

# Washington

## State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

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**Department of Services for the Blind**  
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## ANNUAL REPORT INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

REFLECTING ON 2022: A LETTER FROM THE SRC-B CHAIR

Dear Acting Commissioner Carol Dobak and Washington State Governor Jay Inslee,

I am pleased to present the 2022 Annual Report on behalf of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B).

This completes my second year as Chair of the SRC-B. We continue to experience a high level of dedication by Council members to our work. This year we continued holding our meetings by utilizing the Zoom platform, which allows for connection via either computer or phone.

As with last year, our membership committee, chaired by SRC-B Vice-chair Linda Wilder, was able to keep every position full, not an easy endeavor with so many people in their positions terming out in the fall of 2022.

Below is a list of the persons leaving us, the new member joining us, and the position filled:

Exited – Corey Grandstaff; New – Larry Wilkinson  
Representing: Current or former recipient of VR Services

Exited – Jerri Clark; New – Jill McCormick  
Representing: Parent Training and Information Center

Exited – Kim Conner, SILC E.D.; New – Rebekah “Bek” Moras, SILC E.D.  
Representing: Washington State Independent Living Council

Exited – Marci Carpenter; New – Kris Colcock  
Representing: Disability Advocacy Group (NFBW)

Exited – Sheila Turner; New – Sara Logston  
Representing: Individuals with Multiple Disabilities

Exited – Steve Fiksdal; New – Julie Harlow  
Representing: Business, Industry, and Labor

SRC-B Committees continue to be a strong working and functioning force within the SRC-B.

1. All current members are continuing in their current committee role; and all new members have been assigned to a committee.
2. The SRC-B Executive committee meets monthly; all other committees have agreed to make a commitment to meet quarterly between each SRC-B meeting with the exception of the policy committee which meets when policy needs are designated.

As noted in last year’s letter, a project the membership committee pursued was to meet with the governor’s office to ensure terms are properly staggered so not all member terms expire at

the same time. They continued in this endeavor much of 2022, but it was decided however, this task was complicated and not able to be resolved, so we will continue to have the previous term limits schedule which was workable.

This year the policy committee did review our bylaws, making suggestions for some changes, and did re-vamp our voting protocol, adjusting to a process much closer to our size and needs in regard to elected positions.

Every member of the executive committee attended some of the monitoring meetings that the Rehab Services Administration held with the Department of Services for the Blind. SRC-B members did this to learn more about DSB functioning, and at times to give input. The SRC-B Chair and Vice-chair had a private meeting, answering questions and giving input, with the head of the RSA monitoring committee.

Sincerely,

Julie Brannon, Chair

Washington State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

GET TO KNOW OUR COUNCIL MEMBERS

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

CURRENT MEMBERS

ANDY ARVIDSON: BUSINESS, LABOR, AND INDUSTRY  
*Anacortes, WA*

Andy is an OTC graduate and holds a master's degree in Martial Arts and Physiology from the World Moo Duk Kwan Academy. Currently a business owner in Anacortes with his wife, and a DSB contractor for Sightless Self-defense classes.

CATHY WILSON: BUSINESS, LABOR, AND INDUSTRY  
*Tacoma, WA*

Cathy has lived in Tacoma since 1989 after living in CA and Germany, and has a B.S. degree in Accounting. Her vision loss occurred over 20+ years, and Cathy attended the OTC after becoming legally blind in 2011. At the OTC she developed a passion to assist and encourage others with their vision loss; and she now works in HR at the Lighthouse for the Blind where an essential part of her job is to recruit talented people who are blind or low vision. Cathy has been active in the Pierce County Association of the Blind (PCAB) since 2013.

CHRIS ALEJANO: STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD MEMBER  
*Seattle, WA*

Chris Alejano is the Education Policy Advisor for City of Seattle Mayor. 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.

CHRISTOPHER ZILAR:

SECTION 121 NATIVE AMERICANS

*Spokane, WA*

Christopher joined Spokane Tribe's Vocational Rehabilitation Program in 2016 as the director. He has previously worked for public health and for a small chamber of commerce focused on diversity and inclusion. Christopher has completed three medical mission trips to Rwanda. He has six kids (two sets of twin boys) and resides near Spokane Indian Reservation with his family.

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. Exiting member in 2022.

