



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

The mission of State Services for the Blind is to facilitate the achievement of vocational and personal independence by Minnesotans who are blind, low vision, or DeafBlind.

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Director's Report, State Services for the Blind, 2024

**Natasha Jerde, Director
State Services for the Blind**

2024 has been a
productive year at SSB.

With many new and exciting developments, we have positioned ourselves to be in the best shape ever to serve every Minnesotan who is blind, DeafBlind, has low vision, or a print-related disability.

Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) Grant

In spring 2024, the SSB leadership team began work on applying for a Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) grant. Administered by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) through the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), this grant's purpose is to support innovative activities aimed at increasing competitive integrated employment (CIE) for youth and other individuals with disabilities. The history of the DIF grant begins with the fiscal year 2012 appropriation where the U.S. Congress provided authority to use unspent Vocational Rehabilitation funds returned from the states. After months of hard work, sweat, and tears, we submitted the SSB grant proposal to RSA in early July. The U.S. Department of Education received over 200 applicants across all 50 states for the DIF grant. We waited with bated breath for news of the 2024 grantees.

In September, we received the exciting news that SSB's proposal was approved! Our agency was awarded a \$9.1 million dollar grant to support a 5-year initiative to tackle unemployment and under-employment for blind, DeafBlind, and low vision Minnesotans. The 2024 DIF grant was the largest in DOE's history with \$251 million awarded to 27 grantees across the country. We are honored to be one of the few grant recipients.

Introducing Evolve Employment

The DIF grant will fund a new initiative at SSB called Evolve Employment. It consists of a dual pronged approach, addressing both job seekers and Minnesota businesses. Our goal is to work with companies at every

step along the way. We understand their needs extend beyond just hiring. This grant will help us scale up our services so that employees and the companies they work for will have all the resources needed to build solid, lasting employer/employee relationships.

Targeted Population

The target population for Evolve Employment are Minnesotans who are blind, low vision, and DeafBlind who:

- Acquire vision loss during their working years;
- Are New Americans; or
- Have been detached from the workforce for more than 27 weeks.

Goals and Objectives

The Evolve Employment model demonstration has three goals:

Goal 1. Implement a Rapid Engagement Team

Approach (RETA): Implement a three-tiered rapid engagement approach provided by a team of experts and partners delivering specialized career services, high-tech/new tech solutions, and business engagement resulting in competitive integrated employment outcomes that align with the Good Jobs Now principles.

Objective 1. Offer a three-tiered portfolio of career services that includes universal, targeted, and intensive approaches for at-risk BLVDB individuals and businesses.

Objective 2. Create a Coordinated Team Approach to support individuals with acquired BLVDB in retaining and obtaining employment as part of Tier 2 and 3 services.

Objective 3. Enhance community partner and interagency collaboration for serving at-risk BLVDB individuals through specialized training and capacity and skill building.

Goal 2. Build a Sector-Based Approach for Advanced

Technology Careers: Target businesses to provide retention services and foster career development opportunities within the Customer Service and Technology sector as part of the MN Governor's Drive for 5 initiative.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Objective 1. Establish and strengthen sector partnerships with businesses and organizations in the Customer Service and Technology (CST) sector.

Objective 2. Develop and implement cutting-edge technology tools and training to support BLVDB individuals in obtaining careers in the CST sectors.

Objective 3. Through a collaborative effort with partners and business, create a customized CST career readiness training program that prepares at-risk BLVDB individuals to enter this sector.

Goal 3. Pilot an Enhanced Progressive Employment Model in Two Communities: Incorporate advanced technology, benefits counseling, and sector partnerships to meet the needs of at-risk Somali jobseekers and support businesses in St. Cloud and Minneapolis/St. Paul Twin Cities.

Objective 1. Support staff in utilizing an EPE Model to create meaningful career opportunities and pathways that align with the Good Jobs principles.

Objective 2. Create a network of businesses, community-based organizations, and subject matter experts that support the CIE outcomes of New Americans participating in EPE.

Objective 3. Implement the EPE Model with New Americans in two pilot locations.

Evolve Employment Vision

The overarching purpose of Evolve Employment is increased labor force participation and employment outcomes, employment retention rates, and the rate at which businesses recruit and retain. Evolve Employment will significantly close the historical employment gap for individuals with vision loss, improve economic independence, and create a more inclusive and diverse workforce. By integrating advanced technology, tailored innovative service models, and strong business and community partnerships, this model offers a



sustainable solution to the employment challenges faced by BLVDB individuals most at risk for under- and un-employment. We're dreaming of a Minnesota where high employment for our community is a thing of the past. With Evolve Employment, funded by this Disability Innovation Fund Grant, we're getting to work to make that dream a reality.

2025 will be the ramp-up year for Evolve Employment staffing and planning. We are looking to build a strong team with the skills and vision to help with the target of reaching and serving 800 individuals and 500 businesses throughout the 5-year grant cycle. A designated Evolve Employment webpage has been created so stakeholders can keep up to date on the initiative - [Evolve Employment / State Services for the Blind](#).

WIOA Combined State Plan

Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Governor of each State must submit a Unified or Combined State Plan to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor that outlines a four-year strategy for the State's workforce development system. The publicly funded workforce development system is a national network of Federal, State, regional, and local agencies and organizations that provide a range of employment, education, training, and related services and supports to help all job-seekers secure good jobs while providing businesses with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. States must have approved Unified or Combined State Plans in place to receive funding for core programs. These programs include:

- Adult programs (Title I),
- Dislocated Worker program (Title I),
- Youth program (Title I),
- Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program (Title II),
- Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program,
- Vocational Rehabilitation programs including State Services for the Blind

The corresponding Minnesota state agencies each prepare their sections for the Combined State Plan. The plan was submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor in April, and we received word of plan approval in June. The Combined State Plan took effect beginning July 1, 2024, and covers program years 2024 through 2027 (Fiscal years July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2028).

Staffing

We are excited to say that SSB is now fully staffed. We welcomed 18 new staff members across all departments in 2024. These talented new hires include an English Language Instructor, a Business and Data Analyst, an Audio Services Librarian, and an Audio Quality Control Coordinator, as well as several new Counselors and Tech Specialists.

Throughout the year, our dedicated staff was able to provide services for 880 Workforce Development customers and 3,617 seniors. The Communication Center produced 40,275 print pages into audio, transcribed 16,948 pages into braille, and broadcast 251 new books through Radio Talking Book. SSB is fortunate to have such an amazing team.

Facilities

We have made some new and exciting facility improvements to our home at 2200 University. We've built a brand-new training kitchen fully equipped with a stove, oven, microwave, dishwasher, and washer and dryer. We are excited to begin offering in-house training sessions furthering our mission to facilitate the achievement of personal independence by Minnesotans who are blind, low vision, or DeafBlind.

SSB's Braille Unit installed all new, high-capacity shelving units for a better way to store and search through our vast collection of braille textbooks and materials. These space saving shelves allow for a much more efficient use of departmental square foot capacity.

We opened our space to welcome 27 Vocational Rehabilitation staff who are using a hotel-style officing system in the Administrative Services wing at 2200. This co-officing solution helps save precious funds for both VRS and SSB. We have loved meeting and getting



to know the VR staff. We've even began work on some collaborative informational and educational endeavors and hope to partner with them more in the future.

We are proud of our accomplishments throughout 2024 and look forward to an even better 2025 as we continue on our mission to facilitate the achievement of vocational and personal independence by Minnesotans who are blind, low vision, or DeafBlind.

