

## **State services for the Blind (SSB)**

### **Customer Adjustment to Blindness Training Informational Guide March 2025**

Greetings,

Thank you for your interest in Adjustment to Blindness (ATB) training. This information is provided to you because you have either requested or will start ATB training soon.

This will give an overview of ATB training, offer some helpful tips, explain State Services for the Blind's (SSB) role in paying for ATB training, and lay out your responsibilities for your training. The short appendix provides excerpts from our SSB policy manual to give you further context to help in understanding more about ATB and SSB's role. We hope this informational guide answers questions or concerns you might have.

If you have further questions not addressed here, please talk to your SSB counselor or other SSB Workforce Development staff.

We're so glad you're interested in ATB training. SSB customers who have taken this training told us that it was critical to their success. For many, ATB was life-changing, often helping them move from feeling overwhelmed and hopeless to feeling capable and empowered.

We sincerely hope you will also find ATB training a positive and productive experience. Thank you for reading this information carefully. Please pay special attention to and note the requirements for successfully completing your training program.

## **Understanding Adjustment to Blindness Training**

ATB teaches you skills for living your life as a person who is blind, low vision, or DeafBlind.

Training includes:

- Assistive Technology – may include using computers, smartphones, tablets, and other technologies used to navigate the digital world.
- Skills for daily living – also called rehabilitation training, which teaches you skills and techniques for managing your daily life.
- Orientation and Mobility training – training that helps you get around your home, your neighborhood, your community, and even travel the world!
- Braille – a reading and writing system of raised dots that can be read using fingers.

## **ATB at a Training Center**

You may attend ATB at one of Minnesota's training centers. A full description of the centers is in the appendix. Currently, there are two:

Lighthouse Center for Vital Living  
Vision Loss Resources

These centers offer comprehensive training programs. Classes offered at these centers may include:

- Braille
- Cooking
- Daily Living Skills
- Industrial arts
- Orientation and Mobility
- Technology
- Career exploration
- Self-Advocacy

Typically, the training center offers a full-day program training program five days a week. There are some flexibilities for those who require part-time or adjusted schedules. However, a full-time schedule is highly encouraged. Some customers who live close to a training center commute to the center while living at home. Other customers, especially those who don't live close to a center, will live in an apartment run by the training center or in other accommodations during the training period.

## **Itinerant ATB Training**

Itinerant ATB is training offered by an independent, individual trainer or through a training center staff. This often means that the trainer will meet you at your home, your workplace, or an agreed upon place in the community.

While it depends on your training needs, itinerant training typically lasts a few hours a day, a few days per week. Depending on your goals, you may receive training from more than one itinerant trainer. Trainers often specialize in one kind of training, such as Orientation and Mobility, assistive technology, or daily living skills. Some trainers might be SSB staff members, others are Community Partners contracted by SSB.

Our website has the Community Partner list and map. These include a list of trainers and training centers, areas where services are provided, and the type of services available.

## **Choosing an ATB Training Provider**

Choosing where you take your ATB training may be one of the most important decisions you make in rehabilitation.

We will help you learn about the training options that best suit your needs. We can provide you with written information and contact information so that you can contact the ATB training provider directly to be able to make a better-informed decision that fits your needs. We can also help you arrange tours or meetings if needed, as well as helping arrange transportation and interpreters for meetings as needed.

If you are considering itinerant training, we can provide the contact information of community partners who provide the ATB services you need in your area, so you are able to make an informed choice that best fits your needs.

We also can share customer satisfaction survey results for the various ATB providers so you can learn about other people's opinions and experiences.

Once you decide, your counselor will complete a referral to the training center or itinerant community partner. There may be a waiting list to begin services. If so, you may wait or find an alternative provider of ATB services.

### **Accommodating Your Training**

If you need accommodations for your training based on other disabilities, we will ensure those are addressed to the best of our ability. You can choose not to disclose that you have any other disabilities; however, by not disclosing, you may not receive the necessary accommodations to be successful in your training.

If you have other disabilities communicate those with your counselor, trainer, or the center before starting training. We want to do our best to make reasonable accommodations for maximum success.

