

Washington

State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind



Department of Services for the Blind
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ANNUAL REPORT INTRODUCTION

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B) is an advisory group of volunteers appointed by the Washington State Governor to provide counsel and guidance to the Department of Services for the Blind (DSB). In Washington State, the DSB has primary responsibility to deliver Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services, the Business Enterprise Program (BEP), and Independent Living (IL) skills training to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. DSB provides services for individuals that can cross one's entire life span.

The purpose of the SRC-B is to review, evaluate, and make recommendations to DSB on its plans, policies, and activities to ensure that people in our state who are blind, low vision or deaf blind receive the most effective and efficient rehabilitation services possible.

In addition to providing direction to the Director of DSB on behalf of the public and participants the SRC-B also advises and reports to the Governor and makes recommendations to the State Legislature about services that impact the lives of blind people. The SRC-B works closely with other state councils, agencies and organizations to enhance the services, opportunities, and rights of Washingtonians who are blind.

The SRC-B is established and authorized under the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended under the 2014 Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA). Under local Washington State law, the SRC-B is authorized in statutes [RCW 74.18.070 through RCW 74.18.100](#).

REFLECTING ON 2020: A LETTER FROM THE SRC-B CHAIR

Dear Commissioner Schultz and Governor Inslee,

I am pleased to present the 2020 Annual Report on behalf of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B).

This has been my final year as Chair of the SRC-B. We continue to experience a high level of dedication by Council members to our work. This year we pivoted to online meetings starting with our first meeting in March due to COVID 19 and the early “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order from our Governor. We successfully utilized Zoom to continue our quarterly meetings. Our committees continued to meet in between full Council meetings. In December, our committees met virtually during the SRC-B meeting. The Policy Committee met to discuss SRC-B involvement in agency policy and expressed the need for Council input in agency policy matters while they are in progress rather than hearing about them after they have been developed.

Many discussions and presentations during our full SRC-B meetings were centered around how various agency programs are adapting during the pandemic. We have been impressed with the flexibility of agency staff and their commitment to ensuring the continuation of quality services. We were pleased that the agency was able to clear the Order of Selection waitlists and can serve all applicants. A main focus for 2020 has been SRC-B training which took place in December of this year. A dedicated team of Council members and our support staff met many times over the course of the year to plan the training agenda. We have had several new members join this year so the training was needed. Jerry Johnson, our CAP representative, gave a very good overview of the purpose and background of the SRC. This led to many questions and a robust discussion. All who participated came away with a better understanding of the SRC-B and their roles as members. We decided to hold regular training sessions every six months since we often have turnover in membership and there is always a need for learning.

Sincerely,

Marci Carpenter, Chair
Washington State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

GET TO KNOW OUR COUNCIL MEMBERS

The Washington State Governor appoints Council members for no more than two 3-year consecutive terms. The Governor actively encourages the Council to seek demographic and ethnic diversity of membership in addition to meeting the federal requirements for representation.

The Council currently has vacancies for a Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider, a State Educational Agency representative, a Tribal VR representative, and three Labor and Business Representatives.

CURRENT MEMBERS

CHRIS ALEJANO: STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD MEMBER
Seattle, WA

Chris Alejano is the Education Policy Advisor for City of Seattle Mayor, Jenny Durkan. He works with city programs and efforts in early learning, K-12, and post-secondary education. Chris brings a unique background that spans the entire educational system from the local to the federal level.

COREY GRANDSTAFF, 2019 SRC-B VICE-CHAIR: CURRENT OR FORMER RECIPIENT OF VR SERVICES
Vancouver, WA

Corey is a graduate of the University of Northern Colorado. Since 2012, he has been employed at the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB) as a Residential Program Assistant and teacher.

DOUG TRIMBLE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Vancouver, WA

Doug has worked at the Washington State School for the Blind since 1999 where he currently teaches Orientation & Mobility to middle and high school students. Doug is also a contracted service provider with the DSB Independent Living Blind Skills Services. This was Doug's last year serving on the Council.

GLORIA WALLING:

BUSINESS, INDUSTRY AND LABOR

Olympia, WA

In 2008, Gloria became a licensed operator in the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) where she has managed cafeterias and other locations. This was Gloria's last year serving on the Council.

JERRY JOHNSEN:

CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Seattle, WA

Jerry has been CAP Director for 38 years and also serves on the DVR SRC-B and the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment (GCDE). Jerry is married with two children; he loves photography, cycling and hiking.

