Maine Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Federal Fiscal Years 2015-2017

2/24/2018

Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired

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**2018**

**State of Maine**

**Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment for Federal Fiscal Years 2015-2017**

**Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

**(DBVI)**

**A study conducted on behalf of the blind and visually impaired citizens of Maine by The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, Maine Department of Labor**

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# INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

## ***Purpose of Comprehensive Needs Assessment***

The Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) assists eligible individuals with disabilities to prepare for, achieve, and retain employment in integrated community settings. DBVI administers the Vocational Rehabilitation program in Maine for the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) specifically for Maine citizens that are blind or visually impaired. A separate program is available to individuals who have other significant, but more general disabilities, through the Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). This comprehensive needs assessment focuses on the Vocational Rehabilitation program for those that are blind and visually impaired and on the needs of individuals eligible for those services.

The assessment is designed to answer important questions about the population eligible for DBVI services living in Maine and their vocational rehabilitation needs. Information gathered for the assessment will guide DBVI in its strategic plan and goal development for the next three fiscal years, 2018 - 2020. Specifically, the report responds to federal regulations (34 CFR 361.29) requiring Maine’s Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) to jointly conduct a “comprehensive statewide assessment” with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) every three years that describes the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the vocational rehabilitation needs of:

- Individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment;

**-** Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program;

**-** Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and

**-** Youth with disabilities, and students with disabilities, including their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.

Additionally, DBVI is required to include an assessment of the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State.

To address these requirements, Maine DBVI relies on a variety of publicly available sources, including survey information from the United States Census Bureau’s American Community Survey and data from the Rehabilitation Services Administration and the Social Security Administration. Maine DBVI gathered information from the Maine Departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services, as well as numerous stakeholder groups, including people with visual disabilities, employers, and Vocational Rehabilitation counselors.

## **Description of Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Vocational Rehabilitation Process**

The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) is an agency within the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) located within the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL). The mission of BRS is to provide full access to employment, independence and community integration for people with disabilities.

DBVI provides services that are governed by the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA). The federal statute authorizes services for students with disabilities who are “Potentially Eligible” for VR to receive Pre-Employment Transition Services, which include Job Exploration Counseling; Work-based Learning; Counseling on opportunities for postsecondary education; Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living; and Instruction in self-advocacy, including peer mentoring. A student with a disability is an individual between Age 14 – Age 21 who is enrolled in an educational program.

The Rehabilitation Act further mandates that each applicant entering the publicly funded program follows an individual process from application through eligibility, comprehensive assessment of rehabilitation needs, individual employment plan development, and provision of appropriate services to achieve employment. Any individual with a disability and a commitment to find or maintain employment may apply. Each applicant can expect an eligibility decision within 60 days of application.

An individual is eligible for DBVI services if that person:

* has a visual impairment, which for the individual, constitutes or **results in a substantial impediment to employment** *(Note: Substantial impediment to employment means that the impairment hinders an individual from preparing for, engaging in, or retaining employment consistent with the individual’s abilities and capabilities)*; and
* **requires vocational rehabilitation services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment** consistent with the applicant’s unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. Required VR services must be necessary to overcome disability related barriers. Lack of resources by itself does not constitute a disability related barrier.

In addition, there is a **presumption of benefit**. It shall be presumed the individual can benefit in terms of an employment outcome from vocational rehabilitation, unless the DBVI counselor can demonstrate by clear and convincing evidence that such individual is incapable of benefiting from vocational rehabilitation services due to the severity of the disability of the individual. Individuals who receive SSI and/or SSDI are presumed to be eligible for DBVI services.

DBVI uses prescribed titles with definitions which act as a crosswalk to RSA status codes, to track an individual’s progress, as they move through the VR process. This allows both the state agency and federal agency, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), to collect data to ensure timely delivery and fiscal accountability.