JACOB KAMAUNU:

BUSINESS, LABOR, AND INDUSTRY (BEP OPERATOR)

*Seattle, WA*

Jacob is currently a restaurateur and a member of the Washington State Business Enterprise Program (BEP) where he received his certification as a blind vender. Jacob has been able to manage and maintain his small business operations out of the heart of Seattle for the past six years, providing employment opportunities to all who are able with no exclusion to those who are blind.

JENNIFER BEAN:

CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

*Bellingham, WA*

Jennifer Bean has been working in the Vocational Rehabilitation field for 20+ years. Her work experience includes being an Independent Living Counselor, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Benefits Specialist, and Regional Trainer at Washington Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). Additionally, she was a Rehabilitation Coordinator with the Washington Client Assistance Program (CAP) and became the Executive Director of CAP in August 2021. Jennifer has a MA degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and has years of experience with training and teaching.

JERRI CLARK:

PARENT INFORMATION AND TRAINING CENTER

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*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). Exiting member in 2022.

JILL MCCORMICK:

PARENT INFORMATION AND TRAINING CENTER

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*Puyallup, WA*

Jill has worked with the disability community in Washington State for the last 16 years. Three years with Self Advocates of Washington and the last 13 years at PAVE as Grant Director for Federal grants around family and transitioning youth. She is also the current Vice-President of the Board at Family Voices. Jill is the parent of three young adults who are impacted by disability and are navigating DVR supports and services.

JULIE BRANNON, 2022 SRC-B CHAIR:

CURRENT OR FORMER RECIPIENT OF VR SERVICES

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*Puyallup, WA*

Julie retired in 2019 after working for over 40 years in the fields of social work, teaching and program management. She has been involved in working with persons who are blind and blindness issues for approximately 25 years, both as a teacher and program manager for DSB; as well as in a variety of leadership roles with one of Washington State's consumer organizations, the Washington Council of the Blind, in which she's currently serving as president.

JULIE HARLOW:

BUSINESS, INDUSTRY, AND LABOR

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*Graham, WA*

Julie is the business owner of InnerVisions, LLC. She gained her master's degree from Maryland University of Integrative Health in Health & Wellness Coaching. She is transitioning from current services to her new start-up business. Julie has been a military dependent. She has lived throughout the United States and Germany, and has made Washington her home for the last thirty years. She is deaf/blind as well as from a multi-cultural family.

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. Exiting member in 2022.

KRIS COLCOCK:

CONSUMER ADVOCACY ORGANIZATION

*Bainbridge Island, WA*

Kris Colcock is the 1st Vice-President of the National Federation of the Blind of Washington. She is a Certified Work Incentive Practitioner and an avid advocate for individuals who are blind. Her involvement includes experience with the Sound Transit Citizens Accessibility Advisory Council and King County S.A.V.E.. Currently she serves on the NFB Employment Committee and the Kitsap County Accessible Community Advisory Council.

KRISTEN GEARY:

COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAM SERVICE PROVIDER

*Seattle, WA*

Kristin has spent the last four years working with Washington Vocational Services which contracts with the DSB's youth services summer internship program. Since moving to Seattle in 2008, Kristin has worked, in some manner, supporting people who are blind with and without additional disabilities, specializing in teaching daily living and employment readiness skills.

LARRY WATKINSON:

CURRENT OR FORMER RECIPIENT OF VR SERVICES

*Olympia, WA*

Larry Watkinson serves as the Department of Licensing ADA Compliance Manager. In this capacity, he is responsible for implementation of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act as well implementation of the departments, ADA Transition Plan. As part of this responsibility, Larry has earned the ADA Coordinator Training Certification Program certification.

Larry holds a master's degree in Public Administration from the Evergreen State College and has also been a small business owner. Larry is an active member of his community, as well as active within numerous non-profit organizations. Larry participated in the efforts to adopt the Americans with Disabilities Act and has been engaged throughout its implementation.

Larry and his wife Kathy live in Olympia with their two daughters.

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LINDA WILDER, 2022 SRC-B VICE-CHAIR: 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.

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MARCI CARPENTER: 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. Exiting member in 2022.

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MICHAEL MACKILLOP: DSB EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (EX-OFFICIO MEMBER)  
*Seattle, WA*

Michael MacKillop was appointed Executive Director of DSB in April 2022. Michael has served as agency Deputy Director as well as other executive and direct service positions over the past 20+ years. He believes deeply in the philosophical backdrop of the Disability Rights and Independent Living movements, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 that all have been key in shaping the agency's mission of "Independence, Inclusion and Economic Vitality for individuals with Visual Disabilities".

