Vermont Department of Labor;
- Sangha Yoga Studio.

As a result of the success of the virtual programming in 2020, LEAP will make a virtual program part of its regular offerings.

In summer 2021, we hope to offer both residential and virtual programming. Our priority is to return to residential as soon as it's safe. We recognize that the in-person, hands on experience is where the most important learning happens on the job, and students living with their peers. We also recognize that a virtual program offers students who cannot or who are not fully ready for a residential experience, to engage in job readiness training from their own home.

Quotes from 2020 LEAP Students

- "Even virtually, LEAP created an opportunity for us to share, connect, and learn. We got to pick up new skills and strengthen existing ones in all different areas, not just social or mobility or daily living. It felt like a dynamic, comprehensive program where each student could decide which sessions would be most beneficial for them."

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-LEAP Intern, Storytelling Project, 2020

- “I learned that I had leadership skills within me, which I had always doubted before, as well as learning how to effectively work with others in a professional setting.”

-LEAP Intern, Youth Advisory Council, 2020

- “I am so grateful for these LEAP Virtual Retreats. We share ideas, laugh and learn from one another. These retreats remind us that no barrier will set us apart.”

-LEAP Virtual Retreat Participant, 2020

- “One lesson I will take with me from LEAP is to step out of your comfort zone, say yes to every opportunity and embrace adventure. Treat your seemingly insurmountable barriers as challenges that can be overcome.”

-LEAP Virtual Retreat Participant, 2020

- “The LEAP program means friendship and community for young adults with vision differences. I learned how to communicate and advocate regarding my visual needs. The greatest impact of LEAP for me is happiness.”

-LEAP Virtual Retreat Participant, 2020

- “The LEAP program is a wonderful, supportive community in which we can laugh, learn, and form ever lasting friendships. I don’t know of any other program that is so supportive in meeting the emotional and educational needs of blind and visually impaired youth: LEAP is my second family!”

-LEAP Intern, Interview Project, Fall 2020

DBVI staff work towards continuous improvement by listening to the voice of customers and using that information and data to improve performance. An updated DBVI State Plan with new goals and strategies was completed and approved by the State Rehabilitation Council in February 2020 and can be found at

<https://dbvi.vermont.gov/resources/publications>. Please also visit the success story link on the DBVI website at www.dbvi.vermont.gov to see examples of people reaching their goals.