



Accomplishing Goals Through Conquering Barriers...



Making The Invisible Visible 2020 Annual Report

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES &
THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT



Services include, *but are not limited to:*



*Vocational
Rehabilitation*



*Business
Engagement*



*Medical
Eye Care*



*Independent
Living*



*Assistive
Technology*



*Business
Enterprises*

The NC Division of Services for the Blind (DSB), an agency under the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) provides services to people who are blind, visually impaired or deafblind to help them reach their goals of independence and employment. This mission is in direct alignment with the mission of NC DHHS in its goal to increase the health and well-being of all North Carolina citizens.

Our *2020 Annual Report*

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NC DSB *State Rehabilitation Council 2019-20*

Debra Pickens, Chair
Parent Training and Information Center

Cody Davis, Vice Chair
Recipient of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

David Horton,
Representative of Business/Industry/and Labor

Denise Puryear,
Community Rehabilitation Services Provider

Agreta Limerick,
NC Division of Workforce Development

Dottie Snyder,
Department of Public Instruction

Dr. Ricky Scott,
Statewide Independent Living Council

Celeste Hunt,
Director of Projects Carried out under
Section 121 of Rehabilitation Act

Willis Hatcher,
Parent of a Child with a Disability

Tania Bowers,
NC Client Assistance Program

Dr. Kara Ramsey,
NC State Optometric Society

Laurie Hoffman OD, FAAO
NC State Optometric Society

Ex-Officio Members

Cynthia Speight, Director
Division of Services for the Blind

Jordan D. Thomas, Area Supervisor
Division of Services for the Blind

NC DSB State Rehabilitation Council

Chairperson's Message



I am honored to present the North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind's (DSB) 2019-2020 Annual Report. I am the youngest daughter of parents who were totally blind and I have a son with deafblindness. I have witnessed first-hand my parents and son accomplish goals through conquering barriers. My parents always had "HIGH EXPECTATIONS" of their children. They were grateful to receive services from the NC Division of Services for the Blind.

As your Chairperson, I am pleased to report successful accomplishments from the NC Division of Services for the Blind. DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Services were provided to 2762 individuals with blindness or low vision. DSB Vocational Rehabilitation achieved 363 successful employment closures. The Independent Living Programs served 4,823 eligible individuals, the DSB Deafblind Specialists provided services to 285 individuals, 707 DSB clients were served by Assistive Technology field staff.

I would like to thank each council member for his/her hard work and dedication. I would also like to thank the NC DSB staff members who support the mission and theme "Accomplishing Goals through Conquering Barriers... Making the Invisible Visible." In the words of my son, "Don't allow your obstacles to conquer you, YOU must conquer your obstacles!" WE must make the "Invisible Visible" and continue to have "HIGH EXPECTATIONS" of "ALL" of our consumers.

Debra Pickens, *Chairperson*

North Carolina DSB State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

2020 *Consumer Satisfaction Survey*

Background

The consumer satisfaction survey was initiated to meet the mandate of Section 105 (c) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, which states that the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) shall, among performing other required functions:

Conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of and client satisfaction with:

A. the functions performed by the designated State agency;

B. vocational rehabilitation services provided by State agencies and other public and private entities responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities under this Act;

C. employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving services under this title, including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with such employment outcomes.

Administration

The administration and management of the consumer satisfaction survey is a coordinated effort between by the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and the Division of Services for the Blind. Telephone surveys were conducted quarterly under a contract with the North Carolina State University, Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services. Survey samples were generated using a weighted random sampling design that included clients with open cases and those whose cases that had recently closed. Interviewers made up to six attempts to reach each person included in the sample.

Description of the Satisfaction Survey Questionnaire

The survey instrument includes four sections: I. Satisfaction with VR Counselor and Staff; II. Client Assistance Program (CAP) Information; III. Barriers to Employment; and IV. Additional Questions.

Section I, Satisfaction with the VR Counselor and Staff, is a battery of 14 items regarding the client's overall VR experience and the professionalism, responsiveness and timeliness of VR staff through eligibility, plan development, and employment. Items in this battery were scaled "Yes/No" with a "Not Applicable" option and were prompted based on a skip pattern according to the client's case status code indicating their progression in the VR program at the time survey samples were generated. Clients indicating dissatisfaction on any item were given the option to explain.

The questions for Section II, Client Assistance Program Information, includes items that ask if the consumer was informed about CAP and their right to appeal agency decisions with which they disagree. Each includes two sub-items that ask whether the CAP information was provided (a) when the client applied for services and (b) when the client and the counselor were developing and individualized plan for employment.

Section III, Barriers to Employment, includes a battery of nine items that are prompted if client reportedly was not working at the time the survey was conducted. Some of the items were revised from the previous version of the survey and an additional "N/A" response option was added.

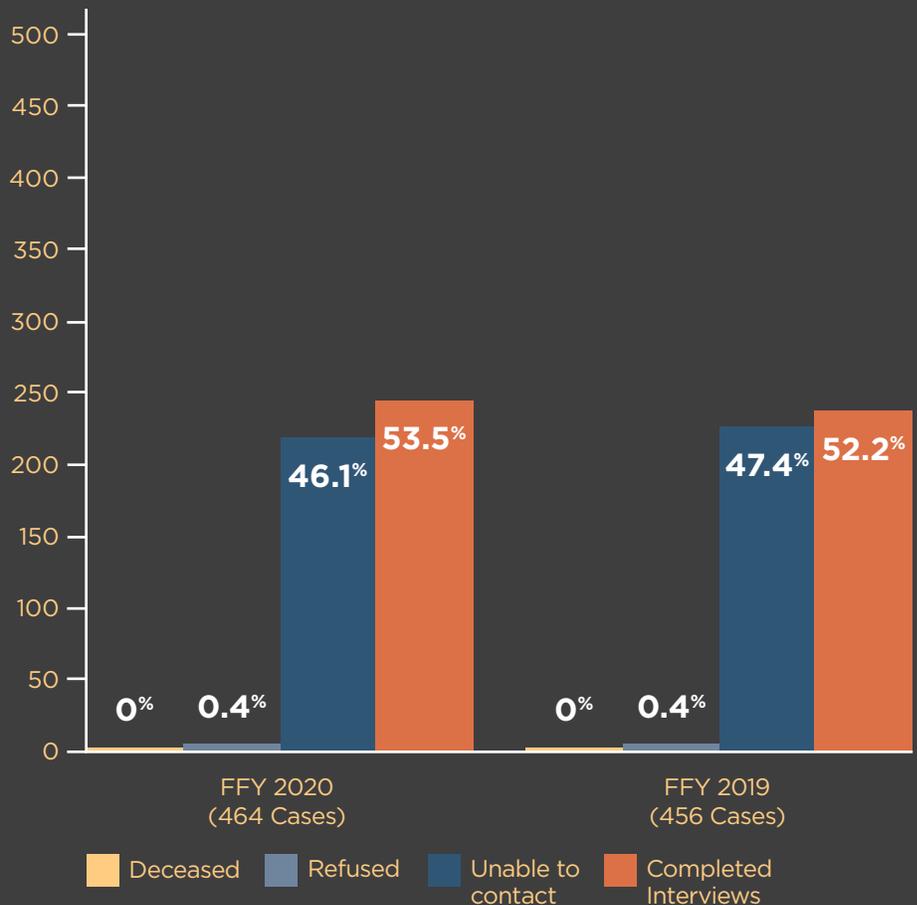
Two of the additional questions in Section IV were prompted for clients who exited VR without an employment outcome at any stage of progression in the VR process. These clients were asked why they felt their case was closed before they were employed and whether there was anything VR could have done to help them start working. The third question in this section, is there anything VR could do to improve its services, was asked of all clients.

Overview of Survey Results

Completed Survey Interviews

Completed Survey Interviews were completed for more than half of the DSB clients sampled in both FFY 2019 and 2020, averaging a completion rate of 53.5% across the two years for the total 920 DSB VR clients selected. An average of 46.1% of telephone interview calls weren't completed because the telephone contact information was no longer valid, the client couldn't be located or the interviewer call attempts were maxed out after six tries. Two of the former VR clients were deceased in FFY 2019 and two refused the interview in 2020. The completion rate was 2.6% lower in FFY 2020 compared to the prior year. This difference is small enough that it may be due to chance variation in the clients randomly selected for the sample since the margin of error is about $\pm 3.4\%$ at 90% confidence in samples of this size (456 to 464 cases). However, completion rates may be improved, overall, with more recently updated client contact information.

Table 1a- Survey Interviews Completed



Satisfaction with VR Counselors and Staff

Table 1b shows the three-year trend for client satisfaction with VR counselors and other program staff. Results are consistent across the three years in most areas. However, there was a decrease in satisfaction for two items asked only to clients that had been placed in employment: (k) timeliness of VR services provided under your plan for employment, including job development and placement (statuses 22+) and (l) Helping you find a job (statuses 22+) For the other questions in this section, the differences in satisfaction are less notable, although there was a -5.5% one-year difference in the percent satisfied with messages being returned promptly, from 91.8% in FFY 2019 to 86.3% in 2020. The areas with the most opportunity for improvement across the three years are (e) helping clients decide on job choices, which averaged 77% satisfaction, and (l) helping clients find a job, which averaged 66.5% satisfaction. Overall client satisfaction with the VR program was about 90% in FFY 2020 and averaged 91% across the three years.