There may be some situations we are unable to accommodate. In those instances, we will seek alternative approaches and methods to help you achieve your goals.

Reasons for requesting accommodations could include:

- Needing American Sign Language interpreters
- Mobility issues not related to blindness
- Chronic health conditions
- Sensory needs
- Other disability-related condition or barrier that may prevent a person from engaging in training

### **Before and During Training**

You may be nervous before and during the first few days of your training. This is normal. We encourage you to find ways to calm yourself, such as taking deep breaths, getting good rest, giving yourself an encouraging pep talk, and focusing on your goals. If the nervous feelings are overwhelming, talk with your counselor, the center staff, or the itinerant community partner. They can help you find a way through this challenging time.

Many people who are new to using a white cane find the training to be a bit daunting and physically exhausting. Remember, you are learning new skills. We've found that successful customers take on the challenge and don't let feelings get in their way. This can also take some time, but it is worth it as your skills and independence grow.

You can expect to be tired, especially for the first weeks. You are learning many new things and engaging your other senses that may not be as strong. We often tell customers they should plan on being tired and make time to rest and relax.

## **ATB Training Requirements**

You must agree to certain requirements for SSB to authorize and pay for your ATB training. These requirements fall into three general categories:

- Attendance
- Communication
- Practicing the skills you learn

### **Attendance**

All classes scheduled with a trainer or training center are required. You must give at least 24-hour notice to the trainer or training center and your counselor if you need to cancel.

If an emergency or sudden illness occurs, and you cannot give 24-hour notice, please contact the trainer or training center as soon as possible.

Please see the “Special Situations” section below for more information about attendance and unusual circumstances.

### **Notes on attendance**

At SSB, we encourage you to approach ATB training like a job. Similar to a job, it requires that you are on time and do the work. You may not be earning a paycheck, but you are making a substantial investment in your future.

SSB cannot pay for training that is scheduled but does not take place. With enough notice of a cancellation, a trainer may be able to make other appointments or otherwise revise their schedules. You can ensure that you get the most out of your training and that our trainers make the best use of their time if you limit cancellations. When circumstances allow, please provide 24-hour notice of cancellation. We realize sometimes there are circumstance that may make this difficult. Please contact your counselor and trainer as soon as you possibly can.

***Missing multiple sessions may result in your counselor or training staff deciding to end your training.***

### **Special Situations**

We recognize that there are certain situations that may make it difficult to attend one or more ATB sessions. Here’s a partial list of special situations and how to handle each:

- If you are ill and cannot attend, let your counselor and the training staff know that you will be out and if possible, when you may be back.
- If you become ill during a training day and need to leave, let the trainer or the center director and your counselor know.
- If you are injured, let the trainer or the center director and your counselor know. If you must leave for treatment, do so. Once addressed let the trainer or center director and your counselor know when you expect to return.
- If you may be late, let the trainer or the center, and your counselor know.

- If you have scheduled appointments, let the trainer or center staff, and your counselor know as far in advance as possible.

### **Communication**

Good communication with training staff, your SSB counselor, and other SSB staff is key to success in ATB training.

Let us know as soon as possible about any issues you might have with the training, and we will work with you to find a resolution. If you have a medical issue or other reason that makes it more difficult to complete training, please let us know as soon as you can. We will work with you to find adjustments, see if we can create a workable solution, or if necessary, postpone your training.

### **Practicing Skills**

There is so much you can do and achieve! Your success depends on you. The skills you learn through ATB training will increase your independence, confidence, and ability to reach your goals. Practicing these skills will be the key to building a strong foundation for yourself. If part of your training is difficult to learn or there is some other barrier to your learning, please let your counselor and the training staff know. We will work together to find a solution. Not doing the assigned homework or otherwise not participating in the training may result in your counselor or training staff deciding to end your training.

### **Establishing Goals and Measuring Progress**

We all have goals; establishing your own is important (e.g., “I want to learn how to go grocery shopping.” Or “I want to be able to ride the light rail from my home to a Twins Game,” etc.). Your help in identifying your goals so that your counselor and trainers can design a program that best meets your needs is essential. These decisions are yours to make.

