

Washington

State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind



October 2018 - September 2019

Department of Services for the Blind
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ANNUAL REPORT INTRODUCTION

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRCB) is an advisory group of volunteers, appointed by the Washington State Governor, who 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 crossing the entire life span.

The SRCB reviews, evaluates, and makes recommendations to DSB on its plans, policies, and activities to insure that blind or visually impaired people in our state 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 consumers, the SRCB also advises and reports to the Governor; makes recommendations to the State Legislature about services that impact the lives of blind people; and, works closely with other state councils, agencies and organizations to enhance the services, opportunities, and rights of Washingtonians who are blind.

The SRCB is authorized by the federal Rehabilitation Act under the federal Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, and in Washington State statute RCW 74.18.070-74.18.100.

REFLECTING ON 2019: A LETTER FROM THE SRCB CHAIR

Dear Commissioner Schultz and Governor Inslee,

I am pleased to present the 2019 Annual Report on behalf of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRCB).

This has been my first year as Chair of the SRCB. We continue to experience a high level of dedication by Council members to our work. Our program reports now include a DSB participant. This year we heard from a blind man newly employed as an engineer at the Boeing Company and a recent graduate of the Orientation and Training Center. We are continuing to hold committee breakout sessions at each of our quarterly meetings. This has enhanced the work of our Council committees and our committees have been more active between full Council meetings. We have completed one year of Constituent Spotlight, where Council members share what is happening with the constituent groups we represent. More members are now sharing information and this has led to increased awareness among all of us about each members constituents.

The survey which had been in use for the last year had yielded a very low response rate. After reviewing a year's worth of data from the Satisfaction Survey this committee rewrote and downsized the entire survey. This was done through committee meetings held in between full Council meetings.

We continue to monitor and give feedback regarding the Order of Selection process. Thanks to increased state and federal funds the agency has been removing more people from its waitlist. We continue to monitor this progress. With the Washington Department of Services for the Blind going into an Order of Selection for the first time in its history we have been focused on ensuring that current and prospective participants receive accurate and consistent communication about this process. We have noted that there is not always consistent messaging from VRC's to consumers about the nature of OOS despite agency training resulting in confusion among potential participants. We have recommended they keep working to ensure consistent messaging.

The Independent Living Advisory Group formed at the end of last year has had very productive meetings. This has resulted in better communications among IL/OB providers. They have now decided to hold regular in-service conference calls and an in-person training this spring.

We thank the agency for accepting this recommendation from the SRC, DSB staff, and interested stakeholders. Consumer organizations are represented. I currently serve as Chair of this group. We have had several telephone conference calls over the last few months.

Sincerely,

Marci Carpenter, Chair

GET TO KNOW OUR COUNCIL MEMBERS

Council members are appointed by the Governor for no more than two 3-year consecutive terms. The Governor actively encourages us 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 Rehab Program Service Provider, a Current or Former Recipient of VR Services, and two Labor and Business Representatives.

CURRENT MEMBERS

CHRIS ALEJANO: STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

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: 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, 2019 SRCB VICE-CHAIR: 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.

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. Gloria is active in her local chapter of the Washington Council of the Blind and the BEP Vendor's committee.

JERRY JOHNSEN:

CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Seattle, WA

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

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.

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 JEFFERSON

NATIVE AMERICAN

Bellingham, WA

Julie is the Director of the Lummi Vocational Rehabilitation Program on the Lummi Reservation.

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.

LOU OMA DURAND:

DSB EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (EX-OFFICIO MEMBER)

Seattle, WA

Lou Oma was appointed Executive Director of the DSB in July 2005. Previously she served as Deputy Director, and held other executive and administrative positions at DSB. In addition to over 25 years of service in state government, Lou Oma was employed for 3 years at Boeing, and

has served on numerous education, arts and other non-profit boards, advisory councils, literary arts organizations, and legislative task forces.