Table 1b- Are you satisfied with your VR counselor and other VR program staff in terms of:

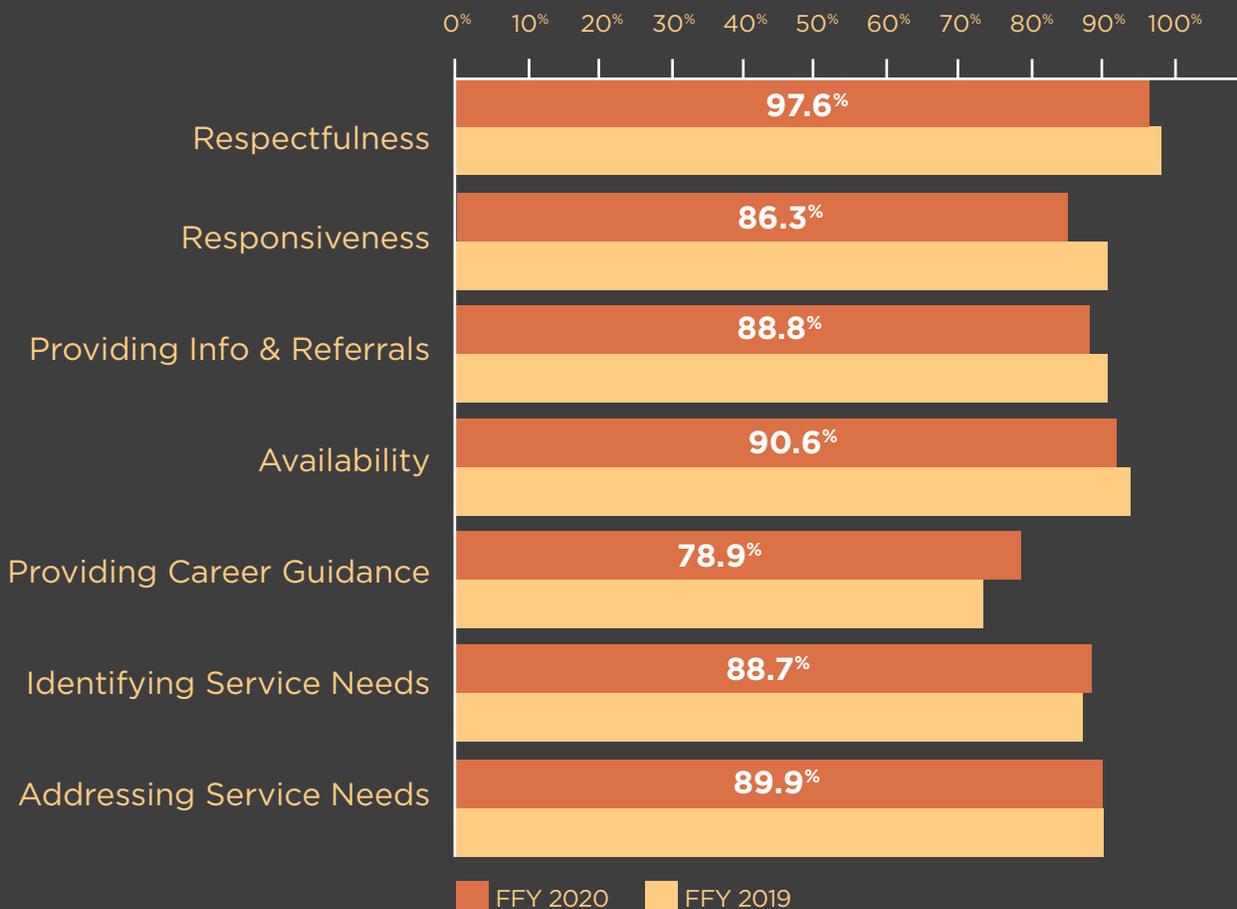
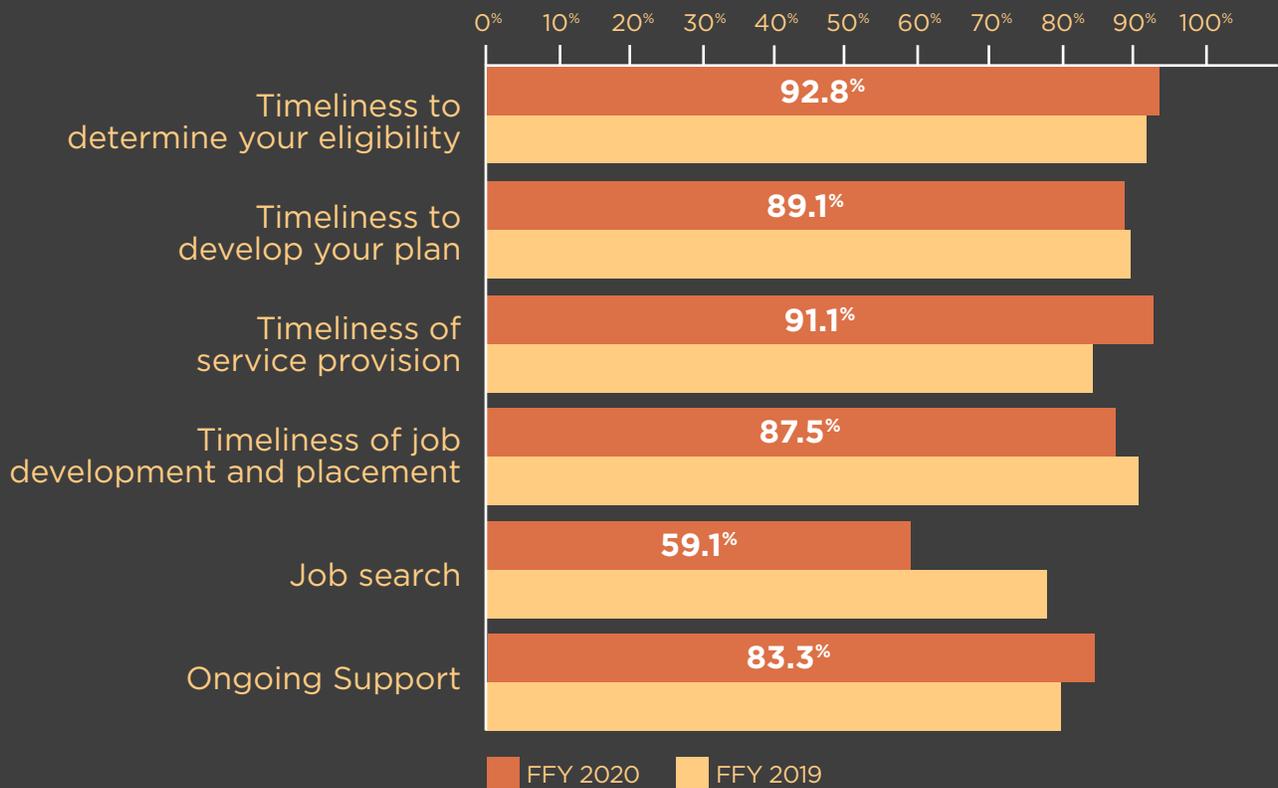
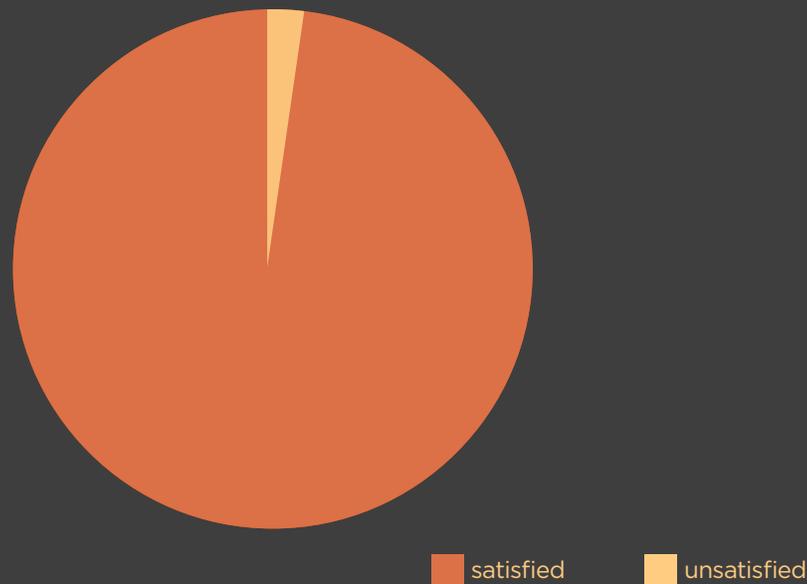


Table 1c- Are you satisfied with your VR counselor and other VR program staff in terms of:



Satisfaction with Overall Experience

90.0 percent of survey respondents reported being satisfied with their overall experience with DSB.



Client Assistance Program Information

The second section of the survey asks clients if their counselor informed them about the Client Assistance Program (CAP) and their right to appeal agency decisions with which they disagree. For FFY 2020, there was an increase of 13.1% from the prior year in the percent that responded they were informed about the Client Assistance Program (CAP) and an increase of 12.1% in the proportion that were informed about their right to appeal agency decisions. Notably, these increases were from the percent that had previously replied that they did not remember. Overall, the responses regarding CAP and the right to appeal for FFY 2020 are consistent with the three-year averages.

Client Assistance Program Questions:

Table 2a- Did your counselor inform you about the Client Assistance Program during application?