Feedback is an important part of the training. The training centers produce monthly progress reports for you and your counselor. These reports describe your progress so that you and your counselor can make adjustments, if needed.

Regular meetings are also a part of supporting you and measuring your progress. These meetings, sometimes called “staffings” are a chance for you and your counselor to hear directly from trainers about how you are doing, and for you to be able to ask any questions and have input in your program.

### **Length of Training/Knowing When You Are Done**

Typical full-time center-based training averages from about nine months to one year, depending on your needs and goals. Not all training areas may take the same amount of time to finish. For example, there can be times when a person shifts from a full-time to a part-time program.

You don’t need to have learned everything possible to have completed training. The core of training is intended to give you a solid foundation for functioning independently and provide the creative problem-solving skills and knowledge to deal with new and unfamiliar situations.

However, you may need for additional training throughout your lifetime. This may be because of changes in your vision or technological advancements that impact your employment.

If you have such a situation, don't hesitate to get in touch with SSB, and we will work with you to determine how best to address it.

## **Unwelcome or Harassing Behavior**

### **PLEASE NOTE:**

**There is zero tolerance for unwelcome behavior from you to others and others to you. This includes any form of physical or verbal harassment.**

Harassment is unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability, or genetic information.

Should you experience or witness harassing or unwelcome behavior, immediately or as soon as possible bring this to the center director's and counselor's attention. They will act promptly and follow up appropriately.

- Be aware that what is acceptable to you may not be acceptable to another person. Language, and conversations should be civil, respectful, and courteous to ensure you and your fellow students can focus on learning in a safe and supportive environment.
- If you feel unsafe or uncomfortable and can do so, remove yourself from the situation and immediately, or as soon as possible, contact your counselor and the center director, unless they are the subject of the concern, in which case contact an SSB supervisor or the Deputy Director of Program Services.

## **Causes for Terminating Training**

Sadly, there are times when we cannot justify continuing SSB support for ATB training. If a customer cannot meet the requirements set out in this information guide, ATB training may be discontinued by the counselor, trainer, or center for the following reasons:

- Repeated unexcused absences.
- Taking extended leaves due to personal or other non-medical reasons.
- Illegal use or abuse of drugs and/or alcohol or otherwise attending training under the influence.
- Misconduct, such as unwelcome, harassing, threatening, or violent behavior.
- Not adhering to center policies.
- Not following through with assigned homework/
- Not progressing sufficiently in developing the skills required to achieve their job goal.

## **Additional ATB Training**

There are certain situations in which SSB can authorize additional ATB training after a customer has completed training.

- A vision change that requires learning new skills.

For instance, a customer may have learned skills for living with low vision, but subsequent vision loss makes it necessary to learn new skills.

- An individual has attempted to complete a comprehensive ATB training program but was

unsuccessful, they may only return to a comprehensive program if the reason the individual was unsuccessful has been addressed and corrected.

For example, an individual was unable to complete their program due to mental health concerns. The individual sought mental health support, has an established medication or other stabilizing regime, and documentation shows the individual can complete the program.

- If an individual has made two or more attempts at completing a comprehensive ATB training program but was not successful, a comprehensive training program may need to be discontinued based on the individual's circumstances. This does not mean that ATB cannot be reconsidered, but rather until circumstances change which allow for successful completion, there is no value in continuing.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for reading through this informational guide and understanding your responsibilities as you begin your ATB training. Completing ATB training can be a significant milestone on your path to achieving your goals and reaching for your dreams. We sincerely wish you every success as you take this next step on the road to independence, achievement, and pride.

## **Appendix**

Below are some of the definitions listed in our SSB policy manual related to ATB training. You might find these helpful in understanding more about your training and SSB's role and requirements.

### **Assistive Technology Training**

Rehabilitation or assistive technology must be provided by an individual qualified to provide assistive technology services, who must then be trained in using it.

Assistive technology training services must be provided by a person who has demonstrated mastery of assistive technology and the ability to teach it to blind, low vision, and Deafblind individuals.