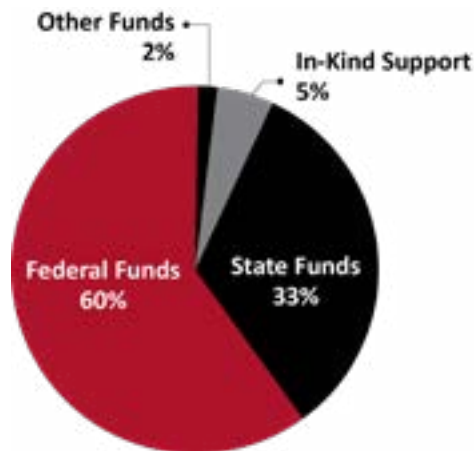
A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Natasha".

Natasha Jerde, SSB Director

SSB FINANCIALS

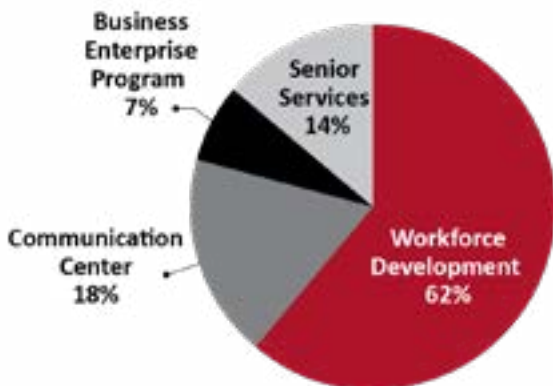
SSB Funding Streams

FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2024

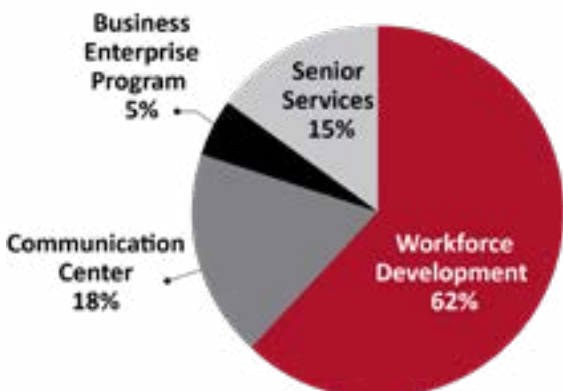


SSB Funding Distribution

FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2023



FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2024



SSB Expenditures

FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2023 AND 2024

Federal Funds	FFY 2023	FFY 2024
Basic VR	10,429,592	12,442,628
Supported Employment	-	-
Independent Living	67,721	15,138
IL-Older Blind	1,701,082	1,397,994
Special Education Agreement	689,101	688,971
Total Federal Funds	12,887,496	14,544,731
Total State Funds	5,903,917	8,052,685
Other Funds		
Gifts/Bequests	283,950	197,886
Dept. of Commerce - Telecommunications Access	77,581	94,999
Aging Eyes	-	-
Communication Center	-	-
Business Enterprises	366,151	277,005
Total Other Funds	934,050	569,890
In-Kind Support		
From Volunteers	1,207,836	1,207,836
Total All Funds	20,726,931	24,375,142

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT | By the Numbers

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT UNIT - State Fiscal Year 2024

880 Customers Served

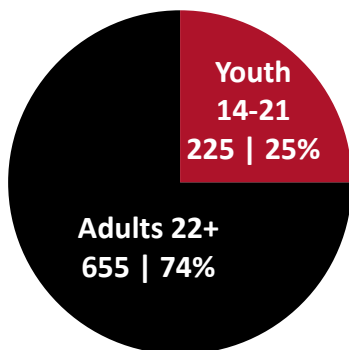
59 who received employment outcome

Vision Impairments of Customers Served



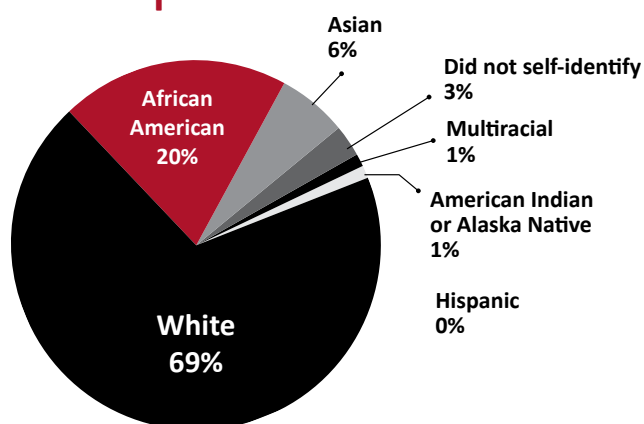
Note: These totals do not include customers who exited prior to providing specific demographic information.

Preparing Adults and Youth in all Regions of the State for Employment



Age	Count	Region	Percent
Youth 14-21	100	Greater MN	11%
Youth 14-21	125	Metro	14%
Youth 14-21	0	Out of State or Private	NA
Adult 22+	417	Metro	47%
Adult 22+	234	Greater MN	27%
Adult 22+	4	Out of State or Private	NA
Total	880	All	100%

Serving Minnesota's Diverse Population



Achieving Equity

DEED is working to address disparities and achieve economic equity for all Minnesotans by identifying and breaking down barriers to employment and business opportunities. Data on the populations served are valuable for program development and policy decisions. This program targets individuals who are blind, low vision, or DeafBlind.

A Successful Start in an In-Demand Field

A pharmacy technician may not be an occupation most people have heard of, but almost everyone who's picked up a prescription at their local pharmacy has probably interacted with someone in this job. Pharmacy technicians assist pharmacists by filling prescriptions, creating label information, ringing up customers, and tracking insurance information, among many other tasks. It's a job that requires a diverse skill set including technical knowledge, good people skills, and attention to detail.

In June of 2024, three customers of State Services for the Blind, along with 6 customers of Vocational Rehabilitation Services graduated from an intensive training program for pharmacy technicians. In collaboration with CVS, the program, offered through Thryv Services, introduced students to the many technical aspects of the work and provided a setting to build customer service and workplace skills.

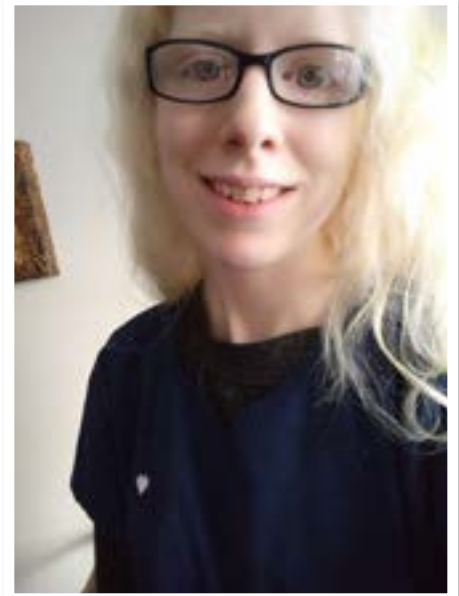
“Pharmacy tech positions represent a great opportunity,” says SSB’s Business Relations Specialist, Dacia VanAlstine, “With many vacancies across the state, and lots of room for career advancement, we are extremely pleased by this collaboration with CVS Pharmacy and Thryv, because it creates opportunities for our customers in an area that has been historically hard to break into.”

Indeed, on its list of more than 525 jobs, the Department of Employment and Economic Development ranks pharmacy technicians at 15 for growth and demand. An anticipated increase in the number of pharmacy tech positions and the need to fill positions due to retirements are some of the factors contributing to the strong need to recruit and train new techs.

“Learning a skill is so important,” reflects Mahad Geedi, “My goal is to have the skills in order to have a career. This was a good program to give me skills for this field.” The instructor with Thryv noted Mahad’s dedication

to the program, attending class after overnight shifts at a security job.