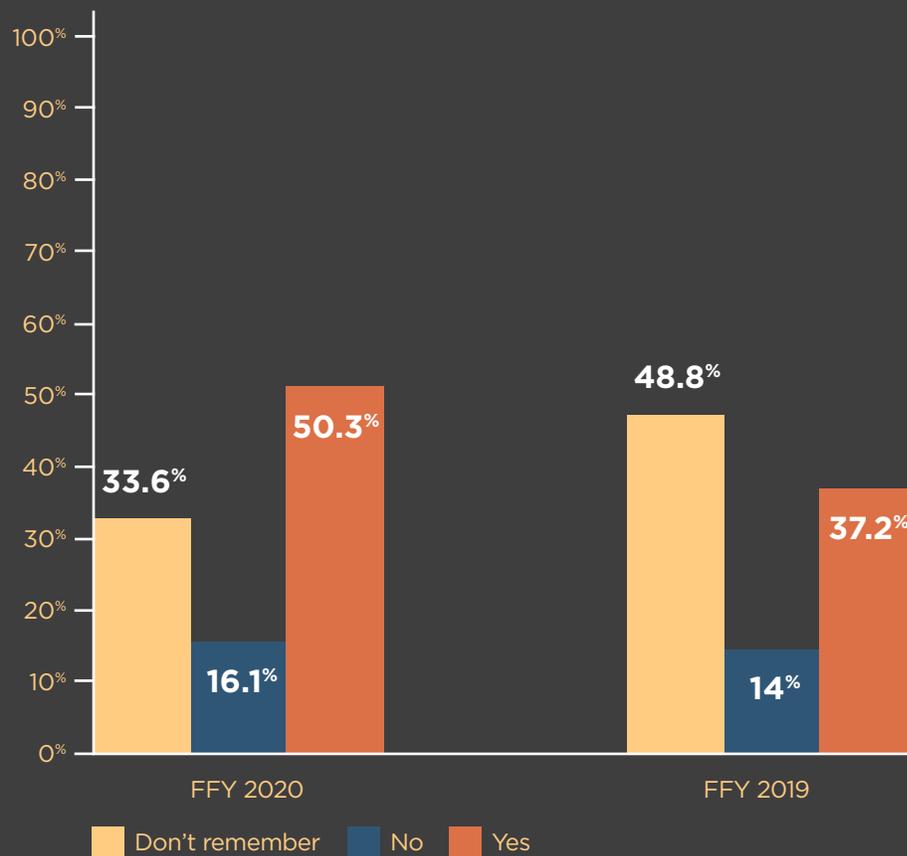
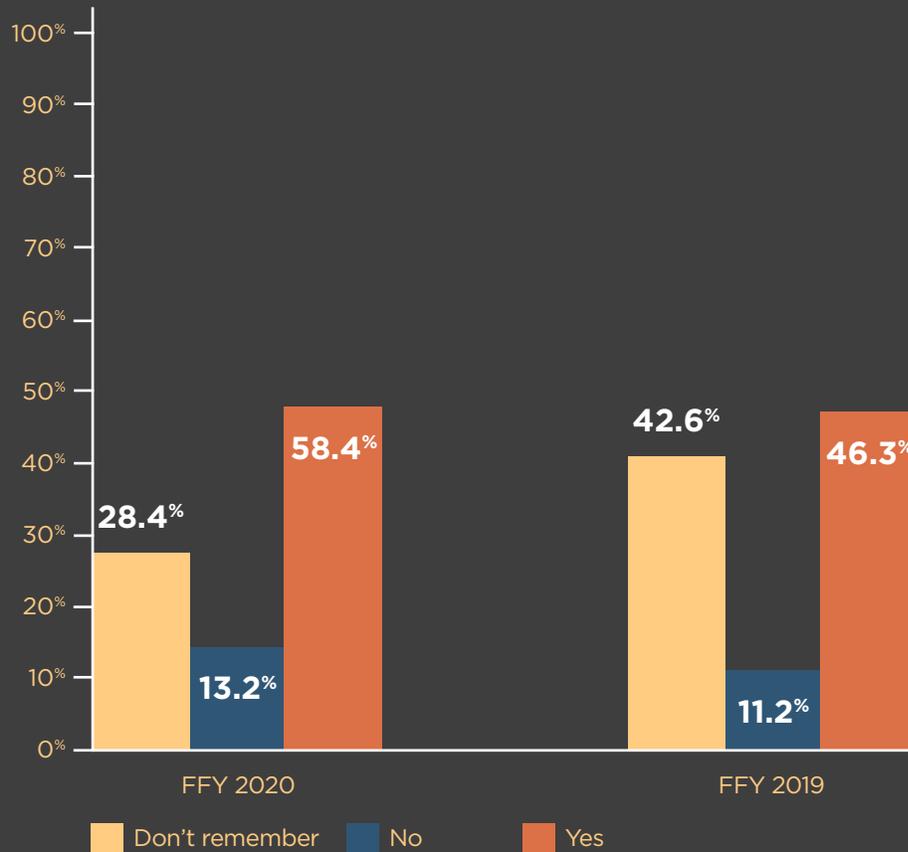


Table 2b- Did your counselor inform you about the right to appeal to decisions you disagreed with during the time your application was taken?



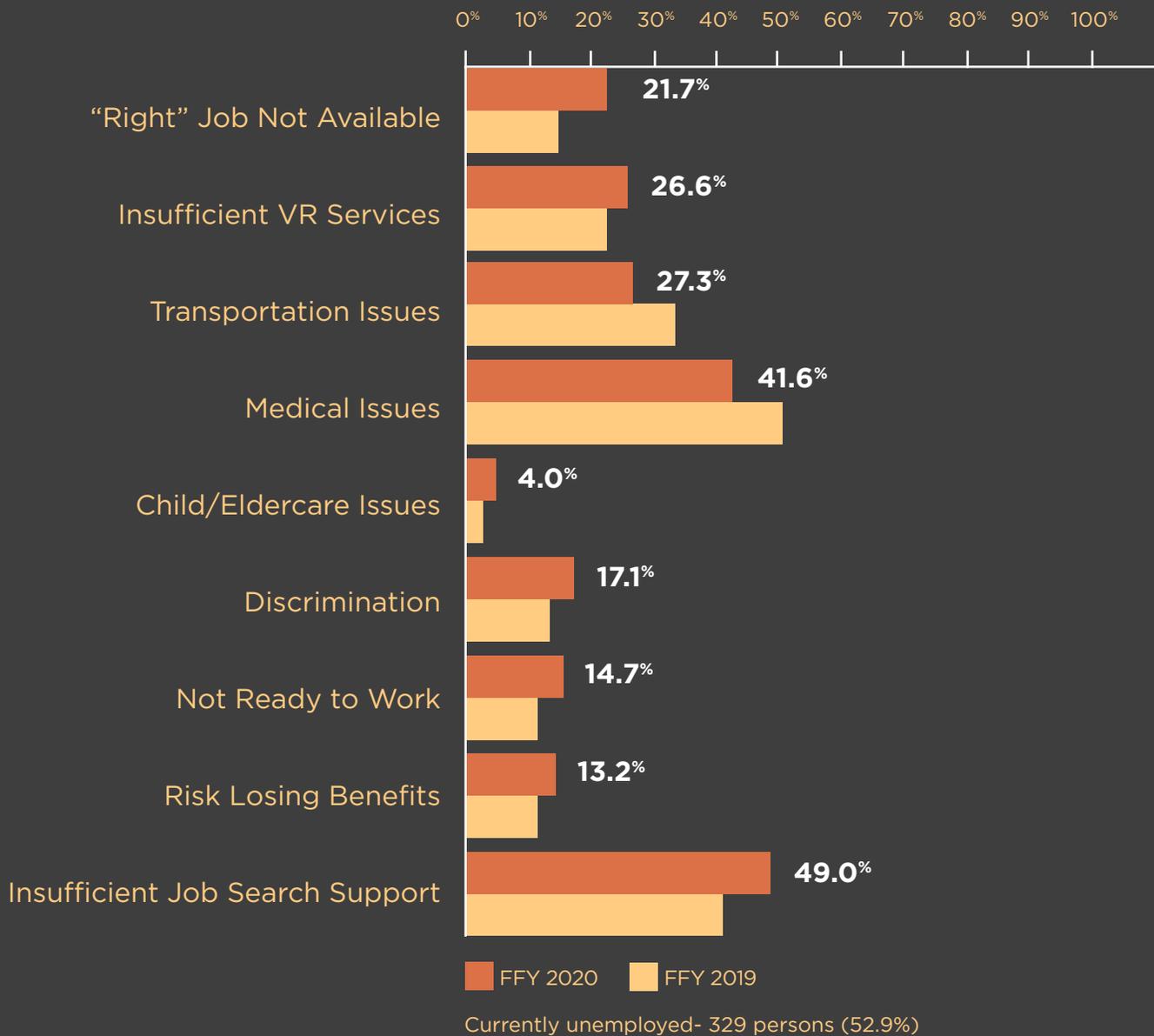
Barriers to Employment

The third section of the survey asks the screening question of whether respondents were currently working. Those that indicated they were not employed were then asked to answer 9 sub-questions regarding barriers to employment. Of 329 clients that responded to this question in FFY 2020, 174 (53%) answered they were not employed, which was a -5.5% difference from the prior year. This count includes individuals with open VR cases progressing towards their goal and former VR clients with recent case closures.

The VR clients not working were provided 9 sub-items regarding their barriers to employment. For FFY 2020, the barriers to employment most commonly reported were: (i) the need for additional help with job search (49%), (d) medical problems (42%), (c) transportation (27%), and (b) the need for additional VR services (27%).

In comparing the results from FFY 2020 with the prior year, there was a notable increase in the need for additional help with the client’s job search (+8%) and a lack of available jobs the client would want (+7%). In contrast, there was a decrease in clients with medical problems (-9%) and for whom a need for transportation (-5%) presented a barrier to employment.

Table 3- Barriers to Employment



Additional Comments

The last section of the survey includes a question on whether there is anything VR can do to improve its services. Below is a list of example comments that are representative of the responses for FFY 2020:

- They could respond quicker to messages.
- More help with orientation and mobility.
- Better pool of job choices.
- They are very short staffed. There is no AT Instructor.
- The technology teaching needs to be more hands on.
- They could modernize technology and modernize the Business Enterprises Program.
- Encourage and motivate the client.
- More follow up, and same person for some length of time.
- More fluid plans should be available.
- The program has been slowed down because of COVID.
- I just would like when the virus is over to be back to job training.
- Some interruption in my service do to COVID but have been in contact with counselor by phone and email.
- I would like to see VR schedule classes more like college classes - during the day and at night.
- Seems to be doing all that they can to help.
- It was a great experience. They really helped me.

DSB *Vocational Rehabilitation* Program

Cody Davis applied for Services for the Blind (DSB) when he was a high school student to obtain career exploration services geared toward researching a meaningful career path, to set his employment goals, and develop an employment plan to obtain the necessary education and experience to reach those goals and obtain successful employment. Counselors in the Winston-Salem District Office supported him every step of the way. His employment goal required a college education therefore DSB provided him with guidance and counseling to assist him with college selection, provided the necessary assistive technology to complete college courses, orientation and mobility skills, as well as having referred him to the DSB independent living skills program so he could obtain the skills needed to be independent and prepared to attend college. Over time, his career goals became



Cody Davis

more and more refined, and graduate school as well as law school became a part of his amended vocational plan. Cody indicated that perhaps the most instrumental support DSB provided throughout his education was the financial support he needed. This included tuition, room and board, and books and supplies needed for college.

During his education, DSB also supported him in his efforts to gain experience through

numerous internships and job shadowing opportunities. Even after completing his education, DSB helped him to surmount the final barrier to achieving his career goals, by assisting with the financial support to allow him to take the bar exam and obtain a law license. Due to the support he received from DSB, Cody is now employed in a meaningful and fulfilling career in the General Assembly in the program evaluation department.

