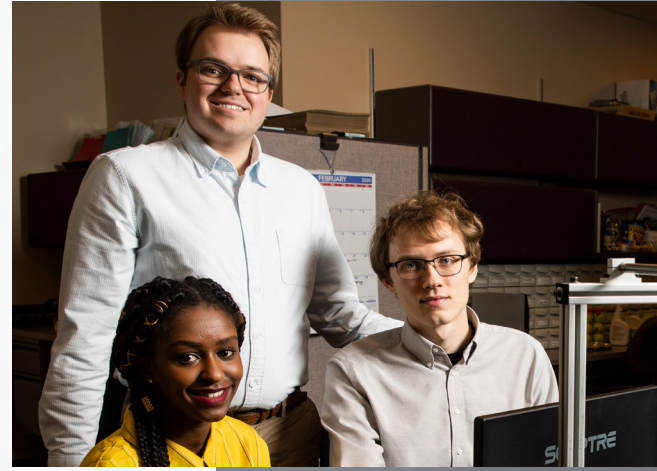


**m** **EMPLOYMENT AND  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**  
STATE SERVICES FOR THE BLIND



# 2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT

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



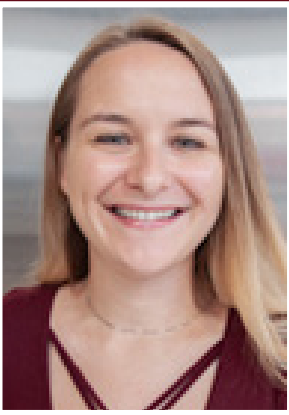
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# Letter from Natasha Jerde, SSB Director



## The Positive Power of “What We Can Do”

Through much of 2021, like so many, we at State Services for the Blind (SSB) worked to create new avenues to serve our customers as

we continued to grapple with the effects of the global pandemic. As our usual models for serving our customers continued to be disrupted, we built on our learnings from 2020 to implement new and creative strategies to carry out our mission of facilitating independence and access for Minnesotans who are blind, DeafBlind, visually impaired or who have a print related disability. Forced to think creatively, and to challenge old assumptions, we embraced the power of “what we can do!”

Even as we recognize and even celebrate the successes of 2021, we acknowledge that for very many, this was another difficult year. We all know the hardships, stress, and isolation people have gone through and are still going through. Staff and customers have experienced great loss - loss of loved ones and jobs. It was our commitment at SSB that we would still be there. We cannot solve everything, but what we could do, we would do.

## Serving Customers

What we could do was advocate to get back into peoples’ homes as quickly and safely as possible. As a result, we were one of the first state agencies within Minnesota to be able to implement our comprehensive plan for in-person services. From April of 2021 through the end of the year, we conducted over 700 in-person visits between our Senior Services and Workforce Development units. At those visits, we consulted on job accommodations, provided adjustment to blindness training, delivered and set up low vision aids and assistive technology, and most importantly, just had conversations with people to find out how they were doing.

As it has for everyone, the pandemic has had a tremendous impact in the lives of our customers. Even as our customers have demonstrated resiliency in the face of new challenges, our own staff have stepped up to find innovative ways to provide needed resources and support.

## A Changing Employment Landscape

Christine Malley is one of our customers who comes to mind when I think about our experiences in the last year. Christine had been out of work for quite a while. She got an internship with United Health Group, an employer we have close connections with. This was supposed to be onsite; however, the Pandemic hit, and UHG had to scramble to make it a remote position. There were all kinds of technology issues but Christine worked closely with a UHG assistive technologist named JP. JP also happens to be blind and was very familiar with the technology Christine uses. Together they got it figured out. UHG stretched out the internship as long as they could but because of budget issues due to covid, they were unable to bring Christine on permanently. Having just had a solid four months of work, Christine was energized and jumped into her job search. She landed a Connect 700 position with the State of Minnesota. SSB assistive technologist John Hess attended new employee training with her to help get everything working. He also taught her some additional things she needed to use the IT systems. Christine was closed successfully July of this year.

Even as many Minnesotans have faced serious setbacks in the past year, I’ve continued to be inspired by people like Christine who were spurred on by those setbacks to rise to the next level. At the beginning of the pandemic, along with the rest of the world, we were confronted by what we could no longer do; we couldn’t meet with customers, couldn’t gather at the office, couldn’t have our volunteers in our studios transcribing books. But, we quickly pivoted to the mindset of “What we can do!”

“What we can do” has been our guiding principle ever since and has shaped our successes in 2021. What follows are some further examples.

## Serving Small Business Owners

What we could do is support our Business Enterprise Program (BEP) operators. We were one of the first states in the country to fully disburse over \$300,000 in Federal Restoration and Relief funds to our operators. In addition, the Elected Committee of the BEP voted to provide a one-time vacation payout of \$5000 to each operator out of the Federal Commission fund. The BEP purchased \$1.8 million dollars in new vending machines. This will allow the program to update and replace almost 30% of our total vending machine inventory – around 400 machines. All the old vending machines we would be replacing are obsolete with replacement parts no longer being

manufactured. We believe this investment will put the program in the best position possible to meet the needs of our customers as our businesses start to return to a more normal business environment.

### **Serving Students**

What we could do is come up with creative ways for students to still get paid work experiences. For the past two summers, we established a virtual work based learning experienced program. SSB hired peer educators, a marketing and outreach associate, and a student literacy associate. Both summers, there were students whose very first job was working with us. All of our students were able to work remotely, which eliminated the transportation barriers. Having youth voices at the center of our programs is essential for us to continue to provide the best experience and services possible.

### **Serving Seniors**

What we could do is be there for the seniors we serve, even when we could not enter into their homes. Our SSU team made thousands of phone calls. Many of those calls were just to check in and see how people were doing. Even with the difficult constraints of the pandemic, this team still is #2 in the country for number of seniors served. And, of course, while we can put a data point next to the number of seniors served, what's immeasurable is the impact of our services in the lives of Minnesota seniors. Nothing makes that more clear to me than this email shared with me from one of our Senior Services Specialists:

"One of my recent visits was with a 90-year old sweet lady. Her husband of 70 years passed away about a year & a half ago. Of course, she is still greatly grieving. He had dementia the last 2 years of his life, and my client kept her promise to him and cared for him at home. They had a 70 year anniversary party a couple of months before he died. Every year of their marriage, they dressed up in 2nd hand wedding clothes. This year, he asked her what they were doing. She said getting married, and he said they had been married for a long time already. Their kids played the song "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," and he stood up and asked her, clear as a bell, to dance. That was their last dance together. She said that he had written her 200 love letters when they were dating. She couldn't see to read them for many years and that was her goal. I set her up with a CCTV, and well, she read several of the letters to me. Her gratitude was through the roof. I love my job and feel privileged for the opportunity to work with our seniors every day."