JERRI CLARK:

PARENT INFORMATION AND TRAINING CENTER

Vancouver, WA

Jerri has a Bachelor of Science degree in journalism from the University of Kansas. She has served families as a resource coordinator for Partnerships for Action, Voices for Empowerment (PAVE) since 2017. She leads a grassroots advocacy movement, Mothers of the Mentally Ill (MOMI).

JULIE BRANNON:

CURRENT OR FORMER RECIPIENT OF VR SERVICES

Puyallup, WA

Julie retired a year ago after working for over 40 years in the fields of social work, teaching and program management. She has been involved in working with persons who are blind and blindness issues for approximately 25 years, both as a teacher and program manager for DSB; as well as in a variety of leadership roles with one of Washington State's consumer organizations, the Washington Council of the Blind, in which she's currently serving as president.

JULIE JEFFERSON

NATIVE AMERICAN

Bellingham, WA

Julie is the Director of the Lummi Vocational Rehabilitation Program on the Lummi Reservation. Julie has announced her retirement and this was her last year serving on the Council.

KIM CONNER: STATE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL (SILC)

Olympia, WA

Kim is Executive Director of the SILC. She previously worked as a consultant providing strategic planning, program development, and partnership building for non-profits and small businesses.

LINDA WILDER: QUALIFIED VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELOR

Tacoma, WA

Linda has a Bachelor's degree from Seattle University and a Master's degree from Chapman University. In 2017, Linda retired from DSB after working 30 years as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

MARCI CARPENTER, 2020 SRC-B CHAIR: CONSUMER ADVOCACY ORGANIZATION

Seattle, WA

Marci Carpenter is the President of the National Federation of the Blind of Washington. A Washington native, she has been a lifelong advocate for blind children and adults. Marci also serves as Chairperson of the Seattle Transit Advisory Board.

MICHAEL MACKILLOP: DSB ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (EX-OFFICIO MEMBER)

Seattle, WA

Michael MacKillop was appointed Acting Executive Director of DSB in January 2020. In his past 19 years with the agency, Michael has served as agency Deputy Director as well as other executive and direct service positions.

SHEILA TURNER: BLIND, WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

Pasco, WA

Sheila is employed as the Independent Living Skills teacher at the Edith Bishel Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Kennewick. She is working towards dual certification as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired and Orientation and Mobility Specialist at the University of Northern Colorado. She is the parent of two children who are blind; one has multiple disabilities.

STEVE FIKSDAL:

BUSINESS, LABOR AND INDUSTRY

Federal Way, WA

Steve is the owner of ConnectEd Institute, which provides character strength assessment and education to individuals and teams. Steve says DSB played a significant role in the establishment of his new company and career by providing him the skills and the resources to succeed in a sighted world and embark on a new and exciting career.

STAFF

MEREDITH STANNARD

DSB APPOINTED LIAISON

Seattle, WA

Meredith worked as a vocational rehabilitation counselor and supervisor for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in Seattle, and retired from her position as Regional Area Manager at the Washington Department of Services for the Blind in 2017. She is entering her third year as the liaison to the Washington State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind. She has a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Seattle University.

A CHANCE TO CONNECT, LEARN FROM, AND WORK WITH EACH OTHER

The SRC-B met four times during 2020, all meetings were held remotely due the coronavirus pandemic. All meetings were open to the public; two meetings were held via phone conferencing and two were held via video conferencing with connection information advertised ahead of time allowing interested consumers to take part regardless of where they live throughout our state. In addition to special presentations and subcommittee updates, meetings consist of a report from the DSB Acting Executive Director about progress towards goals outlined in the state plan and a report from the SRC-B Chair about Council activities.

The agenda always offers an opportunity for public comment on subjects related to Council business including the Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living Programs, and issues impacting the employment or independence of blind Washington State citizens.

Agenda items this year included:

- Meeting DSB's new Executive Team members
- Ongoing Independent Living and Older Blind program updates
- Ongoing updates on impact of the coronavirus pandemic and agency response
- Legislative Budget updates and discussion while in session
- Providing feedback to agency Executive Team for the State Plan updates
- Orientation and Training Center remote learning update
- Youth Services presentation on their Virtual Summer Program
- Council Membership discussion and recruiting
- Planning for SRC training session
- DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors' presentation on providing remote services
- Business Enterprise Program Manager and Vendor presentation regarding pandemic impacts

COMMITTEE ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2019

The SRC-B has four standing committees that do the work of the Council. Every member is expected to serve on a committee.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

This committee provides overall leadership, vision, and guidance. It includes the Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Chairs of the other standing committees. Responsibilities include: supervising SRC-B staff; developing and managing SRC-B resources; planning meeting agendas; strategic planning and work plan development; meeting federal and state mandates on time and within budget; and submitting this Annual Report.