DSB VR Outcomes for SFY 2019-2020

- ***DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Services were provided to 2,762 individuals with blindness or low vision***
- ***DSB VR has achieved 363 successful employment closures, which was an increase from the previous year***
- ***Average wages for successfully employed consumers: \$14.64 per hour, which is an increase from the prior year***

Impact of the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)*

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law on July 22, 2014. WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy.

WIOA is landmark legislation that is designed to strengthen and improve the workforce system and help Americans, including youth and those with significant barriers to obtain employment, move into high-quality careers and to assist employers to hire and retain skilled workers.

Due to this legislation, the NC Division of Services for the Blind has continued to focus on building career-based employment opportunities for consumers. Additionally, DSB has significantly increased efforts to collaborate with community partners through our contractual commitment of engagement with local One-Stop Centers for the purpose of addressing barriers to employment for consumers. Many of our staff maintain a regular presence in local centers across the state as well as being members of the Workforce Development Boards.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Services Highlights

- ***Transition Counselors added virtual delivery of services to the students/families***
- ***Transition staff applied a virtual outreach approach using student tailored newsletters and monthly e-mail activities to stay connected.***
- ***Engaged with WINTAC on numerous projects regarding Pre-ETS services which increased staff knowledge***
- ***Engaged in numerous outreach efforts to be able to collaborate with other agencies on Transition services, such as Alliance of Disability Advocates, school staff, CAP, North Carolina Youth Leadership Forum***
- ***Trained DSB counselors and other staff on WIOA/ Pre-ETS interpretation of clarification to increase staff knowledge, increase accurate data collection***

DSB Assistive Technology Services

DSB offers assistive technology services through its seven district offices as well as the DSB Career and Training Center (the Center) to assist people who require assistive technology (AT) to be successful with employment, training, education, and independent living goals.

Assistive technology is constantly evolving which requires our staff to stay abreast of changes. This year, training was provided to staff on smart devices, streaming devices, video conferencing platforms, new features of JAWS 2020 and use of shortcut keys with JAWS and Outlook 365. DSB also implemented a new policy and procedure for hiring AT Instructor vendors to expand the network of individuals available to provide instruction to our consumers.

Assistive Technology Services Success Story

Grace Minter is an amazing person who accomplished her ultimate goal of becoming a schoolteacher overcoming any barrier that came in her path. Grace was hired by the Governor Morehead School as their new Braille Education Teacher and won the Student Teacher of the Year, awarded by the NC Association of Colleges of Teacher Educators. Grace is legally blind and travels with Stormy, her leader dog.

She first came to the Division of Services for the Blind Vocational Rehabilitation program in high school as a transition student. She was quickly referred to our AT Instructor, Cindy Meadows. Cindy began teaching Grace how to use assistive technology

to access high school curriculum and prepare Grace for college success. Grace was relying on screen magnification only with her Mac but that was not enough

anymore to access the computer screen. Cindy taught her to use the screen reader JAWS with MS Office on her PC. This skill was needed to learn how to use a screen reader for more efficient access to the computer and digital curriculum. With assistance from Cindy, Grace learned how to develop PPT presentations and Excel spreadsheets using JAWS. Sometimes Cindy would just send Grace instruction on how to access something and Grace would impressively conquer the task independently.



Grace Minter and her leader dog Stormy

Through high school and college, DSB-VR provided Grace with computers, JAWS, Open Book and a Braille Note Touch (a braille computer). Grace adeptly uses the magnification side of the Mac computer and JAWS with her personal computer. She attended the DSB Career and Training Center for short term training and became more efficient on the Braille Note.

Grace conquered obstacles again by not only graduating from Mid-Atlantic Christian College in Elizabeth City, NC but by becoming the valedictorian. She completed a 60-hour internship with NCDSB. During the internship, Grace provided instruction on computer and mobile device accessibility to adult learners with a wide variety of visual conditions and levels of computer experience. Grace created and delivered awesome presentations to groups of students participating in the DSB transition program. The DSB Career and Training Center staff and participating students were most impressed with an activity she designed to show college prep students how to find key information from PowerPoint slides for more effective

notetaking. She demonstrated an innate ability to connect with these students and successfully conveyed the importance of this skill for college success.

This individual has distinguished herself by showing exceptional proficiency in the use of screen reader and braille technologies. Cindy stated that Grace has shown more skill, initiative, and perseverance than any client she has worked with in the last 20 years. DSB staff that worked with her nicknamed her Amazing Grace. Grace said, "Working with Cindy filled the AT gaps that school wasn't able to, and it had a significant impact on my ability to gain the knowledge and skills needed for success in college and my career." It's no shock to all of us that Grace applied for and was hired for the position at the Governor Morehead School as the Braille Education Teacher. Grace has also been accepted to the Vision Studies, Assistive Technology Program at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. Grace truly is amazing to not only accomplish her goals but exceed at conquering every barrier that came her way.

DSB Assistive Technology Services Results

During this federal fiscal year, **707** DSB clients were served by Assistive Technology field staff. At the Center, **53** individuals took technology classes and **13** received technology-only training.

DSB *Business Enterprises* Program



Photo of twin sisters Karen Young and Sharon Young-BEP Operators

Sharon Rhue came to North Carolina Business Enterprises from the Southern part of the state. Although new to North Carolina Business Enterprises, she was not new to entrepreneurship. She began her entrepreneurial journey while working with her mother's cleaning company. She served as an actual cleaner, manager, human resource professional, bookkeeper and payroll clerk.

As a Business Enterprises student, she worked as equally hard to earn her license

as a North Carolina Business Enterprises Operator. She came in excited and focused to succeed. She was able to earn a very high average and show great leadership skills during her training, graduating September 23, 2019.

Soon after her graduation, she was able to apply for a location and was awarded Dart Cherry. Sharon is such a great addition to North Carolina Business Enterprises and has a bright future ahead.

Karen Young also comes from the Southern part of the state and is the twin sister of Sharon Rhue. Karen, like her sister began her entrepreneurial journey working for her mother at her cleaning company. Karen served as a cleaner, manager and human resource professional.

As a Business Enterprises student, Karen worked hard to earn her license to become a North Carolina Business Enterprises Operator.

She was dedicated and eager to succeed. Karen graduated with a high average and demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of her new endeavor to be a North Carolina Business Enterprises Operator.

She graduated September 23, 2019 and now satellites locations in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Karen is a great addition to North Carolina Business Enterprises and has a bright future ahead.



Photos-Twin sister stacking beverages for BEP Job

DSB Business Enterprises Outcomes for SFY 2019-2020

Business Enterprises currently has 47 licensed blind operators who manage 144 food and vending facilities on state, federal and private properties. During SFY 2019-2020 gross sales from all BEP food service and vending facilities totaled to \$10,230,070 in comparison to the prior year's total earnings at \$11,230,986.90. The NC Business Enterprises administration consist of 9 employees.

Business Enterprises successfully graduated 3 new licensees and 2 have successfully obtained Business Enterprises locations. The BEP program accepted 3 new referrals/trainees into the BEP training program in 2020.

DSB *School to Work Transition Services*



Transition Services Newsletter

DSB Pre-ETS and Transition Program Highlights:

Adaptability and new ideas emerged from the challenges of a global pandemic within the NC DSB Transition Services team. Transition Counselors Brittney Greer and Taylor Hinton as well as the Community Employment Specialist Janel Shaver applied a virtual outreach approach using student tailored newsletters and monthly

e-mail activities to stay connected. This enabled the staff to engage with their students via email communications while in-person meetings were no longer safe and allowed. This approach drew attention and was recognized by the WINTAC team and featured as a COVID-19 Resource on their Pre-ETS webpage.

The agency continued their strong commitment providing a variety of Pre-Employment Transition Services to our students; focusing on activities to explore career paths and providing opportunity for growth to enable a successful transition from high school to adulthood. The continuum of services begins with our Pre-Employment Transition Associates by providing the five Pre-ETS activities to the students age 14-21 as required by the WIOA. During the SFY 19-20 they served 16 potentially eligible students who had not yet applied for Vocational Rehabilitation services and partnered with the Counselors on serving eligible students with various Pre-ETS activities. In 2020, The counselors arranged for students to attend transition fairs, career fairs and college fairs both in-person and virtually. Nine active school contracts were in place to enhance the partnerships between the educational staff and DSB; continuous

outreach efforts by the Pre-ETS Associates and DSB staff continued to identify potentially eligible students in other schools. The counselors arranged for students to attend transition fairs, career fairs, college fairs, in-person and virtual. Six Pre-ETS providers had active contracts with DSB to offer Pre-Employment Transition services to students. Highlights prior to social distancing included a student transition event at the Charlotte office, engaging ten students in self-advocacy, college information, financial literacy and VR topics. The Winston-Salem office five students engaged in a 5-day Youth Empowerment program focusing on self-advocacy, workplace readiness and career exploration. During the SFY19-20, thirty-five students participated in work experiences to assist them in gaining valuable skills to help them transition from high school to college, a training program or employment.

*Adaptability
and new ideas
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DSB Supported Employment Services

The NC DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Program closed 363 cases successfully in SFY 2019-2020 despite unprecedented challenges due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Pictured below is David Vines of Halifax, NC. David began working at Lowes Home Improvement in February of 2020 as a Lawn and Garden Associate. After almost 5 years of unemployment, David is now successfully working in a job that he enjoys, and his employer says that David “is a great asset and performs great on the job”. Chronic Angle-Closure Glaucoma causes very low vision for David who received guidance

and counseling, low vision assessments, handheld video magnifier and other low vision aids, sponsorship of needed work clothing, orientation and mobility services, and job placement assistance from the DSB Business Services Representative. Additionally, David attended the DSB Career and Training Center in 2016 for ABLE training which equipped him with many needed skills to function with his vision loss and prepared him for this opportunity. David states that he is “forever grateful for DSB services.” DSB congratulates David on his success and remaining persistent in pursuing his goal.



David Vines at work in Lowes Home Improvement posing for in front of a Christmas tree display

Work Experiences

Multiple types of Work Experiences can be applied to an array of vocational situations for DSB eligible individuals, such as On-the-Job (OJT) Training, Internships, and Unpaid Work Experiences. This year, DSB provided 105 Work Experiences to 61 clients. Work experiences are provided for the purpose of vocational exploration, assessment, or training at an employer work site under the general supervision of VR organization personnel.