Each individual who applies for services has a determination of eligibility and works with a qualified VR counselor and others to identify an employment goal within 90 days of being determined eligible and the appropriate services necessary to achieve that goal. The Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) may include guidance and counseling, training, education, job search, and job placement among other things. Every applicant coming to DBVI has different abilities, goals, expectations and barriers to employment; therefore, each plan is individualized for each eligible person. The successful conclusion of the VR process is an individual working for a job consistent with his or her capabilities for 90 days with the supposition of continued employment. No person’s path is the same and the process is flexible enough to attend to new barriers as they arise.

By federal statute, any VR program that is unable to provide services to all eligible individuals must implement an Order of Selection, so that individuals with the most significant disabilities receive services first. Under the Order of Selection, eligible individuals are assigned to a priority category based on the severity of their disability and vocational barriers. The highest priority, Category 1, is given to individuals with the most significant visual impairment and highest level of rehabilitation needs. Category 2 is assigned to individuals with visual impairments, but who have fewer functional limitations or less complex rehabilitation needs than those in Category 1. Currently, DBVI is not on a wait list for services and is able to serve those in all categories.

While helping individuals obtain employment is the ultimate success of the VR program, many VR cases are closed each year before the individual achieves and maintains employment for at least 90 days. These closures happen for a variety of causes and can occur at any step in the VR process. Some individuals who apply are found “not eligible” because they do not have a qualifying disability, while others, after being found eligible, leave the VR program for several reasons, including finding employment on their own, having an exacerbation of a chronic condition or their VR counselor is unable to locate them for an extended period. Everyone who applies for VR services has the right to appeal any decision made by the agency, including the decision to close a case.

Individuals can receive further support through post-employment services after becoming successfully employed, if services are necessary to maintain, regain or advance in employment. This assistance is limited in scope to two or less services and duration of no more than one year. If more comprehensive services are required, and/or there is a new disabling condition, and/or it has been longer than three years since the case was closed successfully, a new application for DBVI services must be completed.

The amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), presented a major change in service delivery to the Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Homemakers were no longer considered a competitive closure under Title I. After September 19, 2016, Individualized Plan for Employments (IPE) with goal of Homemaker were no longer allowed to be written by staff at the Division. Existing cases with an IPE with a goal of Homemaker were given until June 2017 to achieve goal attainment, with extensions possible if services had not been completed. Therefore, this report includes data of cases with homemaker as an employment goal.

# **State of Maine Demographics**

Population (7/1/2017)- 1,335,907 which is up 4,428 from 2016 and is up 7,545 from 2010. This is a 0.6% increase in population from 2010, as compared to the United States which had an 5.5% increase in population from 2010 (308,758,105) to 2017 (325,719,178)

Of Maine’s 2017 estimated population stated above, 19.1% is under the age of 18, which is slightly lower than the national average of 22.8%. In contrast, 19.4% of Maine citizens are over the age of 65, which is higher than the national average of 13.0%.

Maine has 51.0% female citizens and 49.0% male citizens.

Maine- Black/African American-1.5% American Indian-0.7% Asian 1.2% Hispanic/Latino 1.6% Caucasian/White 94.8%. English is the first language in all but 6.5% of Maine homes.

91.9% of Maine citizens have at least a high school diploma, in relation to the U.S. average of 87.0%. Maine is just slightly below the national average for higher education with 29.3% in Maine and 30.3% nationally.

For people under the age of 65 in Maine, 11.9% state that they have a disability, in contrast to 8.6% across the nation.

Of the total civilian labor workforce, the number aged 16 years and older is 63.0% in Maine and is about on par with the national average of 63.1%

59.6% of those are females who reside in Maine. Again, this is slightly higher than the national average of 58.3%

Maine has an average (mean) time of 23.7 minutes to travel to work which is slightly lower than the national average of 26.1 minutes to work.