### **Serving Minnesota's Diverse Communities**

What we could do was find creative ways to provide access to print to Minnesotans who speak languages other than English. Our audio services team has been working to partner with Minnesota authors to record their books in a accessible digital audio format. Now, the first accessible title in the Somali language is available through the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled. We were proud to partner with author Hudda Ibrahim who recorded the Somali and English versions of her children's book What Color is My Hijab.

What we could do was help preserve native languages in accessible formats. Ojibwe and Dakota are important indigenous languages within our state and we are proud to have produced the first Ojibwe and Dakota titles in an accessible digital audio format. We partnered with Dr. Anton Treuer and the Bemidji State American Indian Resource Center to produce an accessible version of the Oshkaabewis Native Journal. In the fall, we were honored to have Minnesota's Poet Laureate, Gwen Nell Westerman record Follow the Blackbirds a poetry collection in English and Dakota. Both of these titles, are also now available nationally through the Braille an Audio Reading Download (BARD) service of NLS.

### **Bringing Forward the Positive Power of "What We Can Do"**

The restrictions imposed by the global pandemic in 2020 and 2021 dramatically disrupted our normal patterns of operation. We learned quickly to turn from thinking about what we could no longer do and to ask the question instead, "What can we do?" It's this creative, proactive, innovative mindset that we bring forward with us into 2022. The world is changing again – as this year begins we are experiencing a welcome reduction in cases of COVID-19. As we expand our options for serving our customers we do so remembering the lessons of creativity, flexibility, and adaptation that we learned over the past two years. Our priority in the year ahead is to commit to do all we can do in order to build back from the difficulties of the last two years with equity and opportunity for all Minnesotans.

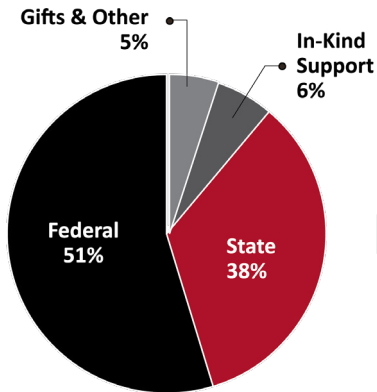


Natasha Jerde, SSB Director

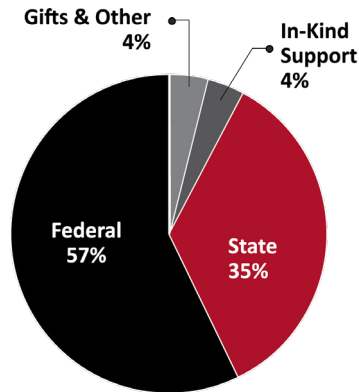
# SSB FINANCIALS

## SSB Funding Streams

FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2020

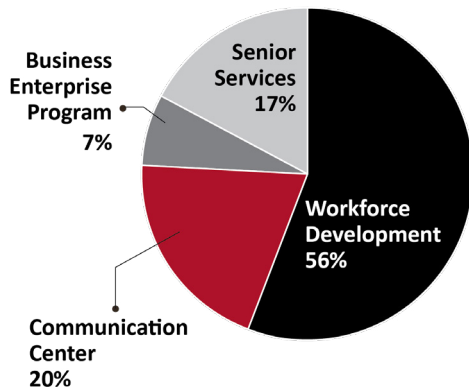


FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2021

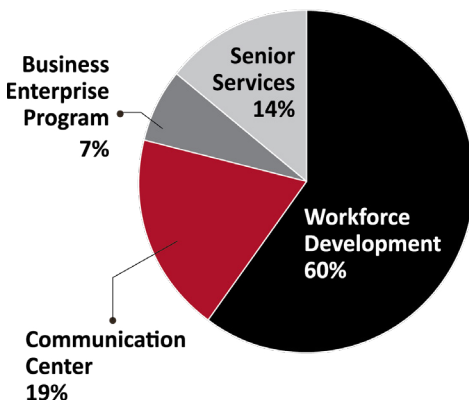


## SSB Funding Distribution

FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2020



FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2021



## SSB Expenditures

FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 2020 AND 2021

Federal Funds	FFY 2020	FFY 2021
Basic VR	\$7,438,893	\$8,503,904
Supported Employment	\$(21,673)	\$17,192
Independent Living	\$74,141	\$27,038
IL-Older Blind	\$702,575	\$1,371,035
Special Education Agreement	\$623,394	\$696,126
<b>Total Federal Funds</b>	<b>\$8,817,330</b>	<b>\$10,615,295</b>
<b>Total State Funds</b>	<b>\$6,543,014</b>	<b>\$6,538,004</b>
Other Funds		
Gifts/Bequests	\$260,908	\$166,491
Dept. of Commerce - Telecommunications Access	\$96,478	\$67,719
Aging Eyes	\$121,190	\$599,322
Communication Center	\$13,800	-
Business Enterprises	\$440,129	\$495,126
<b>Total Other Funds</b>	<b>\$932,506</b>	<b>\$788,657</b>
In-Kind Support		
<b>From Volunteers</b>	<b>\$1,020,000</b>	<b>\$652,000</b>
<b>Total All Funds</b>	<b>\$17,312,849</b>	<b>\$18,593,955</b>

# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

## By the Numbers

### SFY 2020

**1,311 Customers Served**

81 who received employment outcome

\$562 Average weekly salary of all closed as employed

### SFY 2021

**827 Customers Served**

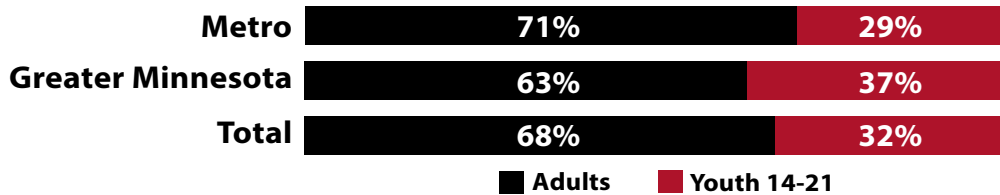
62 who received employment outcome

\$615 Average weekly salary of all closed as employed

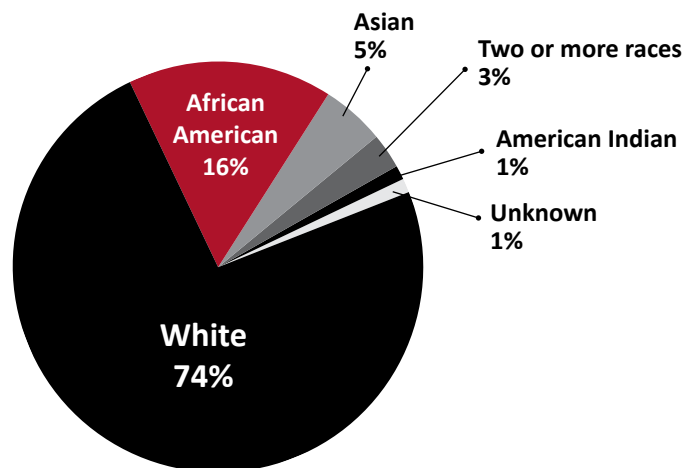
### Achieving Equity

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

### Preparing Adults & Youth for Work in all Regions of the State



### Serving Minnesota's Diverse Population



# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

## By the Numbers

### Vision Impairments of Customers Served



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

### Successful Closures for Workforce Development Customers Exiting in FFY2020-21



**Successful Closures 2020 – 81**

**Successful Closures 2021 – 66**



## Meet Levi Welsch

Like many teenagers, Levi Welsch wanted a job in order to earn some money and buy things he wanted. Levi's passion is music, and his summer job would help him pay for musical equipment on his own. But besides the cash, he thought the prospect of getting a job and working was exciting.

Welsch worked as an intern at the front desk of SSB's Communication Center over the summer of 2019. He learned about the internship opportunity from vocational rehabilitation counselor Shane DeSantis. "Shane calls me to check in and see how I'm doing," he said, "and he lets me know about things I could try."

"I interviewed for the job, and then I went to camp for a week. I didn't know if I had gotten it. When I found out that I got the job, I celebrated!"

The internship gave Welsch a close-up view of services offered at SSB. "I learned a lot about all the resources, through all the people that came in who needed something," he said. "I didn't know about all the things SSB does before I had that job."

Welsch has learned new skills and faced new challenges since being diagnosed with a form of retina pigmentosa in 2017. "It's been hard at times," his mom Delise said. "Levi was pretty angry, and we spent a lot of time going to specialists."

One thing he found hard at first was learning to use a white cane. Welsch said the cane is helpful, especially at night or in low light; but using it was embarrassing to him at first. Friends at church helped him get past that embarrassment. "They were accepting, and didn't single me out. That made a big difference."

Welsch's summer job taught him customer service skills. "You always have to be polite, and know how to transfer calls to the right person," he remembered. In addition, there were the other responsibilities that come with a job. "I had to get up really early, so I had to adjust my sleep schedule. In the mornings my



Levi Welsch

parents dropped me off at their work, and I took the bus to SSB. That was good for me too."

In 2018 Welsch began attending the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind (MSAB) in Faribault.

"I like the principles of the school," he said, "like the principle that blind people are equal."

Delise agrees that MSAB has been a good fit. "You don't have to fight for accommodations," she said, "and they have sports like goalball, wrestling, and beep baseball, which are great for Levi."

When he isn't studying or playing sports, Welsch can be found working on his music. He's proud that he can use equipment he bought with his own hard-earned money.

Looking back at the past couple of years, and remembering his own frustration, Welsch offered some advice to students going through similar struggles. "Don't be stubborn, like I was," he said. "You've just got to decide to learn things."

"I'm learning skills, and I know that SSB has my back."

### Meet Roger Rutten

An impact can be measured in many ways when serving vision-impaired people in their older years. One person may get a simple device and find that it creates a huge impact. Another may receive multiple services but believe they can't learn new things, or they aren't motivated. Age and disabilities also get in the way of learning. Two things that always matter, though, are motivation and attitude.

SSB consumer Roger Rutten embodies that positive attitude and motivation and, as a result, represents the kind of impact that's possible through the program. Before he lost his vision in 2010, Rutten worked as an accountant for a large agriculture services company. When discussing the issues with his eye doctor he asked, "How can I keep working?" Though surprised by his sureness, the doctor helped connect Rutten with SSB's Workforce Development Unit (WDU). He worked with rehabilitation counselor and assistive technology supervisor Lindsey Hanson to develop a plan and returned to work after a short time.

Technology, combined with a love of learning, made the difference for Rutten. When he started working many years ago, he said, all he had was an adding machine and calculator. But thanks to WDU and the advent of effective assistive technology software, he was able to work for four more years before he was ready to retire.

Rutten attends a senior vision loss support group near his home in Alexandria. Last year, Senior Services Unit (SSU) technology specialist Byron Lee attended the group to discuss the technology available to people who are visually impaired. Rutten felt enlightened and enthusiastic about the possibilities. Lee conducted a technology assessment, recommended software and a computer, and helped Rutten get everything set up and ready to use. Though he never saw himself with a personal communication device, he is now the proud owner of an iPhone. He works with Lee to discover its

accessibility features and kicked off his use by surprising his brother with a text message. His brother replied: "Welcome to the 21st century!"

But Rutten didn't stop at technology.

Through Lauren Eliason, his counselor, he has begun working with a trainer and is learning to travel independently using a white cane. He completed an Adjustment to Blindness class, taught by training coordinator Charlene Guggisberg. In the class, seniors learn non-sighted techniques to manage money, clean house, cook, organize their home, and manage medications; and in Rutten's case, decorate for the holidays and prepare baked goods for his condo's regular get-together.