Work Experience Success Story

When Noah Long first opened his VR Transition case with DSB back in 2013, he was attending school at The Governor Morehead School for the Blind and was doing a work experience as a front desk associate at the school greeting and welcoming visitors and helping those visitors find their desired locations. Now, he is beginning his career doing that same job he loved so much back in high school. Blind since birth, Noah has no light perception in one eye and light perception only in the other eye. Additionally, he has cerebral palsy and walks with the assistance of a walker.

Over the years, Noah has participated in work experiences doing switchboard operations, on-air radio work, and tutoring other students about assistive technology. He has also received vocational evaluations, participated in the SAVVY summer youth program, and went to ABLE training

at the DSB Career and Training Center. He received Supported Employment services from 2 different CRPs throughout the life of his case but began working with Easter Seals in January 2019. Quickly, Easter Seals saw that he was a great match for their open front desk position. In January 2019, Noah began a competitive integrated position in the Easter Seals office as a front desk receptionist greeting guests and answering phones.

By July 2019, DSB provided him with JAWS software which allowed him to expand his job duties beyond just answering phones and greeting guests. Using JAWS and a refreshable Braille display in his workplace, he is now able to access documents, create documents, and upload files. The work experiences from high school really helped Noah identify his interests and talents in this field and now he is working in a career that he loves.



Noah Long of Holly Springs, NC is working at his desk at Easter Seals with his computer, keyboard, headset, and refreshable Braille display.

Supported Employment Success Story

After 7 years of unemployment, Jasmine Jackson of Jacksonville, NC is enjoying working at her new position in Housekeeping thanks to Jasmine's hard work, and persistence and thanks to great teamwork between DSB and 2 valuable CRP partners. Jasmine is employed by Coastal Enterprises at Naval Medical Center on Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base and is receiving job coaching from Cape Fear Vocational Services to ensure stability and job retention. Jasmine opened her VR case with DSB in September 2019 and received Guidance and Counseling and was referred for Supported Employment Services. Her SE provider, Cape Fear Vocational Services

provided job development and placement, application assistance, resume assistance, and job coaching. Jasmine's job coach connected her with the opportunity with Coastal Enterprises and she has happily been working in the position since October

2020. Jasmine has Diabetic Retinopathy which causes difficulty reading fine print and discerning small objects which makes it difficult to find and keep employment. Additionally, this year Jasmine broke her foot which delayed her job search temporarily. But she is finishing the year strong with a new job and thriving in a position that fits her well. Well done, Jasmine!



Jasmine Jackson completing housekeeping tasks-sweeping

DSB *Community Based Work Adjustment Services*

Community Work Adjustment and Supported Employment Services can be used for clients that meet criteria for Severely Disabled and Most Severely Disabled classifications. Work adjustment training can assist the individual in developing work skills, work habits, and job retention skills required to obtain and maintain employment. Work adjustment training includes activities to improve and increase productivity, attendance, punctuality, ability to work with others, ability to work under supervision, and work tolerance.

Supported Employment services are provided for a longer term and can include all the services included in Work Adjustment but can also include ongoing job coaching and follow up services to ensure better job retention. Both Work Adjustment and Supported Employment Services are provided through the purchase of services with private, certified Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) throughout the state. This SFY 2019-2020, 49 DSB VR Clients received Work Adjustment Services, and 44 Clients received Supported Employment Services.

Work adjustment training can assist the individual in developing work skills, work habits, and job retention skills.

DSB Career and Training Center



Picture of the front of the DSB Career and Training Center

It was another busy and productive year at the DSB Career and Training Center. In-person services were provided through March then switched to safer methods of training.

The Center's Cooking Class Instructor and Recreational Therapists collaborated with the Interfaith Food Shuttle on their six-week Cooking Matters course. Sixteen ABE (Adapting to Blindness in a Learning Environment) participants joined in. The course engages low-income adults in cooking classes designed to teach skills to stretch their food budgets and provide nutritious meals. Participants were given a \$10 gift card and challenged to purchase

a balanced meal for a family of four to include all food groups.

Another evening workshop was the "Nature of Poetry" which began with an ABE consumer's idea that a student-directed project would empower students. The consumer worked with the Adult Basic Education Instructor to curate the series with local poets.

Guest speakers were invited to the Center to talk with consumers about the importance of Job Readiness, Interviewing Skills & Employment. Terry Lewis has worked for LCI (Lions Club Industries) for 10 years, he shared appropriate



Participants who completed the Cooking Matters course pose with their certificates along with the instructors.

work behaviors with the students. Katie Pender has worked for NCSU Computer Programing Dept. for 12 years and shared tips about building their own web sites. Shelia McNair has worked for Walmart for the Incoming Call Center and Wake Med Dietitian Assistance Program and she discussed courteous and professional handling of phone calls.

Triple S: Soft Skills for Success was another workshop available to ABLE students. This workshop focused on soft skills that help people get, and stay, employed, such as communication skills, appearance and grooming, teamwork, decision making and professionalism. Guest speakers included a NC Works employee, a skincare consultant,

a group of young entrepreneurs, as well as VI professionals who spoke from their real-life perspectives. Activities included a field trip to GIGI's Closet and Dress for Success. GiGi's Closet is a nonprofit offering men's suits and accessories. Dress for Success is a nonprofit which provided the female students with one-on-one time with a career coach and guidance on selecting professional clothes.

Two (2) consumers participated in work experiences through the ABLE2 Work program. One consumer worked as a stocker in a grocery store and another worked as an assistive technology tester with a nonprofit organization.



Six men stand proudly in their new professional suits.



Four pictures of women posing proudly in their new professional clothing.

Another important function of the Center is to educate individuals who are new to DSB and/or the field of blindness and visual impairment. A student in Orientation & Mobility from NC Central University completed her internship prior to the beginning of teleworking and an intern in the UNC-CH Clinical Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling program worked with the remote SAVVY program. A NEST (New Employee Sensitivity Training) was held in February for Daily Living Skills Class Instructors. Participants resided on campus for four days and engaged in daily classes as well as evening campus and community activities.

When NC moved to stay at home orders due to COVID-19 and staff moved to teleworking, Center staff quickly hit the ground running and adapted their teaching to these new circumstances. The Techniques of Daily Living teacher, who has taught at the Center for

more than 20 years, stated, “I thought, what will I be able to do with my students to make their remote learning experiences beneficial? After all, our training has always been hands-on so, how will this work?” The instructor found that she could continue to teach using a combination of telephone lessons and discussions, videos and video conferencing. She stated, “It was challenging and a learning experience at the same time. Students stated that they enjoyed the information that they received and often asked for information and ideas for specific topics.”

All the instructors found ways to adapt their teaching for the ABLE program, NEST and SAVVY. The technology instructors at the Center took the lead

with learning numerous new platforms and then trained other staff. Over time, the Division was able to gain access to multiple video conferencing platforms which expanded participation options.

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Career and Training Center Youth Services-2020

SAVVY 2020 had 16 participants and was held via Zoom over four weeks. The theme was “Envision the Possibilities”. Youth-in-Transition classes were taught on an alternating basis providing students the opportunity to experience Assistive Technology, Orientation & Mobility, Techniques of Daily Living & Cooking Skills, and Education & Braille.

College Prep participants utilized Zoom, Blackboard Course sites and Google Drive. They learned, studied, submitted assignments and engaged in topics related to college readiness with the Center College Prep Instructor and a UNC-Charlotte graduate who is visually impaired.

Two teens participated in the remote World of Work program. They attended workshops to prepare for work by

learning about general work expectations, remote job expectations, time management, appropriate behaviors, and hard and soft skills specific to their interests in technology. Both participants worked remotely with DSB Assistive Technology Instructors.

When the fall ABLÉ Program resumed, staff mastered another video conferencing platform, Google Meet, which provides an accessible platform which can be accessed from computers or mobile devices and has additional tools to assist with curriculums and instruction.

The Center adapted to unexpectedly provide quality remote services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired and staff. Staff very much look forward to resuming regular in-person services when it is possible to do so.

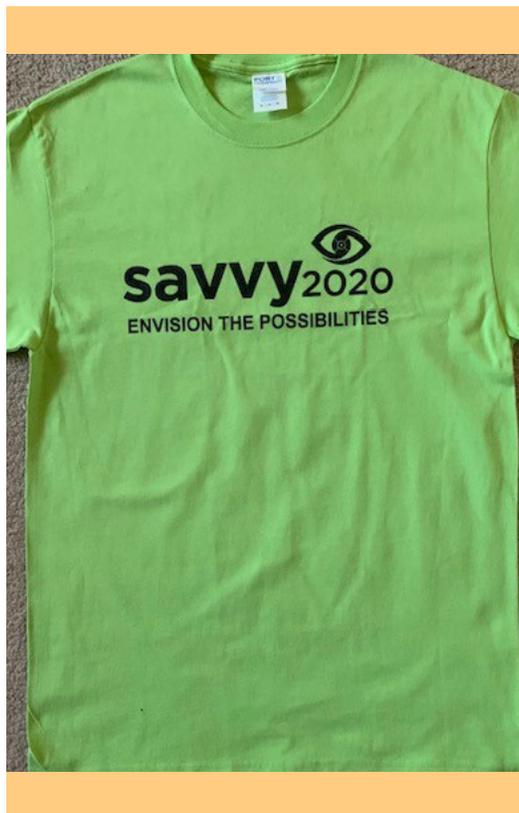


Photo of savvy 2020 t-shirt with DSB icon and “Envision the Possibilities”

DSB Career and Training Center Results

59 VR eligible individuals received training in the Adapting to Blindness in a Learning Environment program

16 transition age students were provided transition services through SAVVY Youth in Transition (10), College Prep (4) and World of Work (2) programs

46 individuals received assessments by classroom instructors

385 class assessments were provided

54 total consumers received EU services

35 general evaluations

22 low vision evaluations

9 psychological-only evaluations

9 vocational-only evaluations



Career and Training Center Staff participating in Pajama Day

DSB *Independent Living Services*

DSB is unique in that we have social workers for the blind. The Independent Living Services Program provides services to eligible individuals in all 100 counties of the state. 54 Social Workers for the Blind are on the front line of DSB finding the visually impaired citizens who are struggling with vision loss. They provide services and supports that assist individuals who are blind, visually impaired and deaf blind to independently manage their activities of daily living and prevent or

reduce institutional care. These services are provided at no cost to eligible individuals. During SFY 2019-2020, 4,029 individuals were provided services such as Adjustment, which includes basic instruction in activities of daily living. Imagine not being able to pour your morning cup of coffee or re-heat a meal in the microwave. The SWB's teach new ways of performing the daily living techniques we can all take for granted. They also play a large role in cultivating relationships with community partners.