(<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/ME/PST045216>)

 The Disability Statistics website from Cornell University shows that the incidence of visual impairment in Maine (2.3%) is just slightly lower than for the U.S. (2.4%) and the employment rate in 2016 for people with visual impairments (28.5%) is indicated as lower than the national rate (43.7%). This is a slight shift from the percentages presented in the last Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), using data from 2012.

## **Individuals with Employment Barriers**

According to the Maine Department of Labor’s Center for Workforce Research and Information, there are 208,600 people with one or more disabilities in Maine, which comprise 16 percent of the civilian population and is above the 12 percent U.S. average. More than half of those with disabilities were between ages 18 and 64. Labor force participation of adults with disabilities averaged just 32 percent, compared to 79 percent of those with no disability from 2011 to 2015. The unemployment rate was more than twice the rate for other workers. ( <http://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/disabilities/> )

Workers with disabilities in Maine are less likely to hold year-round, full-time jobs and most earn less than $25,000 per year. Adults with a disability are more likely to live in or near poverty, regardless of work status, and are less likely to have postsecondary education than adults with no disability. In the face of a declining labor force, there is opportunity for people with disabilities to become employed.

## **Students with Disabilities**

As stated earlier, DBVI provides services that are governed by the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), to students with a disability between Age 14 – Age 21 who are enrolled in an educational program. Below are charts from the Maine Department of Education, depicting students in Maine schools with a Section 504 plan. The chart shows not only those students that DBVI could be working with now but those that will potentially need services as they progress through school. There are currently 6489 students.

| **Grade** | **Section 504** |
| --- | --- |
| 01 | 159 |
| 02 | 234 |
| 03 | 346 |
| 04 | 411 |
| 05 | 451 |
| 06 | 542 |
| 07 | 635 |
| 08 | 663 |
| 09 | 754 |
| 10 | 707 |
| 11 | 741 |
| 12 | 791 |
| K | 49 |
| PK | 6 |
| **Grand Total** | **6489** |

In addition, the Maine Department of Education also reports the following students receiving special education services by County.

| County | 09 | 10 | 11 | 12 | Grand Total |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Androscoggin | 205 | 212 | 190 | 200 | 807 |
| Aroostook | 131 | 143 | 124 | 144 | 542 |
| Cumberland | 448 | 480 | 462 | 457 | 1847 |
| Franklin | 73 | 48 | 42 | 47 | 210 |
| Hancock | 79 | 80 | 89 | 77 | 325 |
| Kennebec | 219 | 205 | 212 | 161 | 797 |
| Knox | 72 | 69 | 61 | 55 | 257 |
| Lincoln | 66 | 66 | 64 | 55 | 251 |
| Maine Department of Corrections | \* | \* | 6 | 12 | 23 |
| Maine Department of Education | \* | \* | \* | \* | 5 |
| Non-Maine SAU | 7 | \* | \* | \* | 11 |
| Oxford | 132 | 132 | 120 | 107 | 491 |
| Penobscot | 264 | 283 | 234 | 246 | 1027 |
| Piscataquis | 33 | 34 | 21 | 37 | 125 |
| Sagadahoc | 67 | 77 | 82 | 52 | 278 |
| Somerset | 120 | 118 | 95 | 98 | 431 |
| Waldo | 100 | 81 | 97 | 99 | 377 |
| Washington | 72 | 51 | 63 | 50 | 236 |
| York | 406 | 340 | 326 | 361 | 1433 |
| Grand Total | 2496 | 2428 | 2291 | 2258 | 9473 |

The above charts show the entire reported population of students receiving services from the Department of Education. The chart below displays counties in Maine that have 5 or more students with a documented visual impairment. Please note that the number of students is 43 statewide, but only three of Maine’s counties have more than 5 each.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| County | Count |
| Androscoggin | \* |
| Aroostook | 6 |
| Cumberland | 10 |
| Franklin | \* |
| Hancock | \* |
| Kennebec | \* |
| Oxford | \* |
| Penobscot | \* |
| Sagadahoc | \* |
| Somerset | \* |
| Washington | \* |
| York | 8 |
| Grand Total | 43 |

## **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)**

Per Section 5 of The State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) By-Laws, the Board shall make an annual report to the Governor and Legislature at the beginning of each calendar year describing the state of Maine’s workforce, and making recommendations for public and private action related to workforce development. This report shall also address annual report requirements in state law for disabilities, apprenticeship, the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act, and youth. It covers the 2017 calendar year and includes data during Program Year 2016 (July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017). The following report includes the Commission on Disability and Employment Report.