Perhaps the biggest surprise came when Rutten decided to tackle Braille. When SSU staff introduce the idea to seniors with significant vision loss, they often imagine it will be too hard and opt to stick with audio reading sources. But Rutten has worked with Guggisberg for several months and has advanced to learning contracted Braille.

While Rutten's story illustrates the work of SSU, he is only one of more than 4,000 seniors served this year. Each senior approaches their vision rehabilitation process and measures success in their own way. What sets Rutten apart is his willingness to try something new, and his motivation to stick with an often difficult and frustrating process. When asked what he would tell someone new to severe vision loss and reluctant to begin training, Rutten says: "You will never know unless you try."



Roger Rutten

## Meet Somali Adult Literacy Training

A collaboration born of necessity helps SSB become more inclusive, and makes a genuine impact in the lives of Minnesotans new to our state.

Somali Adult Literacy Training (SALT) is a program of Arrive Ministries, a faith-based organization headquartered in the Minneapolis suburb of Richfield. Arrive Ministries began in 1988 to address the needs of refugees coming to Minnesota. Since then the organization has resettled more than 11,000 refugees, from more than 50 different countries and more than 120 language groups.

Arrive Ministries' website explains: "Our Somali neighbors have escaped civil war violence and extreme hardship in refugee camps. Now they are learning English, how to survive Minnesota weather, and to thrive in our economy. Teams of teachers and tutors meet at multiple locations in the Twin Cities metro area and greater Minnesota."

"Our work with SALT has become a good partnership," said SSB vocational rehabilitation counselor Meredith Larson. "Initially I got a call from one of their tutors who said they had a client with visual impairment. The two of us visited the client at home, then met for coffee to discuss what each of our organizations has to offer. So now together we're filling a gap, expanding access to English literacy."

"We had a client up in Willmar, a woman in her 50s, who knew no English. I worked with her on basic home skills," said SSB training coordinator Charlene Guggisberg. "We knew she was isolated, and in order for her to go further with training would need to learn more English. I contacted the adult literacy teachers in Willmar and they referred me to Nathan Scheele, the SALT coordinator in Willmar. Nathan and I met for coffee, and I explained the services we offer."

In April 2019 Guggisberg teamed up with SSB audio quality coordinator Jeff Behl on an early-stage audio cartridge for visually impaired people. Larson contacted a former SSB client who speaks Somali, and the group recorded translations of key words and phrases.

"The cartridge translates basic words and phrases into English by a native Somali speaker," Behl said. "Our translator makes valuable contributions and suggestions



for improvement. For example, when there is no direct equivalent for an English word in Somali, the translator explains this and provides the closest equivalent in Arabic. It's not unusual to find Arabic substitutes in the Somali language, so this happens fairly frequently. She does more than simply translate the word; she explains the context between the two cultures and three languages."

"She's a delightful young woman, and teaching comes naturally to her. As of February she's come in to record at SSB three times as of this writing. We've compiled more than twenty-six minutes of translated words and phrases. Suggestions for topics and words come from the SALT literacy teacher. It's truly a collaboration born of necessity, and with no road map to follow."

With this support the Willmar client quickly advanced from one to two training sessions a week, and then to using Braille alphabet and numbers flashcards.

"One of the best things about this is that we can expand and find other people and organizations to help us." Guggisberg said. "Our client told me, 'I want to be like you; I want to walk out of my apartment.' And she got the confidence to go out into the world and interact. For her, that's a big step."

"What began as a one-time experiment for one person has drawn enthusiastic interest from other literacy teachers," said Behl. "We've supplied digital audio cartridges to three individuals thus far. The project is still in its infancy, but we've been heartened by the positive responses it's received and we hope it continues to grow."

"We hope to keep working with SALT to provide these services to clients across the state," Guiggisberg added. "If we take our time and reach out to people in the community, we can work collaboratively on projects and make a greater impact."

To learn more about SALT, please visit [arriveministries.org](http://arriveministries.org).



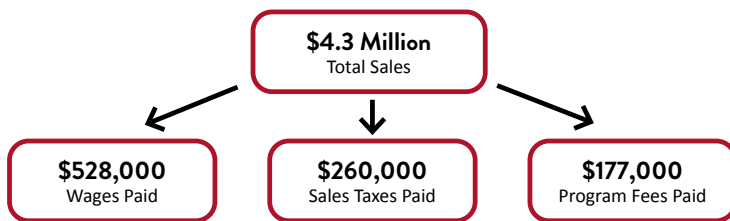
# BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM

## By the Numbers

### BY THE NUMBERS FFY 2019-2020

- 27 business operators served
- 36 individuals employed by BEP operators
- 27 businesses in 150 locations in 46 cities across the state
- \$34,451 Average Net Profit

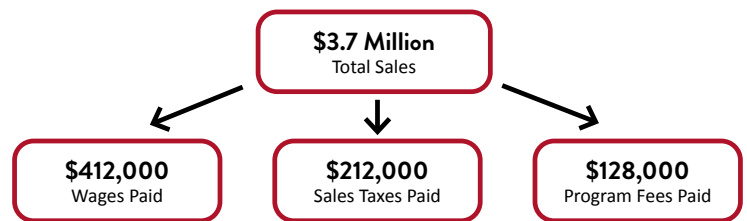
Contributed \$950,000  
to Minnesota's Economy



### BY THE NUMBERS FFY 2020-2021

- 26 business operators served
- 28 individuals employed by BEP operators
- 26 businesses in 145 locations in 46 cities across the state
- \$42,330 Average Net Profit

Contributed \$750,000  
to Minnesota's Economy



## BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM Profile

### Meet Tim Flaata

The biggest challenge in Tim Flaata's business is actually a blessing in disguise – keeping his vending machines stocked. "Sometimes I can't keep up with the demand," he chuckled. "You fill a machine, you turn around, and it needs to be filled again. But that's a problem worth having when you're running a business and working to maximize profits."

Flaata is a Business Enterprises Program (BEP) vending business owner, operating more than 70 vending machines at the Minnesota Correctional Facility (MCF) campus in Faribault. This is the largest MCF location in the Minnesota Department of Corrections system, and it provides Flaata a captive audience as customers.