Woman in a wheelchair holding a muffin tin while her cooking instructor speaks to her.

Independent Living Success Stories:

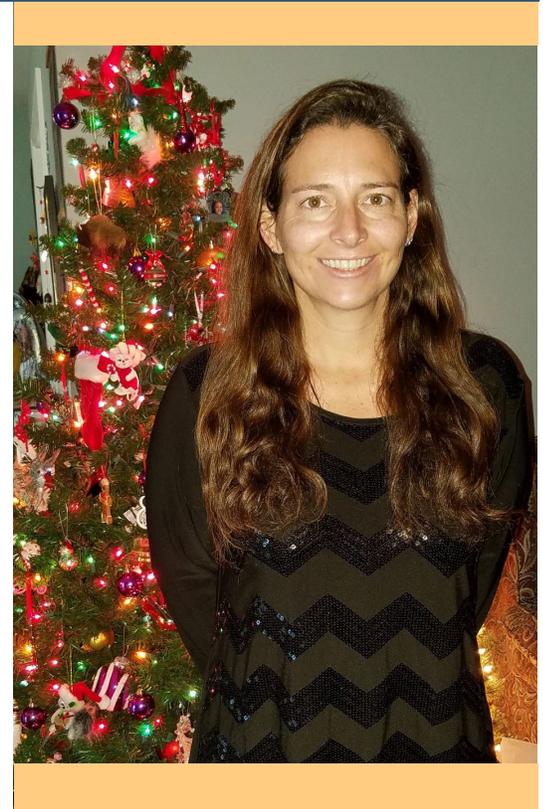
Reflections on Providing Services During Covid-19

Rhonda Greene, SWB Rutherford County

When asked to write about a success story, my initial response was, “I haven’t done anything extraordinary to warrant a success story.” But it did make me pause and think about all the small successes I have gotten to experience during these times of restrictions and adaptations. I have still been able to accomplish things that impact the lives of VIPs and their families, sometimes having to think outside the box and sometimes just having time to do some old-fashioned social work (even if it is by phone).

So this is a story of inspiration, not about something I have done, but how the people of my community have come together and supported me, supported the VIPs, and been willing at times to even do my job for me so that someone could get the aids they needed. In a year that there has been so much negativity, I choose to focus on the positive. I choose to admire the Lions that normally have a Christmas lunch for the VIPs in the county. This year it had to be cancelled, but they have continued working to ensure the VIPs each get a gift in the mail. They could have just said, “Well, the lunch is cancelled. We will try again next year.” Their commitment is shown by changing their tradition this year while working to keep VIPs safe. They are giving VIPs a little extra cheer for the holidays and letting them know they are not forgotten. I am proud to provide assistance to the Lions in this endeavor. It is they who should be recognized as a true success.

I also reflect on the opportunity I have had to work with individuals that otherwise I may have never gotten to meet. It has been extremely hard on the VIPs, as well as others, in nursing care facilities. I have worked with the Directors, social workers and in the facilities to ensure VIPs can have access to services. Normally, I bypass some of these workers and go straight to the consumer. They have been heroes to me during the pandemic. They have stepped in, allowing me to provide hands-on instruction to them so that they can ensure the consumers gets the hands-on experience they need to use low vision aids successfully. They have also helped by reading the applications to the consumer and obtaining signatures.



Rhonda Greene

It is not just other professionals that should receive praise. Family members have also stepped up to learn how to use low vision aids so that they can provide the training that usually is provided by me. Although these procedures are not our norm, and I can't wait to be able to work again without the current restrictions, I must pause to appreciate the opportunities that have surfaced out of necessity. Inadvertently, my daily job has become a daily outreach. I have the opportunity to educate so many more people in my community than I normally would in any given situation. How wonderful is it that the passion I have for my job is now spreading through facilities and homes by other people who have taken the time to be helpful!

So, when I think about success, I don't think about something specific I have achieved. I think about the kindness of the people I have the pleasure to work with, the willingness they have to help and the impact that their actions have on my community. I feel like achievements have been made during the pandemic that will produce a chain reaction of many more success stories in the future. These are the people that inspire me. They are the true success stories.

Teaching Braille Via Telephone

Lucy Plyler, SWB Cleveland County

Week 1: I never would have thought of even attempting to teach braille over the phone, but I did just that today. She's a quick learner and is motivated. A-J is mastered only after 20 minutes. Once she knows the placement of the dots, then I can introduce her to a braille book.

Week 2: I must brag on my student who is learning braille over the phone. After only two 30-minute lessons, she has mastered the whole alphabet! I am teaching her the dot placement with an egg crate and cotton balls first, then I plan to introduce braille on a notecard.



Lucy Plyler



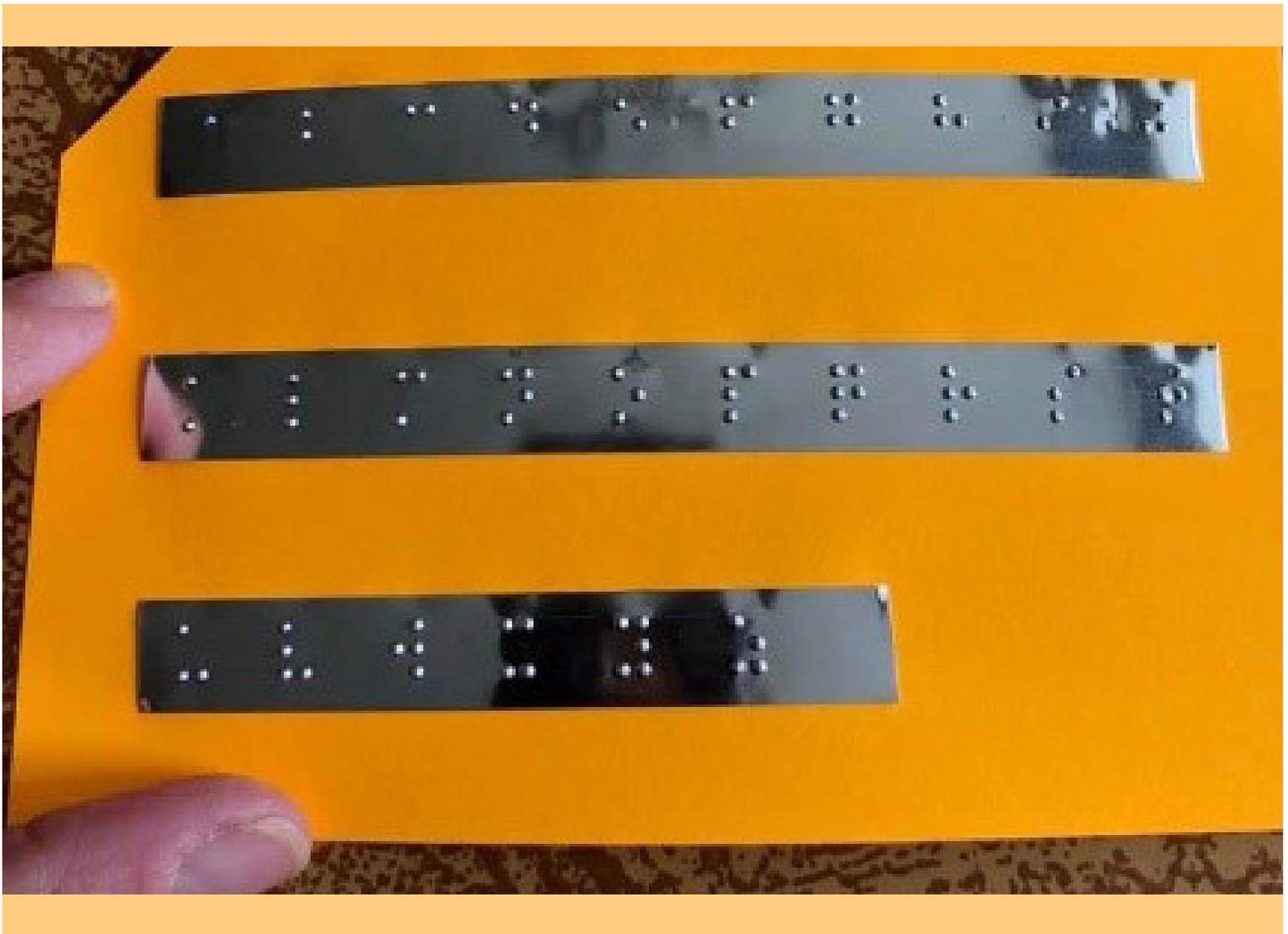
Egg carton adapted for Braille instructions