MARCI CARPENTER, 2019 SRCB 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.

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 SRCB met four times in Seattle during 2019. All meetings were open to the public; a phone conferencing system with call-in 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 Executive Director about progress towards goals outlined in the state plan and a report from the SRCB 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:

- Ongoing Order of Selection updates and discussion
- SRCB Purpose overview and discussion
- Legislative Budget updates and discussion while in session
- Ongoing DSB Director reports to keep the SRCB apprised of Department highlights
- Committee break-out sessions at each quarterly meeting, and reports back to the SRCB
- Independent Living and Older Blind Program discussion
- SRCB constituent spotlights on individual programs
- Presentation from current Orientation & Training Center participant
- Presentation by a Case Manager from Seattle's Deaf Blind Service Center
- Discussion of SRCB By-laws and approve recommended updates
- Presentation from new Business Enterprise Program Manager
- Presentation from new Orientation & Training Center Manager
- Providing feedback to agency Executive Team for the State Plan updates

COMMITTEE ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2019

The SRCB 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 SRCB staff; developing and managing SRCB 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, training and support; public relations and outreach; and coordination of collaborative activities with partner councils.

PROGRAM AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE

The committee evaluates customer satisfaction and other DSB performance measures, and makes suggestions for program improvement based on finding; coordinates opportunities for public feedback, and input to the SRCB Annual Report.

This committee oversaw the anonymous satisfaction survey for VR customers closed in the federal fiscal year, conducted by SRCB staff. Surveys were completed online. Questions address categories identified in the Governor's Results Washington initiatives. The Council has approved of moving forward with a condensed set of questions to encourage more responses from participants that will capture both analytical data and the opportunity for written feedback that DSB will use to enhance their programs and customer service.

Overall satisfaction: for 2019 was 80%; for 2018 was 79%; for 2017 was 83%

Training offered: for 2019 was 81%; for 2018 was 93%; for 2017 was 84%

Accuracy of staff: for 2019 was 84%; for 2018 was 90%; for 2017 was 86%

Respectfulness of staff: for 2019 was 80%; for 2018 was 85%; for 2017 was 84%

The target for all satisfaction measures is 80%.

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.

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 from birth through 8. 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. Of course, 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.

In 2019, 18 children from birth to age 8 received services, including counseling, family consultations, and basic independent living skills.

Children and Families webpage: <http://www.dsb.wa.gov/services/children-and-families.shtml>.

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, as young as age 9 to as old as age 24, 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 IEP development and post-school activities
- Five 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 of the participants. The youngest participants are working on social skills and the oldest participants are taking college classes while living on campus.

In 2019, DSB provided a variety of services in addition to the summer programs to more than 350 youth. DSB assisted 142 participants with their higher education tuition.

School to Work Transition webpage: <http://www.dsb.wa.gov/services/school-work-transition.shtml>

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 customers 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, or internships and other work experiences.

At the end of 2019, 84 participants achieved successful employment outcomes with an average hourly wage of \$22.83. 27 of these participants were receiving job retention assistance. Three of them are Honorably Discharged Veterans. 31 participants now have all of their medical health insurance paid by their employers. 22 participants are no longer relying on Public Assistance as their primary source of income. And, the oldest participant, who needed help retaining employment as a Psychologist, was 90 years old.

A complete list of jobs and employers can be found online, but a few examples of employers include: Boeing, Cascade Public Media (KCTS9), Farmers Insurance, Glass Doctor, Helen Keller National Center, Jarnot Engineering, Inc., Mukilteo School District, Paccar, Seattle Public Schools, Skagit River Brewery, and WA State Department of Corrections.