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REBEKAH 'BEK' MORAS WA STATE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL  
*Lacey, WA*

Bek is the Executive Director of the Washington State Independent Living Council. She has a PhD in Disability Studies, identifies as a person with multiple "hidden disabilities", and as a survivor of domestic violence and sexual assault. Bek has a passion for technical accessibility, including accessible communication, events, documents, policies, and practices.

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SARA LOGSTON BLIND, WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES  
*Vancouver, WA*

Sara is finishing her TVI degree from the University of Northern Colorado. She currently works at the Washington State School for the Blind as a Residential Life Counselor. Sara has two teenage boys and likes to spend time traveling with family when school is not in session.

SEAN MCCORMICK:

STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY

*Vancouver, WA*

Sean is the Director of On-Campus Education at the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB). His path in education includes serving as a Paraprofessional, Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments, an Orientation & Mobility Instructor, Associate Principal, and Principal. In his current role, Sean oversees the educational programs held at WSSB's campus through both day and residential opportunities for students. Sean is an active member of WA's Special Education Advisory Council, Washington Unified English Braille Committee, and the Council of Schools and Services for the Blind's Principals subgroup.

SHEILA TURNER:

BLIND, WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

*Pasco, WA*

Sheila is employed as an Independent Living Skills teacher 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. Exiting member in 2022.

STEVE FIKSDAL:

BUSINESS, LABOR, AND INDUSTRY

*Federal Way, WA*

Steve is the owner of Fiksdal Strengths, which provides strength identification and coaching to individuals and teams. Steve says DSB played a significant role in the establishment of his new company and career by providing him the resources and tools to succeed in a sighted world and embark on a new and exciting career. Exiting member in 2022.

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 fifth 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.

YVONNE VERBRAAK

SRC-B STAFF ASSISTANT

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*Olympia, WA*

Yvonne came to Services for the Blind in 2017 with a diverse work background, and says she has been able to put everything she's ever learned to use at DSB. Yvonne is a lifelong Washingtonian and currently lives in Olympia. She feels very fortunate to have landed at a state agency that holds the same values as she does, and enjoys supporting the SRC-B and its members as part of her work.

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

The SRC-B met four times during 2022. Meetings were held via the Zoom platform, with connection information advertised ahead of time allowing interested consumers to take part regardless of where they live throughout our state. In addition to special presentations and subcommittee updates, meetings consisted of a report from the DSB Executive Director about progress towards goals outlined in the state plan and a report from the SRC-B Chair about Council activities.

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

Agenda items this year included:

- Saying goodbye to several council members whose positions had termed out and welcoming several new Council members.
- SRC-B Committee Reports. Our committees continue to be a strong working and functioning force within the SRC-B.
- Met and heard from Nohemy Solórzano-Thompson, PhD, DSB's HR Liaison and DEI Program Manager.
- Met and heard from Carl Peterson, DSB's Engagement and Workforce Program Manager.
- Lisa Wheeler, Assistant Director of Vocational Rehabilitation & Workforce for DSB, discussed changes to VR regulations (Post-Employment Services) and the resulting focus on functional limitations and expedited eligibilities.
- It was decided that at each meeting, at least one person will give a report from the entity they represent, this year reports were given for:
  - The State Independent Living Council (SILC)
  - The Client Assistance Program (CAP)
  - State consumer organizations for the blind and their annual conventions
- The SRC-B was asked to have any interested members join DSB's Pro-Equity, Anti-Racism Committee (PEAR). Two SRC-B members joined the committee: Christopher Zilar and Jacob Kamaunu.
- Elections:
  - By-law change: In July, the SRC-B voted to accept a revised election process suggested by the Policy committee, changing to a more fluid and appropriate process for the SRC-B

- In our December meeting, Julie Brannon was re-elected Chair of the Council, and Linda Wilder was re-elected Vice-chair, both for a one-year term.
- Due to six new members joining the SRC-B in the fall of 2022, it was decided to offer another SRC-B training, to be held in April of 2023. An ad hoc committee was created for this purpose.
- New WA state law allows compensation for lived experience on boards, commissions, councils, committees, and other similar groups. The SRC support staff developed an understandable outline from this new compensation initiative, it was shared by the DSB Executive Director at our December quarterly meeting.