Flaata has had Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) since birth. Despite his eyesight getting progressively worse over his lifetime, it hasn't affected his spirit or his drive. "I know there are people out there with circumstances worse than mine," he said. "I think

you need to make the best of your own situation, and I try to do that when I get up each morning. I could choose to sit at home and not work, but that's not me and it would not make me happy."



Tim Flaata

The BEP provides vending business opportunities on state and federal property for qualified, legally blind individuals. BEP director John Hulet believes Flaata epitomizes what the program is all about. "Tim is an outstanding business owner," Hulet said. "He shows up every day with a positive attitude, he's dedicated and reliable, and he genuinely cares about the customers he serves. He's taking advantage of the unique opportunity this program

provides and does everything he can to make the most of it.”

As an operator in the BEP for more than a year, Flaata is grateful for an opportunity to work hard and be his own boss. “Working in the BEP lets me control my own destiny in the business world,” he said. “I have the freedom to make decisions that affect my livelihood, and to implement creative ideas to tackle the demands of a successful vending business. I am very appreciative of the opportunity the BEP has provided for me, and I look forward to going to work each day.”

While Flaata has worked many different jobs over his career, he’s gotten the most enjoyment as a business owner. He got the bug at age eleven when he started out as a paperboy in St. James. “That was my first job,” he said. “I was responsible for paying for the product, delivering the product on time, and collecting payment for the product. I learned quickly the importance of organizing my time and providing great customer service.”

“I also shoveled snow and mowed lawns,” Flaata continued. “There’s a special satisfaction you get when working for yourself.”

Flaata’s entrepreneurial spirit continued after high school. After working at a restaurant and grocery store, he became the owner-operator of his family’s appliance sale and repair business. “I learned a lot about operating a business when I took it over: how to manage inventory, record-keeping, sales strategies, and maximizing productivity, just to name a few,” he said. “There were many lean years, and I had to work odd jobs to keep the business afloat, but I thoroughly enjoyed it.” Flaata also became a volunteer fire fighter during this time; he served for more than 30 years and advanced to the rank of Assistant Chief.

As his eyesight continued to diminish, Flaata gave up driving in his early thirties. Shortly thereafter he sold the family business and started a maintenance job at a nursing home. “I enjoyed running the business,” Flaata said, “but I needed more stability in my life at that time. I was married, and I wanted

to provide for my family and spend more time with them. A part-time opportunity at the nursing home turned into a full-time one with benefits.” He continued with this position until moving to Owatonna in 2016.

Flaata learned about the BEP through his sister, who is also a BEP operator. He never felt the timing was right to consider it a viable option and thought he would need to relocate to get an opportunity. “Though I knew the BEP would be an interesting prospect, I also knew there would be training,” he said. “At that time training required several months and had to be completed in St. Paul. I couldn’t take time off from work, so I kept doing what I was doing.”

That changed in 2016. Flaata’s sister told him the BEP had a business opening in Faribault, and that most of the training could be completed on-line and at the MCF. “When John and my counselor met with me and explained everything, I became very excited,” Flaata said. “My kids were grown up, and I was ready to get back to running my own business. I couldn’t wait to get started.”

“The BEP’s training has been revised over the years to make it more individualized and can be completed at a pace the student is comfortable with,” said Hulet. “While some of the training is conducted in St. Paul, many of the tasks can be completed on-line wherever the student has access to a computer. Tim was really motivated: he completed his training as fast as we had anyone go through it, and he did it while working full-time with the outgoing business owner.”

Flaata hopes to continue operating his business until he decides to retire. He works with his wife Val, and they spend long hours together each week fulfilling the obligations of a vending business owner. “The work is hard but rewarding. Val keeps asking me if I’m ever going to take a vacation,” Flaata laughed. “I keep telling her someday we will - but right now we have machines to fill.”

To learn more about the BEP, contact John Hulet at 651-539-2284 or [john.hulet@state.mn.us](mailto:john.hulet@state.mn.us).



# SENIOR SERVICES

## By the Numbers



SFY 2020

# 3,823

## CLIENTS SERVED BY THE SENIOR SERVICES UNIT

SFY 2021

# 2,872

## CLIENTS SERVED BY THE SENIOR SERVICES UNIT

Providing Services to Help Seniors Choose Where to Live

Private residence (house or apartment)	2,486
Senior Living Retirement Community	664
Assisted Living Facility	399
Independent Living (ages 18-54)	91
Nursing Home/ Long-term Care facility	179
Homeless	4

Private residence (house or apartment)	1,947
Senior Living Retirement Community	439
Assisted Living Facility	306
Independent Living (ages 18-54)	76
Nursing Home/ Long-term Care facility	101
Homeless	3

## Meet Dallas Fogg

Dallas Fogg, electrical engineer and long-time SSB volunteer, had little reason to expect that one day he would directly benefit from his volunteer efforts.

Fogg, who worked for many years as an electrical engineer with Unisys, has been a volunteer in SSB's Engineering Unit for 27 years. He comes in each week to clean and repair the digital talking book players (DTBs) that have been returned by customers.

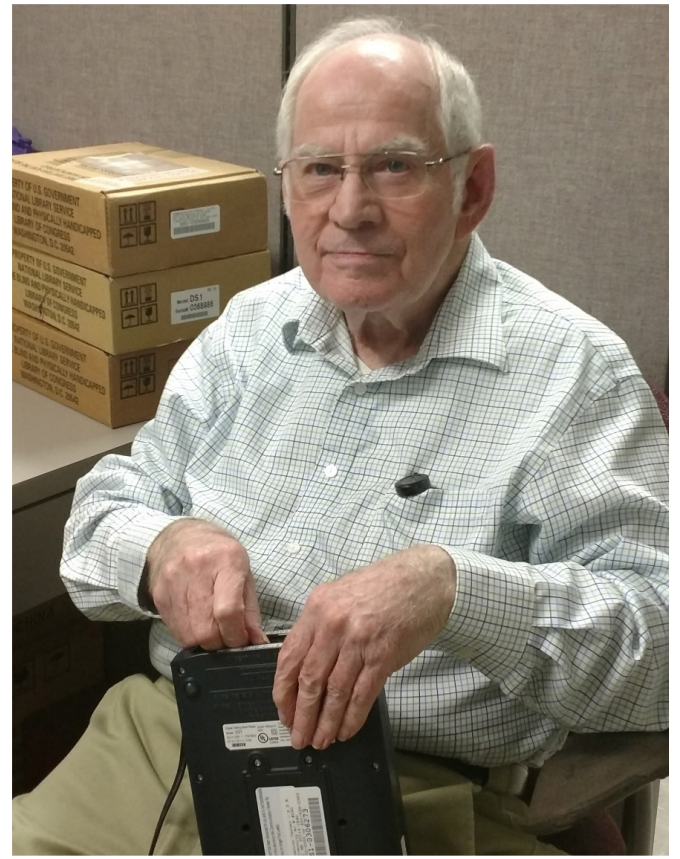
About a year ago, Fogg took a fall in his home and injured his neck. He required surgery and was unable to move his head for several months. This meant he couldn't read - something he loves to do.