## PY16 Performance Overview

The US Department of Labor did not require States to submit an annual performance report narrative for Program Year 2016 because under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) States had no WIOA performance information available.  Performance information is collected up to one year after program exit and employment outcome measures require an additional quarter (three months) to obtain, resulting in an overall period of 15 months after exit for most performance outcomes data to become available.

The tables in the report were either missing and/or had non-validated data because PY16 under WIOA had no WIOA performance information available.

  (<http://www.maine.gov/swb/documents/annual_report/index.shtml>)

1. **Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired Data from Aware Case Management System for clients served FFY 2015-FFY 2017 (regardless of closure status unless note)**

| **FFY** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Gender** |  |  |  |
| Female | 89 | 146 | 142 |
| Male | 93 | 116 | 159 |
| **FFY** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** |
| **Age Group at App** |  |  |  |
| 13-22 | 24 | 41 | 72 |
| 23-54 | 64 | 86 | 132 |
| 55-65 | 35 | 49 | 53 |
| 66+ | 59 | 86 | 43 |
| Null (under 13) |  |  | 1 |

| **FFY** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Race** |  |  |  |
| White | 173 | 244 | 274 |
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| Black or African American | 4 | 5 | 11 |
| Hispanic or Latino, white | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Asian | 0 | 3 | 5 |
| American Indian or Alaskan Native, White | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Asian, Hispanic or Latino | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino  | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Does not wish to Identify | 0 | 0 | 1 |

| **FFY** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Education at Application** |  |  |  |
| Less than HS | 6 | 21 | 35 |
| HS or GED | 18 | 20 | 112 |
| Some College | 4 | 5 | 39 |
| College or more | 1 | 7 | 48 |
| Unknown/null | 153 | 209 | 57 |
| **FFY** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** |
| **New Applications** | 144 | 109 | 91 |
| **FFY** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** |
| **New IPE** | 104 | 93 | 81 |
| **FFY** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** |
| **All closures** | 156 | 206 | 120 |
| **FFY** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** |
| **Education at Closure** |  |  |  |
| Less than HS | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| HS or GED | 7 | 5 | 55 |
| Some College | 1 | 4 | 21 |
| College or more | 2 | 1 | 12 |
| Unknown or null | 170 | 252 | 187 |

| **FFY** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Months App to closure average** | 26.4  | 26.08 | 31.25 |
| **FFY** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** |
| **Work status at application** |  |  |  |
| Not employed all other students | 10 | 20 | 25 |
| Not employed other | 86 | 126 |  121 |
| Not employed Student in secondary school | 12 | 17 | 34 |
| Not employed, trainee, volunteer | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Self-employed, Not BEP | 8 | 3 | 9 |
| BEP | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Employment with Supports in Integrated Setting | 9 | 3 | 8 |
| Employment without Supports in Integrated Setting | 21 | 30 | 37 |
| Extended employment | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Homemaker | 33 | 59 | 39 |
| Unpaid Family Worker | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Null | 0 | 0 | 19 |
| Employed received notice of termination or warning | 0 | 0 | 1 |

| **FFY** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Work Status at Closure**  |  |  |  |
| Competitive Integrated (Supported Employment) | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Competitive Integrated Employment | 0 | 0 | 12 |
| Employment in an integrated setting | 23 | 23 | 10 |
| Homemaker | 60 | 85 | 28 |
| Self-Employment (NOT BEP) | 60 | 4 | 4 |
| BEP | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Unpaid family Worker | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Null | 90 | 149 | 242 |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **FFY** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** |
| **Average cost of purchased services for all cases (open and closed)** | **$6583.85** | **$3081.70** | **$3422.08** |
| **FFY** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** |
| **Avg costs for Closed Homemakers** | **$4344** | **$2736** | **$4807** |
| **Avg costs for Closed Competitive** | **$4698** | **$2686** | **$5632** |