#### COMMITTEE ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2021

The SRC-B has four standing committees that do the work of the Council. Every member is expected to serve on a committee. This year, all new members were assigned to committees to allow for every member's involvement. Committees have been asked to meet quarterly, before each SRC-B meeting.

#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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

This year, the Executive committee met monthly to discuss committee needs and functions. The Executive committee was involved in being a part of the RSA monitoring sessions with DSB from March 7<sup>th</sup> through the first week in April. SRC-B Chair and Vice-chair had an individual meeting with the head of the RSA monitor team.

It was decided that the Executive committee will meet with DSB Executive staff quarterly, before the SRC-B meetings.

The Executive committee plans to hold another SRC-B training event in April 2023.

#### MEMBERSHIP AND COLLABORATION COMMITTEE

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The Membership committee works to maintain a strong, active, and high-functioning Council. This includes member recruitment; member training and support; public relations and outreach.

The Membership committee filled six vacant seats on the SRC-B this year that included a current or former recipient of VR services; a representative from a Parent Training and Information Center; a representative from the WA State Independent Living Council; a representative from a disability advocacy group; a representative of blind or disabled people who cannot represent themselves; and a representative from Business, Industry, and Labor.

#### 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.

This year, the Policy committee spearheaded a work group to give input for By-law changes. Included in this were more logical and practical voting methods for the SRC-B positions.

#### CUSTOMER SATISFACTION COMMITTEE

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

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

Overall satisfaction: for 2022 was 76%; for 2021 was 86%; for 2020 was 72%

Training offered: for 2022 was 79%; for 2021 was 80%; for 2020 was 84%

Accuracy of staff: for 2022 was 89%; for 2021 was 89%; for 2020 was 95%

Respectfulness of staff: for 2022 was 76%; for 2021 was 91%; for 2020 was 84%

The target for all satisfaction measures is 80%.

DSB had 288 participants with closed cases in 2022 who were sent the survey. 38 survey responses were received which is a 3% return rate.

Over the last year, the Customer Satisfaction survey showed overall satisfaction with services from DSB, with an average rating between satisfied and very satisfied. However, satisfaction decreased in several categories. Trends related to the negative impacts of staff turnover, including difficulty establishing a relationship with their new counselor and the new counselor not understanding the individual's disability and limitations.

Below is a sampling of customer comments.

- It built confidence that was lost when I started to go blind. It showed me my worth. It got me thinking seriously about my future. It got involved in a community I would have never found on my own. It got me pointed in a new fulfilling direction. It eventually got me a new job I love. I am a more well-rounded content person who sees a bright future. I no longer feel sad, lonely, and broken like I did before going to the DSB/OTC. Thank you.
- Dissatisfied about the turnover in VRCs. Due to the turnovers, I felt disconnected.
- I have confidence to get back to work. The training has reduced my anxiety over simply leaving my home, going for walks, going back to work!
- I did not know what questions to ask or how to navigate through what services that were offered.
- It's helped me greatly to be able to work from home and grow my business.
- It provided me with opportunities that I did not even know existed and has placed me into a career path that engages me and allows me to help earn money for my family.

Over the last year, this committee has been exploring options for improving the customer satisfaction data collected. Our goal is to help the Council better understand customer satisfaction trends. Currently, the survey is sent only to closed cases, resulting in a limited number of responses and inability to adequately identify and understand trends. This committee has also been focusing on underserved populations. We want to learn more about customer's equity, diversity, access, and inclusion issues during their DSB experience. DSB's recently appointed HR Liaison/Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Manager has been partnering with this committee to coordinate activities, provide subject matter expertise and ensure clear and timely communication. We look forward to carrying this work forward in the coming year.