Examples include:

- Using a screen reader via speech or braille output or screen magnification programs to access an operating system, word processing, email, and internet browser applications.
- Operating other current or emerging electronic aids and devices.

### **Orientation and Mobility**

Orientation and mobility services means the provision of transportation aids and devices and instruction in their use which enable an individual to travel safely and independently without sight or with impaired sight. These services include the provision of white canes and instruction in cane travel. Orientation and Mobility training must allow travel without the instructor and on increasingly difficult routes.

Orientation and Mobility training of a legally blind individual who has some remaining vision must include the use of sleep shades. The one exception is if an Orientation and Mobility specialist or other qualified person determines that because of age or one or more nonvisual disabilities, the use of sleep shades would be unsafe.

SSB shall provide instruction in outdoor white cane travel to an individual to achieve the goal identified in the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) unless:

- The individual is not expected to travel alone outside their residence because of one or more severe nonvisual disabilities, or
- The individual and an Orientation and Mobility specialist or other qualified person determines the individual can travel safely and independently outside their residence without receiving outdoor white cane travel instruction.

### **Rehabilitation Teaching**

Rehabilitation teaching services mean instruction in using alternative techniques other than Orientation and Mobility and assistive technology services.

Rehabilitation teaching includes teaching tasks of daily living and alternative access to print (such as braille). Alternative techniques enable individuals to perform activities of daily living independently without sight or with limited sight.

One technique is to place bump dots on a kitchen stove dial to identify temperature settings.

SSB shall provide instruction in braille to an individual to achieve the goal identified in the IPE unless:

- The individual can read print with enough proficiency to successfully complete the IPE, or
- A medical condition prevents the individual from reading braille.

### **Overview of ATB Training Centers**

The following information was provided by each of the Minnesota-based ATB training centers.

#### **Lighthouse Services**

Friendly. Person-Centered. Comprehensive. Fun.

The Lighthouse Center for Vital Living offers an especially wide array of training opportunities. Options include:

- Part-time or full-time residential training at our Duluth Center
- Training in your home or workplace
- Remote training via Zoom or Teams
- The Lighthouse Transition Program for youth aged 14-21 (a combination of onsite weekend and remote programming)
- Summer Camps for 14–21-year-old

**Like other ATB centers**, our class offerings include:

- Orientation and Mobility (travel skills) training
- Daily living skills training (cooking, cleaning, organizing, financial management, self-care, etc.)
- Braille
- Technology
- Adaptive Leisure



- Emotional Adjustment to Blindness
- Self-Advocacy
- Employment readiness

**Unlike other centers,** at the Lighthouse you can also take Self-Defense from a black belt master. You can explore a variety of careers or gain work experience. If you are interested, you can also enjoy walks on the beach, rock climbing, canoeing, water skiing, tandem biking, skiing, and other activities.

The Lighthouse also offers an occupational therapy division and an assistive technology division. Our occupational therapists and our assistive technology staff can help people overcome challenges of vision loss – or other disabilities or challenges they might face. Our six technology professionals are experts in a wide range of both mainstream or assistive technologies to make your life easier or help you succeed in the workplace. Our device lending library houses more than 500 devices.

Duluth, Minnesota offers the best of many worlds. It is a mid-sized city with small-town charm and convenience. The Duluth area is home to 5 colleges or universities. The local economy has varied career opportunities to explore. It is the jewel of the Northland – sitting on the shores of Lake Superior, surrounded by natural beauty.

**Vision Loss Resources (VLR)**

We provide innovative and relevant ATB training and support to build individual confidence and success. Our program options are designed to help students adapt, connect, and thrive. We meet each individual where they are and work together to create a training plan tailored to each student's unique goals and needs. Our dedicated, certified, and knowledgeable Instructors assist each student in learning how adaptive tools and methods improve independence and enhance the quality of life. VLR is committed to a culture and environment that builds community. In addition to ATB training, we offer support groups and a monthly calendar of activities. Our mission is to create a community of service, skills, and support for individuals experiencing blindness and low vision.