VR Services Website: <http://www.dsb.wa.gov/services/employment.shtml>

OTC GRADUATES ARE CONFIDENT, INDEPENDENT, AND SUCCESSFUL

The Orientation and Training Center is primarily a residential program for VR customers who need intensive daily instruction in adaptive skills of blindness and employment-related experiences. Students participate in a variety of classes, including Home Management, Keyboarding and Computers, and Orientation and Mobility. OTC students participate in other activities and learning experiences. Challenge Activities, like tandem bike riding and kayaking, help students build confidence with vision loss. The skills they learn and experiences they have enable them to be independent and successful in the home, in school, on the job, and in their communities.

In 2019, the OTC had 41 students attend its regular training program and intensive workshops. As part of the program, eight students had the opportunity to participate in a Student Training Employment Program internship:

- One placement at DSB's Lacey office with an Assistive Technology Specialist
- One placement working with a TVI and a Braillist at Lichton Springs Elementary
- One placement at both Lowell Elementary and Rainier Beach High School working with a Para educator of blind students
- One placement at the NW Justice Center assisting with records management
- One placement with a creative writer which has inspired the student to publish their stories
- One placement with the Rooted in Rights Organization working as a Graphic Designer on their website
- One placement at the NW ADA Center analyzing their website for accessibility
- One placement at the Seattle Lighthouse for the Blind working in Customer Service

OTC's website: <http://www.dsb.wa.gov/about/orientation-and-training-center.shtml>

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.

2019 ended with 16 BEP vendors in operation, and the successful opening of a new facility at the US Courthouse in Downtown Seattle. This site creates even more visibility to the program as the location is open to the public and is a high traffic, high profile federal location. All of the BEP facilities benefit the state and our economy as a whole, in addition to the vendors and their employees.

- Median BEP vendor income for 2019 was \$68,005
- 22 facilities combined had total gross sales of \$7,439,010
- \$556,051 was collected as sales tax from all facilities
- \$286,126 was collected as payroll tax from all facilities

BEP website: <http://www.dsb.wa.gov/about/business-enterprise-program.shtml-1>

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 2019, IL served 13 centenarians! Most of the participants are actually 55 or older. More than two-thirds of them are women; the majority have macular degeneration; and the average age is 84 years old. Of those clients 54 or younger, the average age is 35 and more than a third suffer from depression. Most participants live in their home or apartment rather than in a nursing or assisted living setting; in 2019, IL services were provided to 9 homeless people.

As 2019 came to a close, the program's five providers statewide served 1196 clients. Despite an emphasis on outreach to the Asian and Hispanic minorities, these populations are still significantly underserved, falling well short of Washington State's general population percentage who are Hispanic or Asian individuals (in contrast to DSB's achievements in the VR Program.) Overall, IL service delivery to underserved minority populations has increased, but more work is clearly needed but the program is moving in the right direction.

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 State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRCB) is vitally important in our current economic environment. Council members actively seek and convey the input of their respective constituents. They are strong partners in helping the agency to clarify values; assess options regarding our budget, policies and strategies; and achieve our agency mission: Inclusion, Independence, and Economic Vitality for People with Visual Disabilities.

As a result, Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) continues to demonstrate the positive impact our services have on children and families, youth transitioning from school to work, adults seeking competitive employment, employers who need qualified workers, and elderly citizens wishing to remain independent in their homes. The focus of the SRCB 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, people in Washington 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.

We create these successes by being innovative in how we manage our resources, providing our state employees an environment of recognition and development, maintaining a strong relationship with our stakeholders, and keeping the public informed. As a state agency, we continue to emphasize accountability, performance outcome measures, and careful analysis of data as the drivers for strategic planning.

Our Council members, seven of whom are blind or have other disabilities, use those same key tools to be well-informed advisors and advocates. They continue to thoughtfully share their expertise, resources, and life experiences with our customers. Both as a group and individually, they function as role models for an engaged Washington committed to the well-being of all its citizens and are persistent on behalf of the economic and cultural vitality of our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to recognize the work of these dedicated volunteers.

Sincerely,

Lou Oma Durand, Director

2019 Outcomes website: <https://dsb.wa.gov/about/dsb-outcomes-and-results.shtml>