Rachel Washenberger is now a pharmacy technician at a CVS location in Cambridge. Rachel had previously studied medical coding and reimbursement, and a position with MNsure



Rachel Washenberger

gave her some related work experience. When the opportunity to go through the Thryv training came along, Rachel saw it as a great chance to get the kind of job she was looking for. “I enjoy working retail, and this job combines working retail with my medical skills and interest, so it’s a good fit with room to go further. I have a sense of pride in calling myself a pharmacy technician,” Rachel adds.

Being a part of this new program to connect customers with jobs in pharmacy tech has presented challenges for both Rachel and Mahad. In fact, glitches with accommodations prevented Mahad from landing a position, and he continues to pursue opportunities across several fields.

“There are parts of some pharmacy technician jobs that were harder to do in the past if you were blind or low vision. But there’s more and more technology tools that our customers use that make it possible for getting good jobs like these,” Dacia continues, “We’re proud of these graduates for their determination to overcome hurdles and we’re committed to finding the right accommodations so that more of our customers can be successful in this high-demand occupation.”

Mahad moved to Minnesota from Portland, Oregon in 2021, with the goal of getting the skills he needed to build a good career. With COVID restrictions still in place, it was difficult to get a foothold. But, as the

instructors in the Thryv program noted, Mahad has a strong determination to persevere and put in the hard work necessary to reach his goals. “You’ve got to be ready,” he says, “You have to find the things you need so you can show you can do the job. You have to show you will work hard and do what’s necessary, and more.”

“Don’t hold yourself down just because something seems hard,” Rachel echoes, “There are many ways

to work around things that may seem like obstacles.” Rachel is now studying for certification in the field as she looks to build her career. When asked if she would recommend pursuing a job as a pharmacy technician to other blind, DeafBlind, or low vision job seekers, Rachel says, “Absolutely. Don’t be afraid to try a new opportunity. Even if it’s not the right fit, you’ll gain skills that are useful and transferrable.”

Hannah Harriman – A Voice of Advocacy

Hannah Harriman’s remarkable journey has paved the way for employment and personal success, as she champions accessibility and advocates for those with disabilities. As an Industry Representative on the Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind, she embodies resilience, strength, and a commitment to making the world more accessible for all. Being blind herself, Hannah understands firsthand the challenges and rewards of setting high expectations and breaking down barriers for those with disabilities.

Hannah’s parents, educators, and case managers played a crucial role in supporting her journey. Their unwavering belief in her potential paved the way for her success. “I really, really was honored and blessed to have such a tremendous IEP team, both with the teachers of the blind and visually impaired, orientation and mobility specialist, my parents, and teachers that really believed in, and supported me”, states Hannah. Despite being blind and having unilateral hearing loss, Hannah’s parents refused to set low bars. Instead, they encouraged her to reach for her full potential.

State Services for the Blind (SSB) also played a pivotal role. Even though she wanted to start college right away, Hannah took the opportunity to wait a year so she could fully prepare for higher education and future employment. “At first, I was really resistant to waiting. I viewed any delay in starting college as a setback”, says Hannah. Attending a summer transition program, arranged through SSB at the University of Saint Thomas, solidified her vocational and independent living goals. “Throughout high school, I was academically solid,



Hannah Harriman

but had a little more work to do when it came to independent living and vocational skills. So, I came to terms with, and totally embraced and accepted that year of transition”. The Minnesota State Academy for the Blind’s Academy Plus program further equipped her for success.

Following the year of transition services, Hannah attended Bethel University in St. Paul, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Relational Communications. During her time at Bethel, she promoted disability advocacy and awareness, providing valuable feedback on website accessibility and supporting students with various disabilities through their post-secondary education. She also worked as a

Bethel University Inclusive Learning and Development (BUILD) Mentor assisting students with cognitive delays. Hannah completed her internship in Bethel's Disability Services Office, where she learned more of the intricacies of supporting students with various disabilities through their post-secondary education. In her senior year, she was presented with the Levi Bauer Access Award by the Bethel Disability Services faculty.

Following graduation, Hannah spent nearly three years working as a recruiter for a medical transcription company. She consistently proved her strong work ethic, adaptability, problem-solving skills, and diligence by raising expectations and setting the bar high for herself and her colleagues as she interviewed and hired candidates and worked on recruitment and retention efforts within the company. Hannah has also worked for the past several years for a nonprofit organization which supports children who are deaf and hard-of-hearing and their families. In this role, she uses her lived experience as someone with a combination of hearing and vision loss to support children and families along their journeys. She views this combination of disabilities as an asset, and she has used her disabilities as a means to advocate for accessibility for all - including promoting image descriptions on social media posts, ensuring that documents are sent in accessible formats, and analyzing companies' websites to evaluate web-accessibility. Recently, Hannah started working full-time as the Office Lead for a family-owned concrete company.

Beyond academics and employment, Hannah actively serves her community. She is the President of the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind Foundation Board and participates in her church as a youth leader and vocalist. Her hobbies include singing, reading, writing, and spending time outdoors.

In spring of 2024, Hannah participated in a fellowship program through RespectAbility. RespectAbility is a diverse, disability-led nonprofit that works to create systemic change in how society views and values people with disabilities. "In the fellowship program, there are different sort of departments that people can focus on. There's leadership and workforce development, faith, inclusion and belonging, entertainment, news, media, and others," explains Hannah. She was selected for the leadership and workforce development tract where she conducted informational interviews and researched how to better equip people with disabilities to join the workforce. She also brainstormed ways to "get more employers aware of people with a variety of disabilities and what they're capable of."

As a new member of the Minnesota State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind, Hannah strives to raise society's expectations of people with disabilities. She empowers individuals to reach their full potential and collaborates with fellow board members to enhance the lives of the blind community in Minnesota.

Hannah's dedication continues to inspire those around her, proving that with the right support, lives can be transformed. "I would not be who I am today if it weren't for a whole team of people. I really do think that my success is the team success - the IEP teams that worked with me throughout the years, the variety of SSB counselors and support staff that I've had, my family members, friends, the teachers, they all play a part of who I am."

Maya Larson – Gaining Perspective

“SSB truly changed my life,” says Maya Larson, who now works as an Administrative and Communications Specialist for the Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing. For Maya, support for tuition and technology for college, Adjustment to Blindness training, guidance in her job search, and resources for building skills for independence have been “incredibly positive.”

As a teenager, Maya began experiencing poor vision at night. Maya’s mom pushed her eye doctors for answers. Maya was then diagnosed with Usher Syndrome, a condition that causes progressive vision and hearing loss. At that time, neither Maya nor her family knew anything about State Services for the Blind and the resources available through SSB. After learning about SSB at a community event, Maya got connected with SSB counselors.

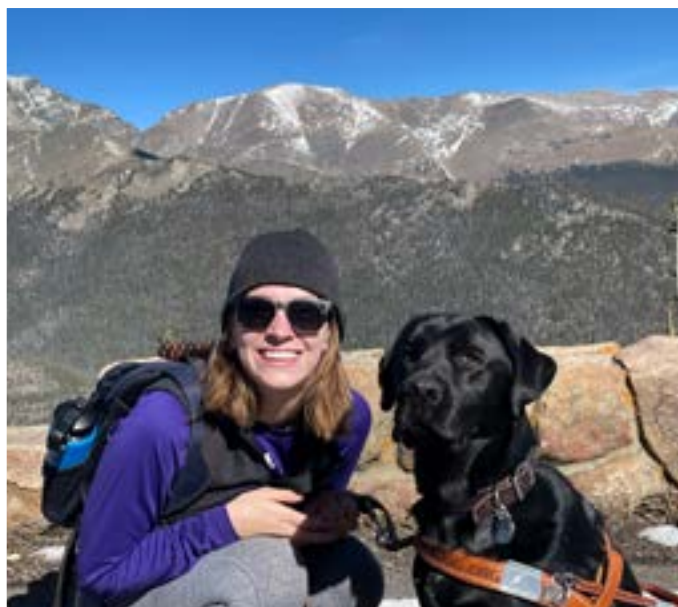
Maya was lucky to be born at a hospital that was performing newborn hearing screens, which was not common at the time. “I had grown up with a very positive view of my hearing loss,” Maya reflects, “Facing vision loss was much more scary. I had a lot of fear and went through the stages of grief.”