# **Surveys**

The primary instrument was a survey used to gather input from DBVI staff, contractors and clients, regarding DBVI services. Surveys were completed by clients via phone calls, or email unless alternative methods were requested. On-line surveys were sent and completed by DBVI staff and contracted partners. Other data sources, which are available to the public, were included in this assessment: The United States Census Bureau and the Maine Department of Labor’s Center for Workforce Research and Information for example.

## **Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired Clients**

The Comprehensive Needs Assessment survey is a triennial assessment so DBVI used data from FFY15 -FFY17 on both open and closed cases. There was a total of 746 individuals served during this time. Twenty-seven of those were extracted from the data due to:

15 closures due to death

1 ineligible

10 no disabling condition

1 no impediment to employment

Letters were then sent to 719 individuals to inform them of the survey and that someone might be reaching out to them for information and giving them the option to not participate in the survey. Of the letters returned undelivered, the ones that identified an updated address were resent and some other addresses were identified through our case management system. For the ones that had no updated information, a secondary script was used when calling that provided them with the information they would have received in the letter.

Thirty-six individuals called and asked to be removed from the list because they did not want to participate, leaving our starting number at 683.

Twelve individuals received an email link to the survey to complete on their own either because they requested it or due to the secondary relationship with DBVI to maintain confidentiality.

There were nine volunteers to make calls: 4 staff from the Central Office, 2 Regional Managers, and 2 representatives from the SRC and 1 representative from the Client Assistance Program. The calls were made intermittently over the course of two weeks at random times, including evenings.

Survey questions were read to each person and entered into survey monkey by the caller.

Of the 671 folks that could be called, sheets of names were randomly handed out to each caller. Calls were made and progress was noted after each name. There were 9 individuals who did not have phone numbers listed, which reduced the number available to call to 662. Based on time and schedules, 522 calls were randomly attempted with many no answers or number no longer in service.

At the end of the two-week range, 140 surveys were completed. As part of the survey data, individuals had an opportunity to provide additional information that may not have been addressed in the survey questions. This personal yet confidential interaction allowed for more candid responses. Notations were made if individuals requested additional information which will be followed up on. This survey contained many homemakers which are no longer allowed within the VR program, thus allowing the phone caller to provide assurance to consumers that services will still be available to them.

### **Survey Questions and Responses**

1. Gender

No one skipped or refused to identify their gender

There was an exact split in gender 70 or 50% were female and 70 or 50% were male.

1. Age Range

139 respondents answered this question in the age range category but one person simply identified themselves as 89 years old.

| 14-21 | 9 or 6.47% |
| --- | --- |
| 22-30 | 11 or 7.91% |
| 31-40 | 11 or 7.91% |
| 41-50 | 15 or 10.79% |
| 51-60 | 21 or 15.11% |
| 61-70 | 28 or 20.14% |
| 71+ | 43 or 30.94% |

1. What is the highest-grade level of education you have received so far?

137 respondents answered this question and 3 skipped the category but there were that responded individually as not receiving any education or that they were illiterate.

| Less than 9th grade (no high school) | 3 or 2.19% |
| --- | --- |
| 9th-11th grade | 14 or 10.22% |
| High school graduate/GED | 51 or 37.23% |
| some college but did not graduate | 21 or 15.33% |
| 2-year community college/technical/vocational program graduate (Associate's degree or equivalent)  |  12 or 8.76% |
| 4-year college graduate (Bachelor's degree or equivalent) | 29 or 21.17% |
| Master's degree | 6 or 4.38% |
| PHD/Doctorate | 1 or .73% |