MEMBERSHIP AND COLLABORATION COMMITTEE

This committee works to maintain a strong, active, and high-functioning Council. This includes: member recruitment; member training and support; public relations and outreach; and coordination of collaborative activities with partner councils.

The membership and collaboration committee has been actively seeking to fill all vacant member seats on the SRC-B. This year, we have been working to recruit a Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP), three business and labor positions, an educational representative, and most recently, a representative of Tribal VR. An application is currently in process for an educational representative, and we have a strong candidate for a Tribal VR representative. In addition, there were three positions in which current members were able to reapply for another term. The membership and collaboration committee worked to ensure an equitable process occurred for elections of both the council chair and vice chair. We are also actively working with the governor's office to ensure terms are properly staggered so not all member terms expire at the same time.

POLICY AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

This committee provides input to DSB's internal policies and practices by: identifying opportunities to engage in DSB internal workgroups; giving input on policy changes affecting DSB participants; and supporting DSB's State Plan forums.

PROGRAM AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE

This committee evaluates customer satisfaction and other DSB performance measures, and makes suggestions for program improvement based on their findings; coordinates opportunities for public feedback, and input to the SRC-B Annual Report.

This committee oversees the anonymous satisfaction survey for VR customers closed in the federal fiscal year, conducted by SRC-B staff. Surveys were completed online. Questions address categories identified in the Governor's Results Washington initiatives. Participants are encouraged to include written comment on their experience with DSB. This helps capture both analytical data and valuable feedback that allows DSB the opportunity to enhance their programs and customer service.

Overall satisfaction: for 2020 was 72%; for 2019 was 80%; for 2018 was 79%

Training offered: for 2020 was 84%; for 2019 was 81%; for 2018 was 93%

Accuracy of staff: for 2020 was 95%; for 2019 was 84%; for 2018 was 90%

Respectfulness of staff: for 2020 was 84%; for 2019 was 80%; for 2018 was 85%

The target for all satisfaction measures is 80%.

Survey feedback:

"I'm no longer afraid of challenges because of my legal blindness. I am able to perform better as it is, and I hold greater hope that more challenges though they may come, somewhere there will unveil people and instruments of possibilities."

"Everyone was very helpful and I'm glad I made the first call. I had no idea what help was out there."

"Overall, my experience with DSB was a positive one. I especially appreciated that if I received any new equipment, or requested additional services, I would get a call from DSB to follow up with how things were going, and I thought that it showed how the staff at DSB really cared about whether I was getting adequate services and that meant a lot to me."

"My experience with DSB has been so wonderful and I feel without their help, support and kindness I would not be in the amazing job that I am today."

DSB PROGRAMS MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION OF A HAPPY AND INDEPENDENT CHILD

The DSB serves children who are blind or have low vision, and their families. DSB provides assistance in understanding the nature and potential impact of the child's visual disability to the often-overwhelmed parents of this most challenging population. Parents are trained alongside the children, receiving training in parenting techniques and understanding the child's developmental needs. Daily living skills are also taught to the child (and their family) to help the child become more independent at home and participate in household chores.

[Resources for Families webpage](#)

A NATIONWIDE EMPHASIS ON YOUTH TRANSITION

A national emphasis in the VR program is services to ensure smooth transition for youth who are moving from school to post-secondary activities. DSB helps students and their families think about and plan for life after high school. The DSB provides:

- Career counseling: including consulting on part-time employment and internships.
- Assessments to help students determine their interests for their future careers.
- Information regarding services for adults, including job counseling and training in the adaptive skills of blindness.
- Collaboration with students, parents, and high school staff on Special Education Individualized Education Plans (IEP) development and post-school activities.
- Many summer programs are available for students in transition, as well as a growing handful of day long programs. Programs have different focuses depending on the age and needs of the participants. The youngest participants are working on social skills and the oldest participants are taking college classes while living on campus.

Due to the pandemic, the established youth programs were unable to be held in-person, and many important skill and personal development opportunities for students were missed this year. However, the Youth Services staff were able to completely revamp how these services were provided remotely, and while some important developmental aspects were lost, others were gained.