Maya’s first Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor at SSB was Ryan Odland who now serves as the Assistant Director of Field Services at the Helen Keller National Center. “I had never met a DeafBlind adult who was successful and happy. Ryan was not only successful, but brilliant and that made a big impression on me.”

In college at Grinnell in Iowa, Maya studied disability history and culture. “I learned about the various models of disability, and about disabled people throughout history, and that began to shift the way I saw myself.”

“It’s about disability pride,” Maya continues, “Even though there are struggles and frustrations, there’s so much I have gained. I’ve gained perspective, skills, and friendships, and all of that makes a huge difference.”

At the Commission, Maya works as an Office Administrator and Communication Specialist. “I love knowing that everything I am doing has a positive impact on the community that I’m a part of. Even if I’m just processing an invoice, small things still make a difference.”



Maya Larson

“Maya’s natural intuition and compassionate nature makes her an ideal colleague,” says Anne Sittner Anderson, Director of Communications with the Commission. “She is sharp, articulate, and hard-working,” Anne continues, “I consider myself fortunate to work with her.”

When Maya is not working, she loves reading, writing short fiction, weightlifting, and walks with her guide dog. “I am a happier person because of the support of people in my life, especially working through all the hard emotions,” Maya says.

Living on her own in an apartment in the Twin Cities, Maya continues to build her skills for success. Through SSB, she’s working with staff from the Helen Keller National Center on skills for managing a household. “I’m learning some things like using a grid system to clean, or handling a knife properly, that just help me be more confident. I can’t say enough positive about SSB and my experience,” she adds.

SSB Peer Ambassadors Promote Connections and Build Community

On February 1st 2024, Minnesota's State Services for the Blind launched the new Youth Service's Peer Ambassadors program. According to Shane DeSantis from SSB's Youth Services department, "There's currently a big movement about having student led programming and hearing directly from student voices." The SSB initiative was created from the need to foster an inclusive and supportive environment for students who are blind, low vision, and DeafBlind within the educational institution. SSB's Peer Ambassadors collaborate with fellow students and SSB staff to promote connections, raise awareness, and aid the overall experience for blind and low vision students in Minnesota. Peer Ambassadors are responsible for helping address areas of transition student needs for individuals by developing programming and various activities for students across the state. Peer Ambassadors conduct regular sessions with students to form a sense of community and provide peer-to-peer opportunities. The application process began in January with a list of preferred qualifications that included:

- Knowledge of blindness skills used in academic, social, and employment settings.
- Knowledge of acceptable behavior as it relates to students.
- Ability to secure the confidence, respect, and cooperation of students.
- Ability to perceive, observe, and address problems as they arise.
- Ability to provide guidance to students as needed to access and participate in activities.
- Display a high level of initiative and leadership.
- Demonstrate self-motivation, maturity, and creativity.

Students aged 14-21 were encouraged to apply. At the end of the application process, two new Peer Ambassadors emerged – Amy Arias-Esquivias and Madeline Major. Amy is a student at the University of Minnesota Duluth campus majoring in social work with plans to be an Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Instructor and a Vision Rehabilitation Therapist upon completion of her education. Madeline is a high school senior currently navigating her way through the college application process in hopes of studying sociology and eventually entering into law school. Both women appreciate being Peer Ambassadors as a way to reach out to others needing a sense of community and support. Additionally, they have found the experience to be beneficial for their personal and professional growth. "I thought it would be



Peer Ambassador Amy Arias



Peer Ambassador Maddy Major

a great opportunity to get more involved with SSB and become connected with the blind community. It's also helped me become a better leader and public speaker," states Madeline. Amy says, "A big reason I applied was because I wanted to be a sort of mentor for younger students going through vision loss and particularly if they are transitioning from high school to college. I have experience going through that and had had a hard time adjusting. So, I thought it would be good for me to be there as a support for other students."

Since the Peer Ambassadors project was new at SSB, the two worked closely with Shane DeSantis at the beginning. Essentially, they had to create from scratch what the program would be, what the goals are, and what they planned to accomplish. "We met a lot and bounced ideas off each other. But Shane gave us the freedom to turn our ideas into reality," says Madeline. "We really just wanted to do what we thought would be best for the students. It was a lot of just trying things out and just seeing what worked and what didn't work," adds Amy.

The inaugural year of SSB's Peer Ambassador program has been a busy one. The Ambassadors coordinated several events and activities including:

- A "Welcome to SSB" podcast. Click the accompanying QR code to listen.
- A Peer to Peer podcast – An introduction to the Peer Ambassadors for transition age students. Click the accompanying QR code to listen.
- A summer social picnic with students at French Park.
- Holding virtual 'hang-outs' for students on Zoom.
- Tools for School - an interactive workshop at the U of M about assistive technology that blind, low vision, and DeafBlind students use for success in college.
- Facilitating a tour for students at SSB.

So far, the Peer Ambassador program has been a success. Amy and Madeline have formed valuable connections with other blind, low vision, and DeafBlind students and have shared their personal stories and experiences. As mentors, the Ambassadors help students feel more comfortable and confident as they begin to explore their career and education options after high school and in their personal lives. Working with others who have firsthand experience gives students a sense that they, too, can achieve their dreams. "I think having a place where students can reach out and ask for advice, or just meet up and talk is beneficial for everyone," says Amy. "Transition age students may think they're struggling alone and that no one could ever understand what they're going through. So having these conversations has been impactful," adds Madeline.



Scan to listen to the Welcome to SSB podcast



Scan to listen to the Peer to Peer podcast.

BUSINESS ENTERPRISES PROGRAM | By the Numbers

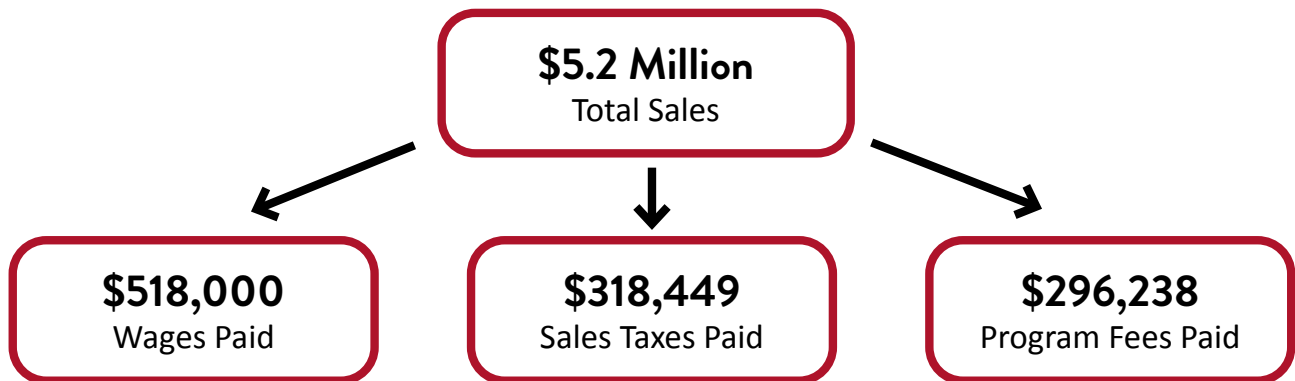


BUSINESS ENTERPRISES PROGRAM

Federal Fiscal Year 2024

- 22 business operators served
- 18 individuals employed by BEP operators
- 22 businesses in 140 locations in 44 cities across the state
- \$60,576 average net profit

BEP Contributed \$1,000,000 to Minnesota's Economy



Mary Armstrong

Mary Armstrong – Building a Business, Building a Life

With forty years in the field, Mary Armstrong, a small business owner in the Business Enterprises Program (BEP), has experienced a lot of ups and downs and seen a lot of changes. Still, the program, which was launched by act of Congress nearly 90 years ago, giving blind and low vision entrepreneurs the opportunity to operate vending businesses on state and federal properties, is one she believes in. "Personally," she reflects, "I hope it sticks around. It's smaller than it used to be. There has been more consolidation in order to create viable businesses that can generate a decent income. But, it's a good opportunity, and I would recommend it."