One group served by SSB is made up of people temporarily unable to read due to a physical problem: those who cannot hold a book or turn its pages. Fogg was eligible for these services. His fellow volunteer John Grape delivered a DTB and a selection of books. Later, Fogg worked with Communication Center Librarian Dan Gausman to request additional titles from The Minnesota Braille and Talking Book Library in Faribault.

"The DTB worked perfectly, with its battery giving me 29 hours of use," said Fogg, citing a tech requirement he is all too familiar with from years of repair work. Fogg used the player between daily rehabilitation sessions, as well as at night when he didn't get much sleep. "The nights got very long," he said. "I would put on a book and pass the night away."

"Even after the repair work I did on the DTBs, I didn't have a complete understanding of all of its features," Fogg said. He and Grape figured out how to use those features; they had trouble getting to a second book at first, but in true engineering fashion the two figured it out and made it work.

Happily, Fogg is now back with SSB cleaning and repairing machines.



Dallas Fogg

# COMMUNICATION CENTER

## By the Numbers

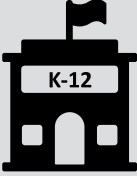


### Communication Center Data: Audio Services, Radio Talking Book, Engineering and Braille



Item	2020	2021
Number of volunteers	325	310
Access to RTB stream, dial-In News, Newsline	443,155	425,614
Talking book players, radios and accessories disbursed	5,182	4,174
Audio books uploaded to BARD	139	80
Transcribed pages distributed to readers	121,214	90,420
Equipment Repaired	1,187	1,149

\*All figures are from the CCSS Database for January 1 to December 31, 2020/2021

### Braille Services provided to K-12 Minnesota Students in 2020

2020	2021
<p><b>Braille</b></p> <p>46 Minnesota students served</p> 	<p><b>Braille</b></p> <p>44 Minnesota students served</p>
<p><b>Braille Titles - 649 total</b></p> <p>137 Purchased from other states</p> <p>190 Newly transcribed by CC</p> <p>322 Reproduced and re-used by CC</p> 	<p><b>Braille Titles - 627 total</b></p> <p>134 Purchased from other states</p> <p>188 Newly transcribed by CC</p> <p>305 Reproduced and re-used by CC</p>
<p><b>Braille Pages - 211,157 total</b></p> <p>144,510 Purchased from other states</p> <p>10,587 Newly transcribed by CC</p> <p>56,060 Reproduced and re-used by CC</p> 	<p><b>Braille Pages - 196,759 total</b></p> <p>133,807 Purchased from other states</p> <p>11,105 Newly transcribed by CC</p> <p>51,847 Reproduced and re-used by CC</p>

## Meet Mona Minkara

SSB's Workforce Services team helps blind, DeafBlind, and visually-impaired customers to find jobs. And they also serve individuals who may need additional training or resources to advance their careers.

Mona Minkara holds a doctorate in computational chemistry and accepted a post-doctoral position at the University of Minnesota several years ago. She reached out to SSB when she realized her work would be strengthened if she could sharpen her skills related to blindness. SSB connected her with several training opportunities, including braille.

"My parents are immigrants from Lebanon, and I grew up in the South Shore of Massachusetts," she said. "I graduated from Wellesley College, got my doctorate from the University of Florida, and then got an opportunity for post-doctoral work at the U of M. I couldn't say no!"

Currently Minkara is a computational chemistry researcher in the Department of Bioengineering at Northeastern University in Boston. "Computational chemistry uses computers to solve chemical problems," she explained. "We construct computer simulations of molecules to see what effect they may have in different environments."

"I love science and gained a great deal of research-lab experience as an undergrad. Going into this field as a person with a visual impairment was very challenging; I really had to work at it. Each day provided a new challenge and required creative solutions. I've used all sorts of things: Play-Doh, pipe cleaners, and plotting things mathematically."

In 2019 Minkara was one of three winners of the prestigious Holman Prize for "legally blind individuals with a penchant for exploration." She used the prize money to create a video series, "Planes, Trains, and Canes," that shows how she navigates public transit in London, Johannesburg, Istanbul, Singapore and Tokyo. "I was independent; I didn't have someone with me all the time except for the videographer,"



Mona Minkara

she recalled. "But I believe I was able to plant some seeds and enable people to rethink their attitudes toward people with visual impairment."

Besides her research career and her video project, Minkara also performs improvisational comedy. "It allows me to relay a deep message and create an impact, using comedy to help discuss demanding situations," she said.

Recently Minkara took part in SSB's Career Expo as a role model for high school and college students. "The goal of my academic career is to carve a path for future blind scientists, so that the unique skills and perspectives of the blind community are embraced by the scientific world," she said. "I'm infinitely grateful to those who've uplifted me, and I aspire to pass that generosity forward."

"If the opportunity comes up to share with someone something that I wish had been shared with me, then I will. You always need to add to your toolkit."

Minkara's video series can be found on the YouTube channel "Planes, Trains, and Canes."



### Meet Joni Luxem – Radio Talking Book volunteer

For more than thirty years Joni Luxem has reached out to SSB’s customers, both over the Radio Talking Book airwaves and via the NFB Newsline phone-in service. Her efforts have created an impact, not only for listeners but in her own life.

In September 2019 Joni received thanks and recognition from the American Council of the Blind of Minnesota (ACB-MN) for her years of recording shopping advertisements for SSB’s Dial-In News service. After SSB phased out Dial-In News in late 2019, Joni continues to record the supermarket and department store flyers for broadcast on NFB Newsline. In addition, she presents RTB’s “At Home” lifestyle program each Wednesday at 1:00 p.m. Central time.