- Aspects lost included:
 - Hands-on work experience
 - Hands-on experience in independently managing own work, paychecks and finances, shopping, meal preparation and chores

- Peer supports and lifelong connections
- Self-advocacy opportunities
- Aspects gained included:
 - Expansion of participation in programs, as remote services didn't require travel or an extended commitment of time
 - Expansion of presenters from around the country and world, including Blind NASA engineers
 - A new curriculum that can be implemented throughout the school year without requiring travel or having to wait for weekend days and school holidays

In 2020, DSB provided a variety of services to 361 youth. DSB assisted 136 participants with their higher education tuition.

[Youth Services webpage](#)

GETTING PEOPLE TO WORK AND HELPING THEM KEEP THEIR JOBS

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is for people interested in getting a job or keeping a job. The comprehensive program considers the needs of each individual and provides quality services to participants rather than just placing people in jobs. DSB consistently gets higher wages than most other VR programs and consistently has the highest ratio of individuals who earn enough to reduce or eliminate Social Security financial benefits. Services are wide-ranging and encourage the participant to take an active role. Participants often need training in adaptive skills of blindness, computer technology for on-the-job success, career exploration and matching interests and aptitude to job types, or internships and other work experiences.

During the past year, the need to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on services, and the way DSB does business. Many direct participant services, while of higher quality when performed in-person, were able to be conducted remotely without an interruption of service continuity. Providing adaptive skills of blindness services is typically a high-touch field. Staff and participants initially struggled to maintain continuity of quality assessment and training services, and have provided much creativity in pivoting from in-person to remote services, attaining many successes. The DSB was able to resume limited in-person outdoors orientation and mobility training in September.

At the end of 2020, 59 participants achieved successful employment outcomes with an average hourly wage of \$29.14. Twelve (12) of these participants received job retention assistance in order to keep a job that was at risk due to their visual disability. Four participants who got or kept a job are Honorably Discharged Veterans. Twenty-one (21) participants now have all of their medical health insurance paid by their employers, as a result of employment through DSB services. Nine participants are no longer relying on Public Assistance as their primary source of

income. The eldest participant needed help retaining employment as an education consultant at 70 years old.

A complete list of jobs and employers can be found online, but a few examples of employers include: Apple, Boeing, Carnegie Mellon University, Clover Park School District, Eastern WA University, Facebook, IQ Credit Union, Microsoft, Puget Sound Energy, Tacoma School District, WA State Department of Fish & Wildlife, and WA State Department of Social & Health Services.

[More information about VR services on Agency website](#)

OTC GRADUATES ARE CONFIDENT, INDEPENDENT, AND SUCCESSFUL

The Orientation and Training Center (OTC) at the DSB is primarily a residential program for vocational rehabilitation participants who need intensive daily instruction in adaptive skills of blindness, employment-related experiences, and adjustment to blindness services. While all skills trained at the OTC are also available through each field office, the OTC allows for intensive, daily training and practice of the necessary adaptive skills of blindness. Students participate in a variety of classes while at the OTC including home management, computers and technology, orientation and mobility, braille, home maintenance, careers and education exploration, and discussion on blindness seminars. OTC students also participate in other activities and learning experiences such as tandem bike riding, kayaking, and rock climbing; these activities help students build confidence in their blindness skills. The skills students learn at the OTC enable them to be independent and successful in the homes, schools, jobs, and in their communities.

The year 2020 started off like any other, with 19 students attending the first term at the OTC and nearly full apartments—the OTC was thriving. Then in March 2020, a worldwide pandemic hit and things had to change quickly for the OTC. Residential students were sent home and unable to live in the apartments, and all in-person classes were suspended at the OTC, per the Governor’s request. Immediately, staff at the OTC and members of the DSB Executive Team met to determine what would happen next. It was unanimously decided that the OTC would stay open to all students and would work in a virtual environment for the foreseeable future.

Staff at the OTC immediately began lesson-planning, working on what technology could be used, and how classes could all be taught virtually. By the second term of 2020, all classes at the OTC were being taught virtually, with minimal lapse in training time. In 2020, the OTC was still able to accomplish great things, despite having to teach in a way that has never been done in OTC history. The following is just a short list of accomplishments in 2020 for the staff and students at the OTC.