## DSB PROGRAMS MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY

### A NATIONWIDE EMPHASIS ON PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION

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

- Job exploration counseling
- Work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after school opportunities, experiences outside of the traditional school setting, and/or internships
- Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs
- Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living
- Instruction in self-advocacy

For the first time since March 2020, DSB was able to offer pre-employment transition programs and workshops in person as well as virtually. Some specific programs and workshops included:

- I-STEM Technical Training Program, a computer science training program for blind or low vision students that allows students to explore positions in the tech industry such as software engineering, machine learning, web development etc.
- Partnered with Outdoors for All and Edgeworks climbing gym to host a climbing event for our Pierce County area students. This was well-attended with 12 students coming to participate. Many of the students had not climbed before, and this activity gave them an opportunity to practice self-advocacy and build self-confidence.
- The Bridge Program is a five-week on campus residential summer program located at Eastern Washington University in Cheney, Washington. The goal of the Bridge Program is to allow students to explore a college preparation program through a curriculum that focuses on independence, self-advocacy, and social situations traditionally encountered in the college setting.
- Youth Employment Solutions 1 (YES 1) is a program held at the Washington State School for the Blind in Vancouver, WA. Participants received instruction in the fundamental areas of job readiness including strategies for searching for jobs, preparing a resume and cover letter, gaining experience through filling out employment applications, participating in mock interviews, and taking inventory of various professions through small discussion and 1-on-1 interviews with professionals.
- Youth Employment Solutions 2 (YES 2) is a multi-week summer program held in Seattle, WA. It is focused on career exploration by providing experience, opportunity, career

preparation, and paid internships for Washington's blind and visually impaired young people. In addition to the internships, participants spend their off-work hours experiencing residential living in the YES residence in Seattle. Students have many opportunities to practice self-advocacy through financial and life management skills learned during the program.

In 2022, DSB provided a variety of services to 368 youth.

[Youth Services webpage](#)

#### GETTING PEOPLE TO WORK AND HELPING THEM KEEP THEIR JOBS

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Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is for people interested in finding or maintaining employment. The comprehensive program considers the needs of each individual and provides quality services to participants rather than just placing people in jobs. The participant takes the active role in determining scope and goal among a wide-ranging set of services. Participants often need training in adaptive skills of blindness, computer technology for on-the-job success, career exploration and matching interests and aptitude to job types, or internships and other work experiences.

At the end of 2022, 87 participants achieved successful employment outcomes with an average hourly wage of \$27.04. Thirty-one of these participants received job retention assistance in order to keep a job that was at risk due to their visual disability. Two participants who got or kept a job are Honorably Discharged Veterans. Fifty participants now have all of their medical health insurance paid by their employers, as a result of employment through DSB services. Twenty-three participants are no longer relying on Public Assistance as their primary source of income. The eldest participant needed assistance retaining their position as a school psychologist at age 69. DSB assisted 102 participants with their higher education tuition.

A few examples of employers include Apple, Climate Pledge Arena, Evergreen Public Schools, Glenhaven Lakes Club, Internal Revenue Service, Liberty Mutual, Microsoft, Olympic National Park, PeaceHealth, Safeway, Seattle Public Schools, Sound Transit, Therapeutic Health Services, United States Postal Service, University of Washington, WA State Department of Social and Health Services, and Washington State University.

A sampling of DSB VR success stories:

- Former participant DE was appointed as the new Assistive Technology Specialist for the DSB Spokane Office. DE brings to DSB her wealth of experience working with students from diverse backgrounds as a Student Success Coach for the Community Colleges of

Spokane. The interview team was also impressed with her work providing Apple and Mac training to those with vision loss in the community.

- Participant CJ was hired on with Lucid Software Inc. in December 2021. CJ's official title is Software Engineer, and his job duties include developing a large enterprise web application. He will work full time at an hourly wage of \$44.00 per hour and receive employment benefits. CJ will obtain his bachelor's degree and work in South Jordan, Utah.
- Participant is working at a new job as a pre-school teacher assistant in Camano Island. She received several VR services from DSB including job placement, retention, adaptive skills training, job site evaluation, and tools/equipment. She will reach her 90th day of employment soon and the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) is already on board to ensure the waiver funding is in place for this participant's long term job needs.
- AD was a return participant to DSB who is now employed at DeafStone Services in Pittsburgh, PA (a non-profit organization) as Director of DeafBlind Services. He joined DeafStone initially as their SSP Coordinator but then received a promotion and a raise. He reports that he is really happy with the job and with living in Pittsburgh, which he describes as "the Seattle of the East, but much more affordable." He is enjoying the local DeafBlind community, as well as being closer to his family in New York.

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

#### OTC GRADUATES ARE CONFIDENT, INDEPENDENT, AND SUCCESSFUL

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

During 2022 the OTC was able to welcome both instructors and students back to the in-person residential program, with operational capacity at 100% by March.