Mary got started in the program working for other vendors, but soon enough, she was able to successfully bid on her own business. She first worked in several state office buildings before acquiring the business at Minneapolis Community and Technical College (now Minneapolis College) in 1991. “It wasn’t a desirable location,” Mary remembers, “Because there wasn’t any storage space. But you had to just be willing to do the work.” In 2014, she took over the business at St. Paul College, which she still runs today.

Reviewing her long career, Mary notes that sales peaked in the early 2000s, just before the bubble burst in 2008. Then, in 2014, working with the BEP program, Mary was able to install all new machines at her St. Paul location. Along with the industry as a whole, Mary’s business took a hit during the pandemic, but sales have slowly recovered.

Before the pandemic shutdown, Mary hired staff to help with the work. Now, especially with the advances in technology, she finds it easy to manage the business solo. She uses a number of technology hacks to accomplish parts of her work. Now to read text, especially small print like the expiration dates on packaging, she uses the AI feature in the Be My Eyes app, or simply opens the camera on her iPhone which she’s configured to identify text. Along with her phone, Mary uses her Olympus Voice Recorder to record sales.

As a graduate of the culinary arts program at Humboldt High School in St. Paul, Mary is no stranger to the food service industry. It only took a week of working in a restaurant, however, to determine that such work wasn’t the right fit for her. Instead, after high school, she went on to St. Mary’s College, where she got connected with two sports that would play an important part in her life.

The first of these was Goal Ball. In Goal Ball, each team, comprised of three blind or low vision players,

attempts to get the bell-filled ball through the opponent’s goal line, while defending their own goal with their bodies. Mary was a part of the storied 1986 Minnesota team which defeated New Jersey for the national championship.

At the same time, Mary began powerlifting, competing in World Power Lifting events. It was through lifting that she met her husband, and they’ve been married forty years.

In recent years, Mary has had to negotiate the complications of physical disabilities and chronic illness, which can sometimes now make hauling and stocking the products more difficult. After a good, long, four-decade career, she sees that retirement might be in the near future. Certainly, she already has a busy life beyond work, including important time baby sitting her grandchild, and continuing to work out, take long walks, and maintain her health.

Mary’s energy is just part of what has helped her succeed in the vending business. In her decades of work, she’s also honed the skills of an entrepreneur and learned the ins-and-outs of the vending business. “Hire an accountant,” is one piece of practical advice she would pass on to prospective vendors, “You need someone to really track your business so that you’re not inadvertently losing money.”

She also knows the importance of product pricing, as well as paying attention to changing tastes and preferences. Recently, she reached an agreement to be an exclusive seller of one drink line, which enabled her to lower prices.

Finally, thinking back, Mary noted that running a vending business at a college has advantages she’s come to appreciate. “Things slow down in the summer, and during the holidays, so those are times when it’s easier to take a break.”

“It’s also great to go to some of the vending shows and see the new products, and what the trends are,” she adds, “Then you come back re-energized.”

SFY
2024 **3,617**

CLIENTS SERVED
BY THE SENIOR SERVICES UNIT

Private residence <i>(house or apartment)</i>	2,335
Senior Living Retirement Community	719
Assisted Living Facility	422
Nursing Home/ Long-term Care Facility	136
Homeless	4



*Providing Services to Help
Seniors Choose Where to Live*

The Independent Living (18-54) does not connote where the person lives. It connotes that they were served not as seniors but as younger people who are unable to participate in WDU programming. That number this year is: 89.

Jim Klatt – Finding His Way

Sitting by his front living room window on a warm late summer morning, Jim Klatt reflects upon his journey with low vision. Diagnosed with Sorsby fundus dystrophy at 40, Jim faces a genetic eye disease that leads to the loss of central vision, similar to macular degeneration. However, unlike macular degeneration, which typically affects those over 55, Sorsby fundus dystrophy begins to impact central vision in one’s 40s or 50s and may later affect peripheral vision.

Jim’s mother and brother were initially diagnosed with macular degeneration, but genetic testing following Jim’s diagnosis revealed that all three had Sorsby fundus dystrophy. Determined to understand his condition, Jim researched and read everything he could about the disease and vision loss. He also learned that understanding the disease and experiencing it are two very different things.



Jim Klatt

Jim grew up in Rosemont, Minnesota. While in school, he was active in sports, playing football, hockey, and baseball. He received a bachelor's degree in Public Administration from Metropolitan State University and a master's degree in Telecommunications Management at St. Mary's University Winona. Jim built a 32-year career at the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) and retired in December 2021 as a Network Systems Project Manager. Throughout his career, Jim found ways to compensate for his decreasing vision. He would use larger computer screens and employ various adjustments. But, toward the last few years, his low vision became more problematic for him. "I consider myself a fairly extroverted individual, always greeting and chatting with my colleagues. Later, I would pass people in the hallway I had known for years and not be able to identify them. I became quieter and more introverted. People thought I was snubbing them," says Jim. It was his wife, Cheri who convinced him to be honest with his colleagues and share his vision difficulties with them. "I didn't want to call attention to myself and feel vulnerable." To his relief, his co-workers were kind and understanding.

Seeking better ways to deal with his low vision, Jim reached out to State Services for the Blind. Senior Services counselor, Sue Crancer, met with Jim at his home. Together, they discussed what Jim could use to make things easier for him. As an avid reader, he enrolled in the National Library Service to access audiobooks through his smart speaker. Jim is a retired IT professional and wanted to keep up with technology. So, SSB technology trainer, Mark Dahlberg, helped him with some useful apps and techniques. Jim decided enroll in an Adjustment to Blindness (ATB) course with SSB staff Charlene Guggisberg and Michell Gip. In the summer of 2024, every Thursday for eight weeks, participants met in Falcon Heights to work on daily living techniques, cooking, and orientation and mobility (O & M) with a white cane. The small group discussed their difficulties with low vision and the SSB counselors gave them practical and useful solutions. Under sleep shades, the participants learned how to prepare lunch progressing from simple sandwiches to cutting, chopping, and cooking on a stovetop and oven. One of Jim's challenges was learning to walk with a white cane. Jim was nervous about navigating and

concerned with other's opinions of him. "It's one thing I need to get more comfortable with," says Jim. Overall, the ATB training gave Jim a greater sense of confidence in his own abilities to adjust with vision loss. The skills he gained through the training was a game changer for Jim. "I feel so much more comfortable with my low vision now. I have learned to be more patient and forgiving of myself. It also helps knowing that the SSB counselors are available to continue that support."

Jim isn't letting his vision loss slow him down. He is an early riser and often starts his day with a workout in his home gym. He loves to listen to the news and history and mystery books on his smart speaker. Jim takes comfort in books that discuss vision loss. His favorite activity is spending time with family, particularly his grandchildren who help him "stay young". Recent trips to New Orleans and Ireland have reignited his love for travel and he hopes to continue traveling to experience new places.

Jim understands challenges are a part of living with low vision. Now, he feels less afraid of the challenges and relies on the confidence that he can figure out how to do things differently. Jim's advice for others facing vision loss is: "do not let your disability define you, never give up, don't be afraid to ask for help, and contact SSB earlier rather than later to better take advantage of the programs and services they have to offer".