- Successfully developed, adapted and delivered remote learning concepts, using new technologies to teach hands on cooking methods and safety techniques.
- Staff and students learned and implemented use of three different software platforms for remote teaching.
- The Careers team and students learned how to navigate and utilize innovative career based programs (i.e. LinkedIn).
- Successfully carried out weekly virtual yoga classes for both staff and students.
- Taught 27 students in the OTC Program.
- Served eight students in the Long Distance Braille Program.
- Coordinated team meetings weekly via Skype and Zoom.
- Successfully graduated five students with virtual ceremonies and Capstone Projects.
- Staff attended over 20 trainings both through DSB and outside the agency.
- Was successful in getting the OTC's name on the national map through a presentation at the national conference, "Dare To Be Remarkable".
- O&M instructors recertified for five more years with ACVREP as Certified Low Vision Therapists (CLVT).
- Students and staff participated in five terms of fitness and exercise challenges.
- The OTC hosted an intern from Portland State University.
- Drastically shifted the OTC's goals to include preparation of students for virtual careers.
- All staff have joined Seminar. This makes it more robust and increases connections amongst staff and students.
- We began hosted OTC staff lunches (virtually), on a weekly basis.

The OTC has been asked to do presentations on teaching remote learning techniques by several groups including Youth Services, the Independent Living Center at the University of Washington, and the Center on Human Development and Disability.

The OTC had to adapt and make many changes over the course of 2020, but thrived all the way. There is hope to be back to in-person training in 2021, as it's known that is the best way for students to learn the skills of blindness.

[Orientation and Training Center website page](#)

LEGALLY-BLIND INDIVIDUALS LEARN TO BE INDEPENDENT ENTREPRENEURS

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) provides training and opportunities for qualified legally-blind individuals to become independent entrepreneurs, operating successful food service businesses, including delis, cafeterias, and espresso stands, in government buildings. Over five to six weeks of online training and hands-on experience, participants complete training in all facets of food service facility operation to become BEP Licensees. They can apply to be operators of program locations and the program will provide the essential food service

equipment and provide ongoing guidance to the operator. The Licensee of each location is solely responsible for the success of the business.

While the response to the coronavirus pandemic has affected all of DSB's programs, the most devastating impact has been to the Business Enterprise Program. Prior to the pandemic, the blind small business owners through the BEP program managed 20 food service facilities in federal, state, and county government buildings. They employed around 95 restaurant and food service staff, generated revenues of around \$7.5 million in sales annually, and contributed more than \$550,000 in sales tax revenues to the state.

The agency's BEP program itself, which provides training, start up supports, equipment & stock, and on going technical assistance to the blind entrepreneurs, is funded primarily on revenues derived from vending machine sales in government buildings and federal facilities. Given the broad state agency pandemic response to primarily work from home, the BEP vendors have no customer base in the government buildings, and vending machines are not being utilized. Most BEP facilities have been closed since March, with three operations operating at a much reduced capacity.

The agency was able to negotiate rent abatement for the Capitol Campus facilities, but county facilities continue to charge rent in empty buildings; and in addition, costs for vending operations continue. The agency assisted vendors in securing CARES Act and other small business support funding to manage through extended months with no revenue.

There is a clear need to create a new model of BEP operations, one that is less dependent on a maximum number of state workers in a building. Through the state's response to the pandemic it is known that there will be a long-term reduction in the customer base for the BEP vendors, and this new model will be needed to keep those businesses profitable and able to continue contributing tax revenues back into the state.

- Median BEP vendor income for 2020 was \$36,425
- 22 facilities combined had total gross sales of \$3,125,848
- Sales tax collected from all facilities was \$191,929
- Payroll tax from all facilities was \$98,667

[Business Enterprise Program website page](#)

LIVING INDEPENDENTLY WITH VISION LOSS

The Independent Living Program (IL) provides the skills, the tools, and the confidence individuals with recent vision loss need to live independently in their homes and communities. IL providers offer a wide range of services, including training, brief counseling, info and referrals, and supplying aids or devices. For most participants, the goal is simply to regain what was lost: the ability to call a friend on the telephone, heat up leftovers in the microwave, know what time it is to get to a doctor's appointment on time, use a magnifier to look at pictures of a loved one, or take a walk in the fresh air.

The IL Program serves clients 18 years old to over 100 years old. In 2020, IL served nine centenarians! Most of the participants are actually 55 or older and the average age is 84 years old. Most participants live in their home or apartment rather than in a nursing or assisted living setting, and request services in order to continue doing so.