The OTC achieved the following successes during the past year:

- Resumed offering an Intensive Workshop week with 19 attendees
- Served 42 resident and non-resident students from 20 to 81 years old
- Provided five new DSB staff with an in-person 3-day OTC experience
- Graduated three students from the OTC program
- Scheduled Life in Action Days to explore activities such as shopping at Costco, skiing/snowboarding, and a self-directed visit to the Washington State Fair
- Served 29 Long Distance Braille students, a record number
- Hired a new Health and Wellness instructor
- Hosted several cultural events including a presentation on Juneteenth, and a talk with a local Native American artist
- Increased exposure to career opportunities with in-person visits from both State and Federal job recruiters, as well as attending a Job Fair event at Joint Base Lewis-McChord
- Emphasized career readiness with the Career Development Program, with emphasis on resumé development, mock interviews, and career exploration

[Orientation and Training Center website page](#)

#### LEGALLY-BLIND INDIVIDUALS LEARN TO BE INDEPENDENT ENTREPRENEURS

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The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) provides training and opportunities for qualified 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.

In 2022 the BEP continued to experience the impact of the pandemic. The predominant customer base for the enterprises located in federal, state and county government buildings continued to work from home throughout 2022. There are eight locations that were able to re-open, leaving the majority of blind operators without any revenues for a second full year. The BEP Manager and staff have facilitated weekly and ongoing conversations with the operators on how to plan for moving forward with their businesses in a completely changed working environment, as well as providing emotional support to folks who have had a closed business for almost three years now.

Based on the feasibility report completed in 2021, and historical program data, the DSB made a significant State budget ask in 2022 to revamp every operator's business to a more sustainable model that includes more grab and go options and the addition of Micro Markets. These changes could see operators raise their profit margins from 7% to 20%. A portion of the money requested was approved by the Legislature to be budgeted through 2025. The BEP Rebuild project kicked off in July with the hiring of a project manager, a thorough assessment of each facility's needs, and creation of a project calendar. At year close, the upgrade work at two BEP locations has commenced.

BEP statistics for 2022:

- Median BEP vendor income for 2022 was \$23,747
- 22 facilities combined had total gross sales of \$2,592,620
- Sales tax collected from all facilities was \$177,115
- Payroll tax from all facilities was \$90,667

[Business Enterprise Program website page](#)

#### LIVING INDEPENDENTLY WITH VISION LOSS

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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 2022, IL served two centenarians! Most of the participants are 55 or older and the average age is 84 years old. Most participants live in their home or apartment rather than in a nursing or assisted living setting, and request services in order to continue doing so.

The most popular Assistive Technology devices provided throughout the year were handheld magnifiers, address books, and writing guides. Over the past year the IL Program has been able to increase the number of higher tech devices available, such as phones, tablets, and digital magazines.

As 2022 came to a close, the program's IL service providers statewide served 693 clients. Overall, IL service delivery to underserved minority populations has increased; more outreach work is needed but the program is moving in the right direction. One initiative has been to create foreign language materials for easier outreach; another has been to develop a

partnership with Washington Talking Book and Braille Library to deliver loaned technology devices more seamlessly to participants who need them. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of being able to live independently at home rather than transfer to a residential assisted living situation, and emphasized the critical value of the Independent Living services to the health and safety of Washington State elders.

Due to the increase of IL clients aged 55 and under, DSB has submitted a State budget request for additional IL funds to increase the number of clients served, vendor compensation, and number of vendors. The IL program runs on a small pool of funds received from the State Plan for Independent Living that has not been enough to serve all clients who've applied for services in the past couple of years, resulting in a wait list to be approved for services. Currently a small number of vendors serve large geographic areas, and clients in certain areas may have to wait several months until they can see an IL provider once they're approved for services.

#### Dotty's IL Success Story:

Dotty is a 95-year-old woman who lives in a Southwest Washington assisted living facility where her meals, laundry, and housekeeping needs are taken care of by staff. Dotty has macular degeneration and a severe hearing loss helped only somewhat by hearing aids, making it extremely difficult for her to stay in touch with her family using the phone. Her son, Trent, was beginning to worry about Dotty not being able to speak on the phone with him and the rest of their family. He noticed she was often frustrated on the phone, sometimes on the verge of tears, and quick to disconnect most of the time. When he asked Dotty about her ability to use her phone, she said she couldn't hear anything and was often calling the wrong number because she couldn't see the buttons. So, Trent called the Washington State Department of Services for the Blind and asked for Dotty to be seen by an IL Specialist. The DSB connected Dotty with Doug Trimble, who jumped into problem solving mode.