Arlene Krick – On a Mission to Help

With a warm smile and bubbly personality, Arlene Krick spends her time in service of others. She is the first person to reach out when people need a helping hand. Within her senior living complex, Arlene is part of the welcoming committee, connecting with new residents and helping them become comfortable in their new surroundings. When someone in the complex is struggling with health issues, Arlene will assist with grocery shopping and laundry. She is the kind of person who looks out for others and selflessly supports in whatever way she can.

Arlene is a native Minnesotan. Her early years were spent in the southwest part of the state. She was born in Heron Lake and attended school in Worthington. After high school, she enrolled in business school in Mankato. Arlene's first job after college was as a secretary in a medical technology company in Minneapolis. Along the arc of her 35-year career, she worked as a medical stenographer and Dictaphone transcriber. Reflecting on her life, Arlene's family is her pride and joy. Together with her husband, she raised 4 daughters who each grew to be happy, successful adults. Arlene's family continues to grow. She now delights in her 7 grandchildren and 7 great-grandchildren.

Arlene first learned about State Services for the Blind when she sat in on a senior services assessment with a friend. Living with macular degeneration, Arlene realized she too could benefit from SSB's services. But she didn't stop with her own needs. According to SSB senior services counselor, Cindy Kauffman, "Once Arlene learned about all of the help that SSB offers, she knew that others in the building could also benefit. Since then, Arlene has become a spokesperson for SSB, all on her own accord. She truly cares for her neighbors and fellow seniors." Arlene understands the frustrations of having low vision and how even small things like a magnifier, a large-print calendar, and bump dots can make a big difference for folks.

She has made it her personal mission to spread the word about SSB senior services to all the residents in her complex who may need the help. She advises others to "be realistic about your low vision, go to the doctor, and don't disregard your diagnosis."

Aside from her role as resident SSB spokesperson, Arlene keeps active at 92 years-old by learning Spanish online, dancing, and attending social activities in her complex. She always looks forward to and enjoys time with family, even helping her granddaughter with online studies. She attributes her strengths of "helpfulness, patience, kindness, and the ability to connect with others" as what keeps her happy and thriving.



Arlene Krick



Audio Services, Radio Talking Book, and Engineering:

Audio Services

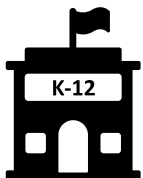
- Number of CC volunteers: **129**
- Accesses of NFB Newline: **374,554**
- NLS Equipment and accessories circulated: **3,981**
- Audio Services print pages transcribed: **40,275**

Radio Talking Book

- RTB **recorded and broadcast 251 new books** in calendar year 2024. This is a **5.9% increase** from the 2023 calendar year's 237 books.

Engineering

- Access to RTB stream: **17,955**
- Talking book players dispersed: **3,981**
- Audio books placed on BARD: **138**
- Equipment Repaired: **1,167**
- CC books downloaded from BARD: **17,955**



Braille Services provided to Minnesota Students K-12

- Minnesota students served: **41**



- Number of braille titles purchased from other states: **73**
- Number of braille titles newly transcribed by CC: **275**
- Number of braille titles reproduced and reused by CC: **330**
- **Total number of braille titles provided: 678**



- Number of braille pages purchased from other states: **106,068**
- Number of braille pages newly transcribed by CC: **16,948**
- Number of braille pages reproduced and reused by CC: **103,237**
- **Total braille pages provided to Minnesota students: 226,253**

Communication Center – Spreading the Word

In early 2024, SSB's Communication Center supervisors and staff met with our outreach team to formulate a plan to spread the word about our audio services. The focus was not just on Minnesotans with low vision and vision loss, rather the need for people with print-related disabilities to know they too have access to the



SSB at the Dakota County Resource Fair

Communication Center's audio services. "In Audio Services, we can also serve people with print disabilities who may be fully sighted, for example: sighted people with physical

disabilities that make it difficult to handle a book due to Parkinson's, Multiple Sclerosis, Arthritis, Cerebral Palsy, and other conditions, and sighted people with perceptual or reading disabilities like Dyslexia, Brain Injury, Autism Spectrum, and other print disabilities," says Jeff Behl, SSB Audio Services Manager.

With the goal to increase awareness of audiobook access across the state, 3 plans emerged:

1. Deploy an email campaign to disability related organizations, state agencies, and departments.
2. Engage in direct interaction with people at health fairs, resource fairs, and conference vendor booths.
3. Create a radio advertisement to feature Communication Center services. The radio advertisement was recorded by SSB's own Joseph Papke in our St. Paul studios.

Through activating the 3 plans, audio services information was shared via:

- 23 direct emails to state agencies and departments.
- 66 direct emails to disability-related organizations.
- 5 virtual meetings
- 3 newsletter articles
- 23 vendor booths at resource fairs, health fairs, and conferences
- 97 radio stations reaching 267,500 weekly listeners across Minnesota!



SSB staff Lisa Rogers and Lisa Larges at the Community Connections Fair



Use this QR code to listen to the radio ad.

As a result of the outreach efforts, the Communication Center has yielded a 10% increase in applications over 2023!

We plan to continue highlighting audio services to a wider audience in 2025 and beyond. So long as there are Minnesotans in need of our services, the work will carry on.

Deb Sampson – The Art of Reading Aloud

“I’ve found reading in Audio Services to be really satisfying,” says volunteer Deb Sampson. “Sometimes, what I read will be very interesting. Other times, it might be a difficult read, or just tiresome. Sometimes, a writer understands punctuation, and their work is easy to read. Other times, especially with academic writing, the sentences go on forever, and it’s as tedious as driving through Oklahoma!”

“But, what matters,” she adds, “is that someone needs this material.”

Because Audio Services exists to transcribe any material requested by a customer, the breadth and variety of what our volunteers might be assigned is impressive. “I have read poorly written mysteries, textbooks, magazines, great fiction, the oldest known document in traditional Chinese medicine... It can be anything,” Deb says.

Because of that breadth of content, we rely on the subject area expertise that many volunteers bring. A career chemist might be assigned higher level science textbooks, an art history buff might be assigned books in that area. Deb Sampson is our go-to for books that contain a significant number of words in languages other than English. In addition to the text on Chinese medicine, Deborah has read books with content in Arabic, Japanese, Sanskrit, Gaelic, and Arapaho, among other languages. Recently, she completed *Banzeiro Òkòtò: The Amazon as the Center of the World*, a complex narrative including Portuguese and Amazonian tribal languages.

“I think of it as a superpower - not speaking the language, just sounding right,” Sampson says. “When I’m learning to pronounce words in an unfamiliar language, I consult reference books in the Communication Center. And, often, I go online to one of those sites that give you a phonetic key: ‘When you see this, say this.’ Then, I dig in and read. Nobody would confuse me with, say, a real speaker of Mandarin. But I can be very consistent, and fairly relaxed pronouncing the occasional foreign phrase.”

Deb’s comfort with reading diverse subject areas, and her facility with unfamiliar words, stem from her lifelong enjoyment of reading aloud to family and friends. “It is a great way to enjoy a book together,” she says, “And on long car trips, it makes the time go faster!”

Deb has brought the lost art of reading aloud to more places in her life. For instance, she’s reading *The Fabric of Civilization: How Textiles Made the World*, to her knitting group. “We were on a weekend retreat, and one evening, I offered to read as people worked. It was a companionable way to be with one another. So, it’s a tradition we’ve continued.”

When Deb learned about volunteering as a reader for the Communication Center, she had lots of experience reading aloud - and, she knew upfront that passing the oral reading test would not be easy. Indeed, because we have a mandate to produce accurate and high-quality work, the test is comprehensive and challenging, and a majority of readers don’t pass on their first try. But when Deb took the test in 2010, she got the call in a couple of days: she had passed with a high score.