With the onset of the coronavirus pandemic all IL services were stopped when the University of WA closed as did many of the service providers. The majority of IL services are provided in person, and clients who did request services were added to a waiting list for when in-person visits resumed. The program has been able to do some remote training with providers, mostly on use of Assisted Technology devices; and has used unspent funds to augment providers' kits so they have up-to-date devices to use when training clients.

The IL Program resumed in-person services in September, after the program and each provider submitted plans to meet the University's and the State's requirements for in-person contact. Since the IL Program serves an older clientele and potentially more vulnerable population to the coronavirus, it is unsurprising that individuals are cautious to engage in services, and referrals to the program have slowed.

As 2020 came to a close, the program's five providers statewide served 649 clients. Overall, IL service delivery to underserved minority populations has increased; more outreach work is needed but the program is moving in the right direction. The pandemic highlighted the importance of being able to live independently at home rather than transfer to a residential assisted living situation, and emphasized the critical value of the Independent Living services to the health and safety of Washington State elders.

A LETTER OF RECOGNITION FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND DIRECTOR

Dear Commissioner Schultz and Governor Inslee,

Representing a broad spectrum of Washington citizens, the agency's State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B) has been vitally important in our current economic environment. The unprecedented challenges of the past year have made the input and perspectives of Council members especially critical to navigating the agency's challenges around the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting impact to agency budget, policies and long-term strategies. The SRC-B members are strong partners helping the agency to clarify values; identify, assess and promote opportunities; and achieve our agency mission of "Inclusion, Independence, and Economic Vitality for People with Visual Disabilities".

Despite the overshadowing of COVID-19, this past year was one of commemoration and celebration for the field of vocational rehabilitation and disability rights. We noted the 100th year anniversary of the Smith-Fess Act, the legislation that initiated a century of ever-evolving public vocational rehabilitation programs, and which has led to our present day customer-centric philosophy and values at DSB. This past year also signified the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), protecting broadly the rights of access for individuals with disabilities. SRC-B members and agency staff took part in numerous remote and video celebrations sharing the history, changes and personal impacts of both these landmark legislative acts.

I want to recognize the leadership of SRC-B chairperson, Marci Carpenter, throughout this challenging year. Under her guidance and the efforts of the SRC staff, the Council pivoted swiftly from meeting in person to facilitating scheduled meetings remotely. Some of the positive results of meeting remotely has been to ease travel burdens on Council members, and to increase public participation in the meetings. Council meetings are shorter, but effective in sharing information among agency, council and public.

The agency and the SRC-B chairs deepened lines of communication over the past year, with the agency's Executive Leadership and SRC Executive Committee meeting every other month to keep each apprised of follow up items and changing circumstances. There has been a greater awareness of the responsibility of SRC-B member roles under Marci's guidance, and trainings were developed to assist the membership in creating a more active framework for advocacy.

Marci Carpenter, as chair, has also led discussions that provided the agency valuable direction around important topics. The SRC-B gave valuable input in planning for a post-pandemic employment environment, creativity in providing services remotely, and surveying participant

experience and needs during the pandemic. They also assisted in identifying resources for Business Enterprise Program vendors whose businesses shut down overnight, and deepening awareness of the importance of Older Blind services in keeping people independent in their homes and away from residential elder care. Marci Carpenter's tenure as chair completes at the end of this year, and I am grateful for her role and advocacy in an unprecedented year.

Despite the need to provide almost exclusively remote services this past year, DSB continues to demonstrate a positive impact on youth and their families, adults seeking competitive employment, employers who need qualified workers, and elderly individuals wishing to remain independent in their homes.

The focus of the SRC-B, along with the successful outcomes achieved by our professional staff, contribute to Washington's economic and cultural vitality by emphasizing the skills and abilities of all its citizens - including those with disabilities.

Every day, Washingtonians with vision loss are going to work in competitive jobs, starting up their own businesses and employing others, or keeping their current jobs by acquiring new skills and assistive technology. These individuals have taken charge of their lives, can support their families, pay taxes, and contribute to the vitality of their communities. Individuals with disabilities are among those who have lost jobs this past year due to the pandemic, and they will require DSB's training and employment services to get back to work in the post-pandemic recovery.

Thank you for the opportunity to recognize the dedication and value of the SRC-B membership in their work to improve agency services and processes.

Sincerely,



Michael MacKillop
Washington State Department of Services for the Blind
Acting Executive Director