Diane Gross participating in Braille lessons via telephone

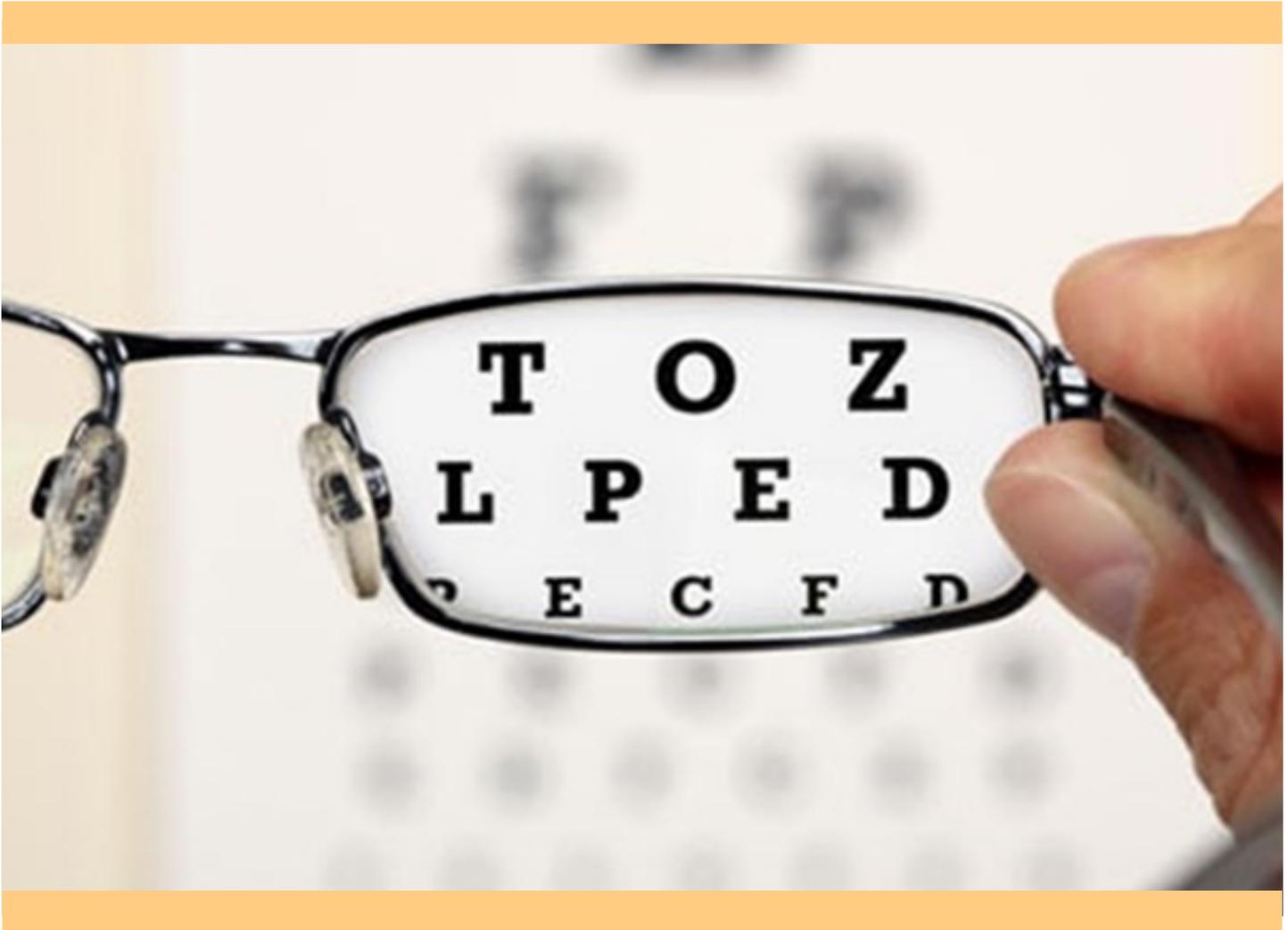
Week 3: As promised, here is a picture of the braille alphabet that I am sending to my student to study with now that she knows the placement for the dots. I have placed a space in between each letter so she can become familiar with the individual letters. Next will come punctuation marks. Then a children's book in braille. I have cut the top left corner so that she will be oriented. And I used metal tape so that as she practices, she won't flatten the dots.

Week 4 and 5: Well, I have to say my student is the most motivated individual I have worked with in a long time. She's got the alphabet, numbers, and punctuation mastered only after 5 telephone lessons. She should be getting some children's braille books this week. You may ask why children's books. So far, I have taught what's called Grade 1 braille. That doesn't mean 1st grade, that means I have not taught the contractions or short form words. That will come much later.



Card with Braille on metal tape with top left corner of card cut

DSB *Medical Eye Care* Program



In North Carolina, the major causes of blindness are Age Related Macular Degeneration, Retinal Disorders, Glaucoma and Cataracts. The Medical Eye Care Program uses available resources to prevent blindness from these and all other causes and restore vision where possible. Services are based on income eligibility and are available to those with no other comparable benefit. During SFY 2019-20, 1,298 individuals received Medical Eye Care Program services.

Nursing Eye Care Consultants provided 1,467 low vision evaluations and evaluations for video magnification for Independent Living consumers and reviewed multiple eye reports for these 1,298 recipients. Also provided were 687 basic and follow up eye exams, 818 treatments and/or surgeries, 28 eyeglasses and 369 eye medications purchased.



DSB Nurse Lynn McCarn processing Medical Eye Care paperwork for services

DSB Medical Eye Care Program Achievements

- **687** basic and follow up eye exams
- **818** treatments and/or surgeries
- **28** eye glasses purchased
- **369** eye medications purchased

DSB Independent Living Rehabilitation and Independent Living Older Blind Programs



Daily Living Skills being conducted remotely-Several consumers pictured on virtual training on Google Meet

Our Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselors (ILRC's) provided comprehensive services in the home and in community-based Daily Living Skills Classes through early March. With the spread of COVID-19, all in-person services had to be halted and planned classes had to be cancelled. Since then, staff have been finding ways to provide as many services

as possible remotely. Equipment which consumers could be trained on by phone has been provided with no contact "porch deliveries". Some approved services related to critical needs due to safety, health and well-being have been provided in-person with significant precautions taken by staff and consumers.

In August, ILRC's were all trained on using Google Meet for one-on-one or group instruction, where feasible. Training was provided by fellow ILRC's who had previously tested the format. All ILRC's have either provided remote classes or planned classes. Although these

services cannot replace the need for in-person instruction, staff now have the tools to provide some instruction without always being in-person. This ability will benefit service provision in the long run in when travel is not possible.

Staff have been finding ways to provide as many services as possible remotely.

DSB ILR and ILOB Results for FFY 2019-2020

- **794** eligible individuals served - 288 ILR and 506 ILOB
- **285** eligible individuals rehabilitated
- **15** Daily Living Skills Classes held - 4 held remotely
- **200** eligible individuals attended Daily Living Skills classes

Independent Living Rehabilitation Success Story: Heidi

Heidi was a 911/field training officer and paramedic for McDowell County EMS for 10 years. She loved her fast-paced, challenging jobs where she worked with a tight-knit group of people who became her family. In December 2017, at the age of 34, she met DSB staff for the first time. Her entire life had just changed overnight when she suddenly lost vision due to lupus. Several complicated surgeries were performed to save her remaining vision, but she had to leave a job that she loved because she could no longer drive an ambulance, perform fast-paced patient care, or see the computer screen at the call center. She moved back in with her parents so they could help her get to medical appointments and give her time to adjust to her new circumstances.

When her Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor and DSB specialists met Heidi, they started with typical services: low vision aids, assistive technology for her iPhone and computer, marking appliances, kitchen gadgets and suggestions. She attended a daily living skills class with a lively group. Although she was quiet and reserved initially, when she spoke, she had thoughtful and insightful comments.



Heidi had always been an active person. She needed to reinvent herself with a new career that would be productive and “something that I would enjoy waking up to every morning”. She had always been artistic. Her grandmother was a potter and would lay clay out for her grandchildren to enjoy creative freedom during summer vacations in her home filled with her own creations.

Heidi started working with DSB VR, and in the fall of 2018, she enrolled in Western Piedmont Community College. She used a talking kitchen scale to weigh out her slabs of clay, tactile and low vision rulers and tape measures, bright duct tape on her tools to locate them on the table,

an adjustable high powered lamp with magnifier clamped to her potter’s wheel, and large print/color-coded and tactile tags to identify bins of raw ingredients and glazes. She had a classroom assistant, a professional potter, who helped translate the teacher’s instructions in the classroom, give descriptive feedback and hands-on guidance. The pottery students were a tight-knit group who developed friendships and a supportive atmosphere. Heidi had been reluctant to stand out as a person with a visual impairment, but in her third semester she had her beautiful artwork

displayed in the student commons for Disability Awareness Month along with a self-written introduction of her own story. Covid-19 upended her final semester leaving projects unfinished and preventing a true celebration of the process and its completion. Despite that, Heidi graduated in the spring with her associate of applied science degree in professional crafts clay.

After graduation, Heidi bought a home where she could set up a pottery studio in her basement. She started doing so by using many of the tools she had learned: choosing bright colors and contrast, using natural light and window treatments to reduce glare, selecting appliances that had easier to see and mark controls. Although she had been reluctant to use her travel cane, but now she is learning walking routes in her neighborhood and is considering a dog guide in the future.

When creating her pottery, she relies on her memories of travels through the mountains, particularly the Blue Ridge Mountains, to recreate landscapes.

“My hands are my eyes; I trust them to guide the clay as I impress upon my works the feeling of a place. My pottery surfaces are all about touch: I apply thick slip with my fingertips to create texture reminiscent of mountains and rolling hills. These tactile elements feel good in one’s hands and allow contrasting glaze colors to break highlighting the texture.”

Heidi’s ability to handle emergency situations throughout her career helped her navigate her own crisis. She was able to stay calm under pressure, think critically to reassess her situation, problem-solve, and make decisions, be flexible, find something that she was passionate about, communicate effectively with others, and work with a team to meet her goals. Heidi is hoping to make connections and friends in the arts community in her new area, set up her studio and start making and selling her pottery. Her Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor believes she will succeed because Heidi is determined and talented. Pictures of some of her lovely work are included in this report.



(Left) A whimsical ceramic tree with large amber colored truck extending vertically into several stacked coiled branches each ending in a rolled circular coil with white breaking into the amber. (Center) Paper Mache replica of Heidi’s beagle, Shadow. Side profile of sitting beagle with perked ears. Black body with brown head and white chest. (Right) Three large pouring pitchers with braided handles, spouts, and textured body. Varying shades of blue imitating the Blue Ridge Mountains.

DSB *Deafblind* Services

Each year, DSB serves individuals with vision and hearing loss through the Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living programs. When someone experiences both vision and hearing loss, serious issues and self-doubt can arise. Many times, initial assessments are conducted with people who are skeptical of services since dealing with a dual sensory loss can be overwhelming. With the help of DSB services, individuals can feel empowered and thrive again.

DSB continues to work collaboratively with other entities serving people who are deafblind including the Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DSDHH), the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Deafblind Project, the North Carolina Deafblind Associates the Deafblind Advisory Council, the Statewide Interagency

Team and Regional Interagency Teams which are comprised of staff from DSDHH, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse, and the Exceptional Children Division of DPI. In addition, the Division of Services for the Blind is a member of the National Community of Partners (NCOP) sponsored by the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC).