Deb Sampson

FEATURE STORY – COMMUNICATION CENTER

Now retired, Deb started her working life at the U of M, working in academic offices, and eventually, typesetting books with math content. Later, she got a graphics degree, and had a freelance career in graphic production. Outside of work, Deb has always been active in various pursuits, such as dancing and pub sings, as well as volunteering. In 2024, Deb moved to a vibrant senior living cooperative, where she appreciates the strong sense of community and the many opportunities for connection and new experiences.

Anyone meeting Deb would be struck by her energetic, warm personality. Yet, as a reader, she has learned the fine art of getting out of the way. “Sometimes it’s tempting to read as though you’re acting,” she notes. “But, you’re not performing. You’re reading so that the listener can make sense of the words in their own mind.”

Another virtue Deb shares with all of our best readers at the Communication Center is her dedication to learning and improving her skills. From master classes previously held at SSB, Deborah now intentionally focuses on varying her pace, changing tone, and adopting a higher or lower pitch for dialogue.

“I’m delighted to know that the Communication Center is increasing its outreach, and specifically expanding to serve people with learning disabilities,” Deb said. “As I read, I think about what might make things clearer for the listener, especially anyone with reading comprehension issues. I make some pauses longer and pay attention to emphasis — anything I can do that would help to make the material easier to understand.”

Over the years, her weekly volunteer shifts as a reader for the Communication Center have become an important anchor in Deborah’s life. “It’s been a blast,” she sums up. “When the pandemic shutdown happened, I was really sad.” In fact, an Audio Services staff member told Deb that she was the last volunteer to read at our 2200 studios before the pandemic shutdown, and she was the first to return when the SSB office reopened.

It’s that kind of commitment that makes Deb an outstanding member of our volunteer team. As we expand our services to support more Minnesotans with print disabilities, SSB is extremely grateful to all the terrific volunteers, like Deb Sampson, who make our work possible.

A Bright Spot in the News and For the News – Judi Brandon Brings a Passion for Reading to RTB

For two decades, Judi Brandon has read the Mankato newspaper for SSB’s Radio Talking Book (RTB). When asked about her strategies for reading, Judi immediately focused on motivation. “What made a great impression on me was talking with a friend who mentioned that their mother listened to our broadcast. I am always aware that there are people out there who rely on this service and appreciate what we are doing.”

The Mankato Reading Project is one of five programs across Minnesota where volunteers record the local newspapers. The others are in Duluth, Fergus Falls, Rochester, and St. Cloud. Each day, the recordings are transmitted to the St. Paul office where they are uploaded to the Radio Talking Book app. Customers access them in much the same way they would a daily podcast.



Judi Brandon

When Judi began reading 20 years ago, she happened to catch the end of the broadcast of the reading of the Twin Cities papers from the St. Paul office. That broadcast featured two readers sharing the coverage. She immediately liked that format, and so she and her husband took on a shift together and would alternate in reading through the articles. When her husband moved on from those volunteer responsibilities, Judi recruited Deb Sutton, a friend from a book club, to join her as co-host for their monthly shift.

A lifelong educator and learner, Judi has always been a reader and a believer in the power of reading. “Exposure to the written word is incredibly important,” she reflects, “Even for young children, the bonding that comes from reading with someone is invaluable. First you listen, and then gradually you take turns listening and reading.”

Having grown up in Detroit, Judi came to Mankato with her husband when he accepted a position at Mankato State, and began her own career as a teacher. After taking time to stay at home with their young children, Judi earned an advanced degree that enabled her to pursue a career as a school principal. Her commitment to education led her to run and win a seat on the Mankato school board.

The critical importance of reading was one cornerstone of Judi’s distinguished career and remains a core part of her own life. In retirement, Judi enjoys being part of two book clubs. “I’m one of those who always wants to read fiction,” Judi says, “So I always appreciate when other book club members force me to read nonfiction, which I always end up enjoying.”

Judi adds that an anchor in her retirement has been her regular shift reading the newspaper for the Radio Talking Book, “It’s such a small investment of time,” she notes, “With such a big reward.”

“Besides,” she adds, “I like to think that we’re doing a small part in keeping local newspapers alive, and keeping people connected to local news.”

Indeed, in her years reading for RTB, Judi has been acutely aware of the fragility of the local press. “It used to be we had to make cuts in order to stay within the one-hour slot. Now, we always worry whether there will be enough articles from just the local paper to fill up our time.”

For Judi, the news, and especially the daily local newspaper, represents more than just a collection of current events. “I remember being at a job interview for a teaching position,” Judi recalls, “I was asked how I would teach if I didn’t have a textbook to teach from.”

“I knew my answer immediately,” she continued, “I would teach from the newspaper. The newspaper has just about all you need to teach so many things, from math, to politics, to geography and history.”

RTB listeners hear Judi and Deb reading the Mankato Free Press each month, usually on the first Wednesday. They are part of the dynamic team that brings an hour of local news from the pages of the Free Press to listeners in the Mankato area, across Minnesota, and far beyond.

Isaac Hanninen – Keeping SSB’s Technology in Shape

If you’ve had your audio book player repaired within the last 8 months, there is a good chance Isaac Hanninen was the technician. Tucked in the southeast corner of SSB’s St. Paul headquarters, the Engineering Department is a technician’s haven. Shelves are stacked with various equipment. Cubicles contain CPUs and monitors. Workbenches are topped with spindles of cords and toolboxes are filled with any gadget, gizmo, and apparatus you could ever need. In the center of it all is the server room with computer banks that keep all of SSB operational. The engineering department can be an intimidating place for those not technically inclined. It is here among the equipment and tools, Isaac feels most comfortable.

Isaac joined SSB’s engineering team in June 2024 with the background and experience well suited to the task. A native Minnesotan, Isaac once had dreams of being a radio DJ. He studied radio broadcasting at Brown College. Upon graduation, he found the local DJ market tough to break into. Metro-based radio stars tend to stay in their positions for decades. So, Isaac moved on to television, finding work at a local station. Seeking something different, he decided to challenge himself and join the Army. “That’s when things really started taking off for me. Until then, I had spent my whole life here in the Twin Cities. But after joining the Army, I moved up and down the east coast, then to Italy, all over Europe, and even central Africa,” says Isaac. In the Army, he learned about electronics repair. He also fixed generators and computer systems. After his military service, Isaac returned to Minnesota where he did contract work for various companies like Dell and HP. He moved on to medical equipment and helped build prototypes for Abbott. It is this wealth of varied experience that makes Isaac well equipped to be a member of SSB’s engineering team.

“My job is a little bit all over the place,” states Isaac. “It’s replacing and repairing digital audio book players, keeping them cleaned and making sure they’re working properly. I run diagnostic tests and clean up the chassis to get them ready for the customer. When I’m not doing that, I work in book duplication,



Isaac Hanninen

or in the booth recording studios, making sure all the equipment is up to date, the microphones are working and recording onto the computers”. He also helps keep the new technology in SSB’s conference rooms running smoothly. Recently, Isaac has been travelling with other SSB technicians to the 5 non-metro Radio Talking Book recording locations in Duluth, Fergus Falls, Mankato, Rochester, and St. Cloud. Each fall, the technicians perform an annual maintenance check on the RTB broadcasting equipment to ensure everything is operating smoothly and listeners across the state get clear, uninterrupted radio news.

Since starting his position, Isaac has become an important member of SSB’s engineering crew. “I’m enjoying my job at SSB. I have been learning about how SSB operates, assisting in a variety of ways, and contributing to a mission that helps people across the state,” concludes Isaac.