Doug met with Dotty and Trent together to assess her ability to use her current phone. He asked them about the solutions she'd already tried, and Trent said, "We've tried almost everything including lots of different cell phones." Doug realized she needed a phone that would address both her inability to see the small buttons of a standard phone and her inability to hear what was being said at the other end of the line. He knew just the thing that would help her: he ordered an amplified, large button phone.

When the adapted phone arrived, he brought it to her house, set it up, and showed her how to use it. Right away, Dotty noticed she could see the large print on the big buttons. It made calling the right number so much easier for her. And, when she practiced calling her son with it, she realized that she could actually hear what was being said. Dotty was thrilled that she could make and receive calls again.

A few weeks after bringing the amplified, large button phone to Dotty, Doug called her to check in. Dotty answered on the very phone Doug had provided her with, saying that staying in touch with her family and longtime friends has made a big difference for her. She loves being able to make calls accurately and actually hear what is being said!

Cynthia's IL Success Story:

When Cynthia, a 48-year-old woman in Pierce County, began experiencing vision loss and was declared legally blind, she felt disconnected from the education of her eleven-year-old son. Cynthia was unable to read the materials sent home from her son's school, or access newsletters and emails from teachers online. While her husband, Phuong, assisted Cynthia with tasks when he was home, she wanted to be able to read and accomplish tasks on her own while Phuong was away at work. She expressed to her Independent Living (IL) Provider that being fully and independently present with her son's schooling was a top priority.

After considering Cynthia's goals, her IL Provider connected her with Independent Living's Desktop Video Magnifier (CCTV) Lending Program ran in partnership with the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library (WTBBL). With the CCTV, Cynthia has been able to read her mail and papers from her son's school unassisted. In addition to the CCTV, Cynthia expressed a desire to access a computer and the internet again, as she had been unable to use one for several years. With some time and care, her IL Provider obtained a laptop of the appropriate size, and with magnification, Cynthia was able to use the laptop with her remaining vision. With the laptop, Cynthia has access to more information and avenues of communication with the world around her. She has been able to be involved in her son's education, and meaningfully engage with her hobbies in her private time. When asked about her experience with the Independent Living Program, Cynthia said this:

*"All the wonderful things I got from Independent Living Services for the Blind have changed my life for the better. I can do more independently, like help cook for my family, read my own mail or important papers... It's been wonderful to do my own stuff rather than relying on other people to do it for me. Thank you so much. I am so glad that there are Programs like this that help people like me who are Legally Blind become more Independent."*

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

Dear Acting Rehabilitation Services Administration Commissioner Carol Dobak and Washington State Governor Jay Inslee,

The Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) turned a corner this year from what had been two pandemic years of focused management around shifting safety protocols, heavy staff turnover, and swift transition to fully remote service provision. In 2022, we have been able to move from daily mitigation protocols to future-thinking strategic analysis and planning towards improved service provision and more solid agency outcomes.

The post-pandemic environment has revealed a changed world of work - one full of new opportunity for job seeking individuals who are blind, low vision or deaf blind. The agency has had opportunity this past year to reflect on the agency's past and present situation, and begin forging new pathways for Washingtonians with visual disabilities to enter the workforce, keep a job, or advance in their career.

Gathering and sharing information among many sectors has been an insightful activity for the agency this past year, and we have begun working to assimilate the information and to act on strategic process improvement efforts that align more fully with post-pandemic realities.

The agency's State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC-B) has this past year sharpened their processes and analysis in collecting data regarding the customer experience, and has partnered with DSB staff to expand the reach and impact of customer survey information.

Our federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) partners provided in-depth analysis and discussion of the agency's performance during an intensive monitoring effort during March and April, and have provided high level areas of focus for improvement while the agency awaits their final monitoring report in 2023.

The Washington State enterprise has actively promoted a renewed focus on accessibility of state systems and tools for individuals with a visual disability this past year, led by Governor Jay Inslee and supported by agencies such as the Office of Chief Information Officer, the Office of Equity, and the Workforce Training and Education Board.