Joni grew up in Minneapolis, graduated from Totino Grace High School in Fridley, and got a degree in education and communications at the University of Minnesota. After graduation she pursued a career as a flight attendant for North Central Airlines (now Delta). “Forty-one years later, I’m still at it,” she said. “It’s enjoyable. I love the variety of people I encounter, not only passengers, but members of the flight crews. It keeps my world large.”

“I was looking for a volunteer opportunity in the fall of 1989. I love to read, and I saw a blurb in the Star Tribune that SSB was looking for volunteers.”

“Joni told me she’d seen this volunteer opportunity, and had decided to go for it,” recalled her husband Dennis. “Joni hates to drive in the snow. But despite that she drove to the studio each winter Friday to record the ads – and she never missed once.”

After a couple of years, it became possible for Joni to

record the ads from her home in suburban Washington County. “I’m a passionate shopper – I read all of the ads thoroughly, and I like to do a really good job,” she said. “I love to be able to relay this information to others, so they can go out and save on their own purchases.”



Joni Luxem

Joni added the “At Home” program in 1995. “That’s the highlight of my week, doing that program,” she said. “It gives me a chance to talk about something I’m passionate about, to do what I love to do. I get to read things that I’d never gotten to read before, and I’ve learned about so many things. When I finish a broadcast, I always ask Dennis, ‘Did you know this? Were you aware of that?’ It keeps my world open.”

“We went to a 25-year recognition event for SSB,” Dennis recalled. “We walked up to the table and Joni said, ‘Here’s two seats – let’s sit here.’ Instantly everyone at the table turned our way and said, ‘You’re Joni Luxem! You talk so much slower in person.’”

“The people I read to are like family to me,” Joni said. “I can picture them on the other end, and it’s like I’m speaking directly with them. And I learn so much – it gives so much back to me.”



## Meet the University of St. Thomas Engineering Team

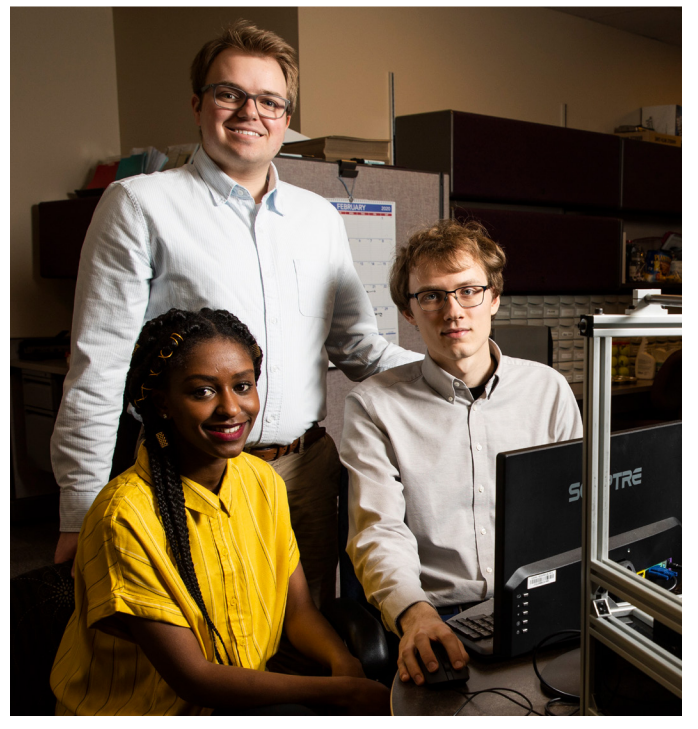
One of SSB's services is the transcription of books and document in Braille. When a book is transcribed, tactile diagrams are created to convey non-textual information through touch. Many of the thermoformed diagrams are created by hand and are time-consuming to produce. Creating copies of the completed diagrams is similarly time-consuming and requires the use of the original. SSB has archived more than 40 thousand tactile diagrams, which are vulnerable to flood, fire, and other damage

In 2018, as a senior project, a team of engineering students from St. Paul's University of St. Thomas devised a Tactile Diagram Scanner. The project's goal was to save digital replicas of SSB's tactile diagrams; thus preserving tens of thousands of images and countless hours of by-hand creation. Saving digital versions protects the originals from damage, and more easily shares the images with teachers and students across the country.

The Tactile Digital Scanner takes multiple pictures of the diagram at different angles to accurately capture the details of the image. It then uses a method called photogrammetry to "stitch" the images together and create a digital 3D model. The use of photogrammetry is well-established for topographic mapping and surveying, but in recent years has also been applied in architecture, industry, engineering, forensics, medicine, geology, and many others.

The project's design requirements included replicating at least 40,000 diagrams up to 11.5 x 11 inches within a resolution of 0.25 mm, without damaging the originals.

The Tactile Digital Scanner is a tangible example of new ideas put to work, and our partnership with these student engineers represents a new and creative way to come together and find new ideas.



University of St. Thomas Engineering Team

# 2020 VOLUNTEER MILESTONES

## Meet Our Multi-Talented Volunteers

We appreciate each of our volunteers. Here are those who achieved a milestone in 2020:

### 5-Year Volunteers

- Bennett, Maggie
- Dierenfeld, David
- Dougherty, Caitlin
- Ellison, Dave
- Goolsby, Susan
- Griffith, Steven
- Hufnagel, Charles
- Johnson, Carol
- Kipp, Dane
- Kregel, James
- Muir, Patricia
- Mullins, Therese
- Murray, (Margaret) Therese
- Myrvik, Karen
- Pierson, Katie
- Sauer, Deborah
- Setala, Jane
- Tacheny, Mary
- Von Bank, Sr. Sue
- Warren, Martin
- Watson, Lynn
- Young, Laura

### 10-Year Volunteers

- Barash, Judith
- Barsness, Jeanette
- Borgelt, Brad
- Brutlag, Gwen
- Coy, Kenneth
- Evans, Esme
- Faber, Roger
- Fredrickson, Ann
- Gaven, Mary