Baylynn Lluveres – Lighting Up the World

Spend just a few minutes talking to sixth grader Baylynn Lluveres, and you'll immediately understand why she has a talent for theater. Smart, funny, enthusiastic, and outgoing Baylynn is the kind of kid that could light up any stage. Over the past two summers, Baylynn has participated in a local summer theater program. She showed up knowing that the task of learning the script and memorizing her lines would be more challenging, since she couldn't read the print. But, the staff at SOAR (St. Michael, Osseo, Albertville, Rogers) Regional Arts had a surprise for her. They had contacted the braille staff at SSB who worked to put the script of *Finding Nemo* into braille. Script in hand, Baylynn was able to fully participate on an equal footing with all the other kids.

“She was a braille-reading rockstar,” Baylynn’s mom, Rosie, says, remembering Baylynn’s early years of school as she first began learning, “Now, she’s more interested in lots of other things, including reading through audio.”

One of Baylynn’s recent interests is related to reading. This year, Baylynn wrote a book based on the Super Mario Brothers, and she’s begun work on a second book. “I’d love to be a writer,” she says, when asked about what she’d like to do when she grows up, “I’d like to be a writer and a singer.”

The oldest of three sisters, Baylynn is part of an active family who love laughing, playing games, and finding adventures. She enjoys P.E. (physical education) class, and art. “I loved the glitter and gems and beads,” Baylynn says.

Another passion of Baylynn’s is music. “I sing, play piano, and compose songs,” Baylynn shares. Indeed, Baylynn was selected to sing the national anthem at a veteran’s golf tournament. She played piano in an honors concert, and, in 2025, she will be performing with an honors choir.

Braille is a critical part of what helps Baylynn enjoy such a rich and active life. “It’s also like a secret code,”



Baylynn Lluveres

Baylynn says, “I can write stuff that my sisters can’t read!”

SSB’s Braille Department holds a major contract with the Minnesota Department of Education through which we produce textbooks for K-12 students across the state. In addition to textbook production and distribution, the braille team transcribes requests that come in from the general public. SOAR, which runs the summer program that Baylynn participated in, used the SSB request form to inquire about having scripts transcribed for her. Other requests might include legal documents, user manuals, restaurant menus, or event programs. Projects like these demonstrate how braille is useful for more than books. Indeed, braille builds connection to community. For students like Baylynn, braille is a key that opens doors to creativity, learning, and success.

2024 VOLUNTEER MILESTONES

Meet Our Multi-Talented Volunteers

We appreciate each of our volunteers. Here are those who achieved a milestone in 2024:

5-Year Volunteers

- Peggy Delapp
- Vicki French
- Sharon Funk
- Jennifer Hedum
- Michael Phoenix
- Karen Ray
- Elizabeth Snelson
- Tracy Young
- David Zierott

10-Year Volunteers

- Penny Banwart
- Steve Cushing
- John Dorn
- Edith Greene
- Theresa Grosser
- Kathy Jacobson
- Celine Karich
- Marilee Mahler
- Greg Olson
- Michael Rengel
- Gary Rodgers
- Tom Speich
- Judy Stow
- Bill Temple
- Jeffrey Thompson
- Kirby Wood

15-Year Volunteers

- Janice Anderson
- Eileen Barratt
- Judith Brandon
- Peter Danbury
- Mary Fahey
- James Gregorich
- Jodi Lindskog
- Yelva Lynfield
- Jill Maltrud
- Anne Obst
- Mary Romoser
- John Zimmerman

20-Year Volunteers

- Michael Holly
- Edith Nicholson
- Michele Potts
- Paul Ranelli
- Jack Rossmann

25-Year Volunteers

- Joseph Cullen
- John Ward

30-Year Volunteers

- Glenn Miller
- Kay Peltier
- Jim Tarbox
- Michael Tierney

35-Year Volunteers

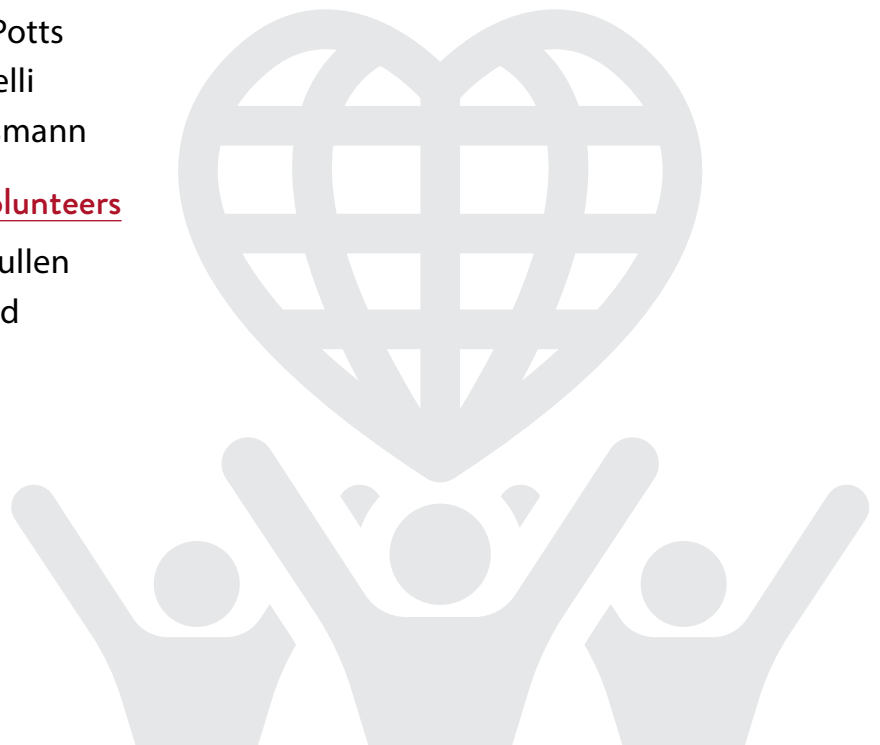
- Joni Luxem

40-Year Volunteers

- Dennis Peters

50-Year Volunteers

- Harriet Ryberg





HOW YOU CAN HELP

Every Minnesota resident who can benefit from State Services for the Blind should know about our services. Please help spread the word that SSB provides Minnesotans who are blind, DeafBlind, and low vision with the resources and tools to achieve equality, independence, and access. In addition, the SSB Communication Center enables those with print disabilities (conditions that make it difficult to hold a book or read standard print) to access news, textbooks, leisure books, and a wide variety of other written materials.

- As we've shown in this annual report, SSB's Communication Center is funded through multiple public and private partnerships. Our work as "Minnesota's Accessible Reading Source" depends upon the generosity of our volunteers and financial donors.
- If there's a senior citizen in your life who is losing vision due to macular degeneration, glaucoma, or some other condition, we're here for them. The Aging Eyes Initiative partners with community programs and organizations throughout Minnesota to help seniors adjust to vision loss. Email us at aging.eyes@state.mn.us, call us at 651-539-2276, or visit us at www.mn.gov/deed/ssb/seniors/aging-eyes.jsp.
- When you visit your ophthalmologist or optometrist, ask if he or she knows that SSB has the knowledge, services, and resources to help patients with vision loss to live well after their diagnosis.
- If you are an employer, talk with our business relations team about finding the candidate who can be your next great hire. SSB has a pool of job-seekers with skills and experience to fill a diverse range of positions.
- If you or someone you know has difficulty reading standard print and/or handling a book due to vision loss, dyslexia, or a physical impairment, learn more about the services available through the Communication Center by calling 651-539-1425.
- Check out the wide range of volunteer opportunities available at SSB by visiting us at Volunteer Opportunities / State Services for the Blind.

**SSB is now part of GiveMN,
which you can visit at
mn.gov/deed/ssbdonate**

State Services for the Blind is a program of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.

2200 University Ave. W. #240 | St. Paul, MN 55114

651-539-2300 | Toll Free: 800-652-9000

mn.gov/deed/ssb