The blindness community in Washington state has been active in providing useful and productive feedback to the agency: during multiple community forums hosted by DSB leadership; in on-going engagement among DSB and consumer organization leadership; and in connection-building among other blindness service organizations.

The agency has implemented challenging changes this past year based on new understandings with our federal partners, such as the need to limit Pre-Employment Transition Service dollars

to only support career exploration activities for students starting at age 14 rather than age 9. We have implemented the changes and are actively seeking other funding options to fully serve Washington's blind youth under age 14.

Coming out from the pandemic – which for this agency had been immediately preceded by an Order of Selection waitlist for services that had a negative impact on agency performance efforts – we have been identifying gaps in performance, processes, and skillsets. In 2023, DSB is gearing up for an agency-wide effort to radically rethink our processes, structures, and work expectations, and to prioritize areas for methodical improvement.

After two years of remote work, staff have reinitiated meeting in person and building the relationships and strong teaming that best serves the agency's customers.

Weathering a wave of retirements in the past two years and with a resulting 60% turnover in some job classes, the number of senior staff who acted as peer mentors have decreased, and the agency realized the need to provide expanded foundational training. The agency recognized the need for greater focus on training of new staff to collectively better understand the blindness context and community in which we work, and to reinvigorate traditional agency practices of teaming, counselor judgment, and community partnering.

DSB is partnering with the state's two blindness consumer organizations to develop trainings to deepen staff understanding of the blindness context and towards setting the highest of expectations for the agency's customers.

We have partnered with the national technical assistance centers to develop the agency's leadership at all levels; ensure accuracy of compliance requirements through coaching and internal controls; support business as a customer; and re-envision the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services.

DSB has a need to re-examine effective outreach practices and rebuild community partnerships after ties were lost due to remote work and changes in staffing both within and without the agency.

Data suggests a continuing strength of the agency is our practice to highly individualize our comprehensive services that result in those individuals who get or keep a job to maintain that job six and twelve months after exit from services. Data also suggests that the agency has a need to bring more participants to employment outcomes now that the pandemic has ended. Opportunities abound, and our participants can benefit from the current job-seekers economy where remote work continues to be a practice for many businesses.

Significant triumphs were accomplished in this past year.

- While many businesses and organizations continue to be challenged in recruiting for vacant positions, all agency vacancies recruited for have been filled with highly skilled talent, most within 60 days of vacancy.
- DSB staff provided trainings for all Workforce Development Councils east of the mountains, and have developed deeper relationships among the WDCs for active partnering.
- DSB has developed and implemented a new set of IT-related career exploration workshops and advanced individualized trainings for pre-employment transition students and transition-age youth in a STEM program called Lean Into Technology.
- Pre-Employment Transition Service work-based learning and career exploration activities have returned to in-person this past summer, enhancing the self-advocacy and workplace readiness skills of Washington students with a visual disability.
- Performance measures for documenting skills gains in training and education programs have exceeded targets – while federally negotiated targets for the Measurable Skills Gains are set at 42%, DSB staff have achieved a 70.5% measure.
- The Independent Living Program initiated a successful and popular technology loan program, partnering with the Washington State Talking Book and Braille Library to assist with delivery of devices.
- The Business Enterprise Program initiated a multi-year program for overhauling existing facilities to support a new business model that allows increased profitability with a smaller customer footprint.
- Washingtonians with visual disabilities went to work in a wide range of competitive jobs, started up their own businesses, and kept their current jobs by acquiring new skills and assistive technology.
- Washingtonians with visual disabilities are living their lives more independently and engaged in community activities and civic responsibilities. These individuals have taken charge of their lives, support their families, pay taxes, and contribute to the vitality of their communities.

DSB has been grateful for the relief this past year from full-time mitigation of pandemic-related issues affecting service provision, and to be able to re-shift focus on improving practices, skills, and structures towards excellent service and outcomes for our customers.

We are grateful for the support, active partnering and guidance of our SRC-B, our Governor and state enterprise partners, the federal and national partners, local businesses and workforce

partners, and the Washington State blindness community. We cannot achieve the successes we aspire to alone. Considering the warm heart-focused energy of the collective community, I am excited for the opportunities that will become increasingly more accessible for Washingtonians who are blind, low vision and deaf blind.

Gratefully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'M' followed by a horizontal line that ends in a small loop.

Michael MacKillop, Executive Director