Although many of the usual events with these organizations had to be cancelled due to COVID-19, we were proud to participate with in-person events through early March. Our Deafblind Coordinator

collaborated with the DPI Deafblind Project Director on the South East Regional Institute on Deafness (SERID) for a one-day virtual Zoom training.

With the help of DSB services, individuals can feel empowered and thrive again.

Perseverance with Conquering Barriers Helped Get Chris Successfully Employed

The next time you are shopping at a Marshalls department store in southeastern NC, you might see Chris Overton smiling and greeting you at the door. His Deafblind Specialist, Donna, states, “With his positive attitude and contagious smile, Chris shows that his disability does not define him, but rather drives him.”

Prior to having surgery to remove a brain tumor which caused optic atrophy and left him legally blind, he had a full-time job working in a pizza restaurant. When he came to DSB shortly after having surgery, he was eager to find work again and DSB’s VR program was available to help him in his journey to persevere and conquer his barriers to employment.

Before he could pursue employment, he had other medical issues that had to be stabilized. That is what rehabilitation is all about, persevering and conquering barriers one step at a time. Chris started working with our Independent Living Services and was referred to our Deafblind Specialist, Donna. He had been hard of hearing since elementary school and had not worn



Chris Overton standing in doorway holding cane and wearing a mask

hearing aids since. Not only has Chris dealt with the challenge of suddenly having a dual sensory loss, but also the challenge of loss of some motor skills. Donna recommended a pocket talker device that assists with amplification of conversations, a doorbell strobe and chime to alert him of visitors, and an alarm clock with bed shaker to wake him up for doctor’s appointments and, eventually, for employment.

After his health stabilized, Chris maintained a positive attitude and was motivated to become independent again. He attended the DSB Career

and Training Center’s Independent Living Week and loved it. He began to learn about braille, computer technology, orientation and mobility services, mobile devices, and daily living skills techniques related to laundry, cooking, and cleaning.

Chris was ready to move toward accomplishing his employment goal. The next persevering step presented to Chris by his VR counselor was to encourage Chris to attend the DSB’s Career and Training Center’s ABLÉ Program. Chris agreed

and graduated from a 15-week program where he flourished. This program opened a whole new world for him. During his time at the ABLÉ program, his Deafblind Specialist assisted him with the paperwork and assessment for a federal program specifically for deafblind individuals which resulted in Chris obtaining an iPhone, laptop, JAWS screen reading software, and headphones for amplification. Later Donna also worked with his VR Counselor and assisted Chris with getting bilateral hearing aids which improved his functional capabilities during his ABLÉ sessions and assisted him with obtaining and retaining a job. “The ABLÉ program gave me the confidence and motivation I needed to seek employment,” he said.

After successfully applying himself to adapting to his vision loss, Chris began receiving supported employment services.

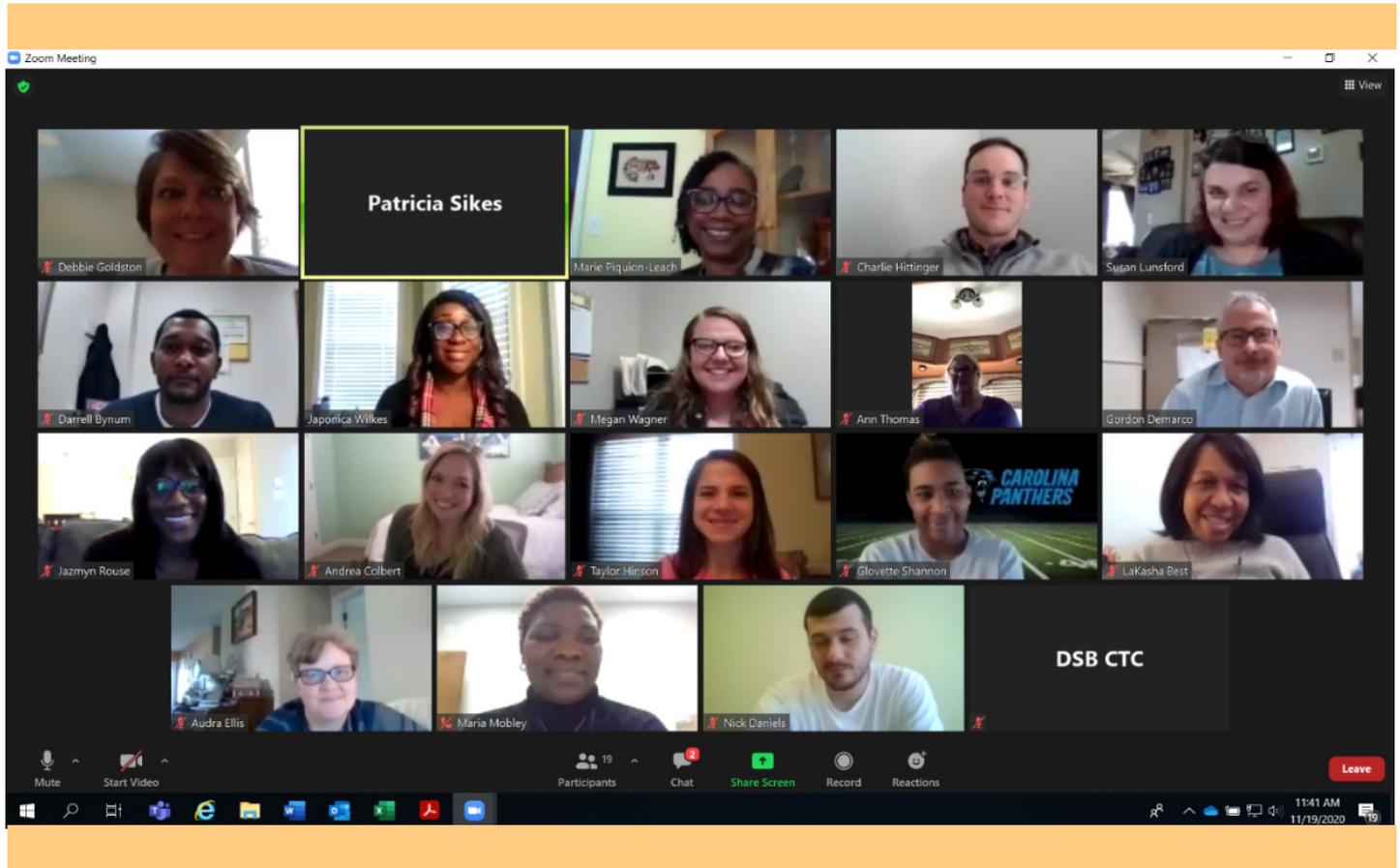
With Donna cheering him on by affirming him and reminding him of the benefits of employment for himself and his kids as well as the need to maintain a strong work ethic for job retention.

Chris reflected on when he first became blind, indicating that mentally, it was very difficult. Fortunately, with DSB stepping in and Chris conquering so many barriers when many others would have given up, he has an amazing new perspective. “I am all for inspiring and encouraging others to not give up no matter what life hands you”, he said. Perhaps the most inspirational quote from Chris after working with DSB through his journey is, “It’s not the end after darkness, keep pushing and don’t quit.” That is exactly what Chris has done. With his initiative and use of support services from DSB, he has accomplished his goals through conquering barriers.

DSB Deafblind Services Outcomes

*This year, DSB’s Deafblind Specialists provided services to **285** individuals served by our programs. Additionally, they served **37** consumers through the National Deafblind Equipment Distribution Program through the collaborative partnership with DSDHH.*

Focus on Staff Development



DSB Staff attending virtual NEST (New Employee Sensitivity Training) Via Zoom

Training Activity

July 2019- Caseload Compliance for VRC & Supervisors

August 2019- Medical Update Duke Eye Center, ILRC In-Service, Deafblind Specialist In-Service

September 2019- AT Specialist Training, NCATP AT Expo

October 2019- NCRA Conference, SERID (Southeastern Regional Institute on Deafness), NC Works Partnership Conference

November 2019- Social Worker for the Blind In-Service, NEST (New Employee Sensitivity Training)

Jan 2019- America Foundation for the Blind Leadership Conference

Feb 2020- Foundations of Customer Service Parc 2020

March 2020- 7th Disability Advocacy

April 2020- Addiction Conference

May 2020- Low Vision Patient History Online Training, Visual Acuity Training, Hand-held Magnifiers Online Training, Stand Magnifiers-Magnifying Spectacles

June 2020- NEST (New Employee Sensitivity Training), IRT (Integrated Resource Team) Online Training



Asheville District Office



Raleigh District Office



Charlotte District Office



Wilmington District Office



Fayetteville District Office



Winston-Salem District Office



Greenville District Office



*Wanda White (DLS Class Instructor),
Jessica Caswell, Kim Tyler (SWB),
Becky Aycock (SWN)*



*DSB provides multiple outreach activities
each year*

*Shawn Hatfield O&M
Specialist nominated
for Governor's Award
of Excellence*



*Jessica Caswell
and Kim Tyler*



*Sherry Baughman (DLS Class Instructor),
Jessica Caswell and Kim Tyler at Lion's VIP
Fishing Tournament in the Outer Banks*

How to *Contact* DSB

Asheville District Office:	828-251-6732/1-800-422-1881
Charlotte District Office:	704-563-4168/1-800-422-1895
Fayetteville District Office:	910-486-1582/1-800-422-1897
Greenville District Office:	252-355-9016/1-800-422-1877
Raleigh District Office:	919-527-6740/1-800-422-1871
Wilmington District Office:	910-251-5743/1-800-422-1884
Winston-Salem District Office:	336-896-2227 /1-800-422-0373
DSB Administration Office:	919-527-6700/1-866-222-1546

in Spanish 1-800-662-7030

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/dsb>



NC Division of Services for the Blind's Fisher Building and Administrative Office



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Division of Services for the Blind

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NC DSB's vocational rehabilitation program receives 78.7 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2020, the total amount of grant funds awarded were \$14,705,354. The remaining 21.3 percent of the costs, \$3,979,975, were funded by state appropriations and non-federal receipts.