1. Who have you had services from either currently or in the past

135 respondents answered this question and 5 skipped the question.

| Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired | 126 or 93.33% |
| --- | --- |
| Maine Department of Health and Human Services | 55 or 40.74% |
| Catholic Charities Maine | 22 or 16.30% |
| The Iris Network | 91 or 67.41% |
| Area Agency on Aging/Spectrum Generations | 20 or14.81% |
| Mainely Access | 14 or 10.37% |

 There were 29 comments to this question and an example of those were:

*“VR helped me through college”*

*“Was involved with the Iris when it was called the Maine Center for the Blind”*

*“No services, only SSI”*

*“Assistance with Heat”*

*“Not sure who DBVI was”*

1. What forms of transportation do you use?

135 respondents answered this question and 5 skipped the question

| Drive yourself | 15 or 11.11% |
| --- | --- |
| Taxi | 28 or 20.74% |
| Public Transportation | 39 or 28.89% |
| Family or Friends | 115 or 85.19% |
| Special or private transportation | 14 or 10.37% |

38 people commented on this question and an example if those were:

*“Uber” (this was repeated several times)*

*“Taxi coupon program out of Rockland, now mostly walks”*

*“Case manager”*

*“Walk” (this was also repeated several times)*

*“Own a car and pay driver”*

1. Do you feel that the transportation method you identified in the previous question meets your needs?

136 people answered this question and 4 skipped the question.

| Yes | 104 or 76.47% |
| --- | --- |
| No | 32 or 23.53% |

48 respondents commented on this question, some examples are as follows:

*“not always. Sometimes the taxi service is unreliable. At times have to reschedule medical appointments. Try to give money for gas to family and friends. Depends on their availability. Public transportation is limited- doesn't run past 5 not on week-end and do not qualify for paratransit because not on MaineCare.”*

*“The public transportation is very limiting. I had to rely on family and friends because the bus schedule could not meet my 8-5 work schedule. This was an issue until I moved to a location where the bus schedule was more fitting to my work schedule.”*

*“Live in rural Maine. No other transportation options.”*

*“Limited cause I live out in the country.”*

*“not totally. Can't drive at night. Would like more options for nighttime transportation.”*

*“Brunswick is good but other areas, such as Augusta, was not good.”*

*“Waiting for self-driving vehicles.”*

*“Walk a lot; transportation system in Bangor (public bus) doesn't run into evening, limited on Sat none on Sun. Sometimes a 20 min drive will take an hour and a half on public bus.”*

*“Spouse is sole transportation provider (lives in rural area so no public transportation). If spouse is ill, cannot keep appointments.”*

1. Besides a visual impairment or blindness, Do you have any other disabilities or chronic illnesses?

124 respondents answered at least part of this multi-sectioned question and 16 respondents did not answer.

 **Disability**

| Yes | 44 |
| --- | --- |
| No |  57 |

**Chronic Illness**

| Yes | 39  |
| --- | --- |
| No | 52  |

3 people did not wish to disclose on a secondary disability and 1 person did not want to disclose to a chronic illness

There were 82 comments on this question mostly describing either the secondary disability or the chronic illness.

Arthritis, Diabetes, and Hearing Loss were prevalent for illnesses, and 1 person stated that they were HIV positive, but is now “cured”

Anxiety and Depression were the most prevailing disabilities, with one comment of “I am a mental freak”

1. How do you receive written information?

138 respondents answered this question and 2 did not answer.