- Goman, Tracy
- Goodner, James
- Hall, Mary
- Jones, Sam
- Kelly, Beth
- Kelly, Daniel
- LaFleur, Michael
- Lee, Don
- Matzer, Fred
- Mikkelson, Carol
- Neely, Lannois
- Pinnow, Eleni
- Rosenbaum, Phil
- Shubitz, Lynn
- Stevens, Robert
- Wallace, Julia
- Whitney, Desmond
- Whitney, Desmond
- Wyrowski, Mary Clare

### 15-Year Volunteers

- Anderson, Gary
- Bakke, Stephen
- Bayer, Nancy
- Clark, Kenneth
- Depman, Barbara
- Hietala, Clarice
- Holden, John
- Holden, Nancy
- Lewis, Carol
- Mak, Barbara
- Malver, Karen
- Schmidt, John
- Sindelir, Bonita
- Swenby, Bonnie
- Wendland, Carmen

### 20-Year Volunteers

- Anderson, Billie
- Anderson, Duayne
- Bell, Andrea
- Bloomer, Barbara
- Bolton, Julie
- Brand, Lynn
- Brand, Tim
- Carlenberg, Ron
- Christenson, Mary
- Collins Wayne, Joanne
- Contos, Annette
- Drake, Thomas
- Ghylin, Curtis
- Gorman, Paul
- Grant, Joseph
- Gulbranson, Geraldine
- Hefty, Connie
- Hunt, Desta
- Hunt, Tim
- Larrivy, Jean
- Lystig, Mark
- Pelletier, Rene
- Piehl, Kathy
- Reiten, Kirk
- Schauland, Mabel
- Schendel, Ward
- Slinde, Ken
- Tanner, David
- Vos, Mary
- Wicklund, Clifford
- Woodward, Judy
- Woolson, Loren

### 25-Year Volunteers

- Bean, Diane
- Empson, Robb
- Goese, Linda
- Jones, Karen
- Lewis, Carol
- Mackenzie, Nancy
- Sloan, Judy
- Thompson, Karen
- Volkmuth, Charlotte

### 30-Year Volunteers

- Burchett, Beverly
- Ritter, Janis
- Sell, Betsy

### 35-Year Volunteers

- Goldner, Barbara

### 45-Year Volunteers

- Friedman, Audrey

## Meet Our Multi-Talented Volunteers

We appreciate each of our volunteers. Here are those who achieved a milestone in 2021:

### 5-Year Volunteers

- Adams, Maxine
- Allen, Joe
- Baron, Amy
- Blaalid, Susie
- Kipka, Sr. Rita Anne
- Klecan, Darci
- Kraus, Virginia
- Larson, Lori
- Lee, Jane
- Martens, Jean
- Martin, Mary Beth
- McNaron, Toni
- Nash, Nicholas
- Powell, Brenda
- Rowe, Megan
- Rudina, Parichay
- Scheel, Rod
- Zannmiller, Sr. Therese Ann

### 10-Year Volunteers

- Anderson, Leon
- Anees, Mahjabeen
- Bowman, Jean
- Craig, Bradley
- Fogale, Cathy
- Hartman, Morris
- Hendrickson, Roger
- Holdeman, Arlene
- Junnila, Mary
- Lillis, Keith
- Markley, Vivian
- Morlock, Bryan
- Pearson, Jack

- Raiche, Julie
- Raiche, Tom
- Sampson, Deborah
- Savage, Bernadette
- Stratioti, Cindy
- Sylvester, Holly
- Winklesky, Sandy

### 15-Year Volunteers

- Abrams, Sally
- Adamski, Jeanne
- Adamson, William "Del"
- Anderson, Judy Lynn
- Bashaw, Linda
- Beattie, George
- Beresford, Cecile
- Bresser, Patricia
- Foley, John
- Johnson, Barbara
- Kirsch, Flo
- Lindquist, Connaught
- Lundby, Val
- Miller, Kimerly
- Rose, Duane
- Stevens, Bonnie
- Swanson, Licia
- Warren, Richard (Dick)
- Woeste, Rita

### 20-Year Volunteers

- Akervik, Jan
- Anderson, Clarice
- Begley, Jerry
- Durivage, Catherine
- Hambrick, Blake
- Johnson, Pamela
- Laudenschach, Marge
- Nagaraju, S.S.
- Obrestad, Sharon
- Panzer, John
- Peterson, Pixie
- Raskob, Colleen
- Spicer, Liz
- Wright, Gregory

### 25-Year Volunteers

- Derosier, John
- Moen, Cheryl
- Olson, Sara

### 30-Year Volunteers

- Talen, Patricia
- Weihe, Jeffrey

### 35-Year Volunteers

- Keen, Jill
- Mateer, Karen

# HOW YOU CAN HELP

Every Minnesotan who can benefit from State Services for the Blind should know about our services. Please help spread the word that SSB provides blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind Minnesotans the resources and tools to achieve equality, independence, and access.

- As we've shown in this annual report, SSB's Communication Center is funded through multiple public and private partnerships. Our work as Minnesota's Accessible Reading Source depends upon the generosity of our volunteers and financial donors.
- If there's a senior citizen in your life who is losing vision due to macular degeneration, glaucoma, or some other cause, we're here for them. The Aging Eyes Initiative partners with community programs and organizations throughout Minnesota to help seniors adjust to vision loss. Email us at [aging.eyes@state.mn.us](mailto:aging.eyes@state.mn.us), call us at 651-539-2276, or visit us at [www.mn.gov/deed/ssb/seniors/aging-eyes.jsp](http://www.mn.gov/deed/ssb/seniors/aging-eyes.jsp).
- When you visit your ophthalmologist or optometrist, ask if he or she knows that SSB has the knowledge, services, and resources to help patients with significant vision loss to live well after diagnosis.
- If you are an employer, talk with our business relations team about finding the candidate who can be your next great hire. SSB has a pool of job-seekers with skills and experience to fill a diverse range of positions.
- If you love the written and spoken word, check out the range of volunteer possibilities by visiting us at [www.MNSSB.org](http://www.MNSSB.org).

**SSB is now part of GiveMN, which you can visit at**  
**[mn.gov/deed/ssbdonate](http://mn.gov/deed/ssbdonate)**



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

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

[www.mnssb.org](http://www.mnssb.org)

An equal opportunity employer and program provider.  
Upon request, this information can be made available  
in alternate formats for individuals with disabilities.