There were 5 categories for respondents to choose and respondents could choose more than one option

**Preferred method and have the ability to receive information this way**

| Regular print | 20 or 33.33% |
| --- | --- |
| Large Print | 56 or 68.29% |
| Braille | 4 or 8.51% |
| Computer/Screen reader | 37 or 48.68% |
| Sighted Reader (family, friend, paid assistance) | 39 or 54.93% |

**Not my preferred method but it is acceptable**

| Regular print | 16 or 26.67% |
| --- | --- |
| Large Print | 10 or 12.20% |
| Braille | 3 or 6.38% |
| Computer/Screen reader | 8 or 10.53% |
| Sighted Reader (family, friend, paid assistance) | 20 or 28.70% |

**I don’t use this method and I don’t care to learn**

| Regular print | 22 or 36.67% |
| --- | --- |
| Large Print | 14 or 17.07% |
| Braille | 36 or 76.60% |
| Computer/Screen reader | 21 or 27.63% |
| Sighted Reader (family, friend, paid assistance) | 12 or 16.90% |

**This is my preferred method but cost is a barrier so I don’t have access**

| Regular print | 0 |
| --- | --- |
| Large Print | 0 |
| Braille | 0 |
| Computer/Screen reader | 7 or 9.21% |
| Sighted Reader (family, friend, paid assistance) | 0 |
|  |

**This is a preferred method but I don’t have the skills I need to access this method**

| Regular print | 2 or 3.33% |
| --- | --- |
| Large Print | 2 or 2.44% |
| Braille | 4 or 8.51% |
| Computer/Screen reader | 0 |
| Sighted Reader (family, friend, paid assistance) | 0 |

There were 60 responses to this question and using a CCTV or a handheld magnifier was prevalent in a significant number of individual responses.

1. Do you know about the services of the Client Assistance Program (CAP)?

138 respondents answered this question and 2 respondents did not answer.

| Yes | 17 or 12.32% |
| --- | --- |
| No | 121 or 87.68% |

1. Do you feel that your rights as a DBVI client were explained to you?

128 respondents answered this question and 12 respondents did not.

| Yes | 103 or 80.47% |
| --- | --- |
| No | 25 or 19.53% |

1. Do you know about the Independent Living Program through DBVI?

138 respondents answered this question and 2 did not answer.

| Yes | 44 or 31.88% |
| --- | --- |
| No | 69 or 50.00% |
| Unsure | 25 or 18.12% |

1. Are you currently?

136 respondents answered this question and 4 did not.

| Retired from work | 56 or 41.18% |
| --- | --- |
| Employed, full time | 12 or 8.82% |
| Employed, part time | 14 or 10.29% |
| Unemployed, looking for work | 24 or 17.65% |
| Unemployed, not looking for work | 14 or 10.29% |
| High school student, current | 5 or 3.68% |
| Recently graduated high school (within 4 years) | 1 or .74% |
| Homemaker | 10 or 7.35% |

 There were 38 comments to this question and of those, several pointed to self-employment as what they are seeking or that they are “disabled and on SSDI” so they cannot work.

***\*\*Depending on the answer to this question #12 the survey would direct to either questions about looking for work, or to a question about their current job, or the survey would go to the last question and skip the employment questions entirely.***

1. Because you are looking for work, what are some of the biggest challenges you are facing? Respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer.

20 respondents answered this question.

| Transportation | 15 or 75.00% |
| --- | --- |
| Lack of work | 7 or 35.00% |
| I need more education | 2 or 10.00% |
| Family challenges | 1 or 5.00% |
| Employers don’t get me | 7 or 35.00% |

There were 18 comments on this question, some comments;

*“Stamina ...disability is still in flux”*

*“Job developer says I have too many skills and years of experience which puts me against people with the same skills & experience. Blindness may scare the employer”*

*“workplace accommodations. Balance with benefits already receives and not lose them.”*

*“Things of interest that would require further education. There is a hurdle to overcome related to vision - from the employers’ side of things”*

*“Would need adaptive equipment in order to do a job.”*

*“Most jobs found need driver's license.”*

*“Has a great resume but gets nowhere, completed a lot of applications but no job”*

*“Not sure what I want to do and where I live is an issue”*

*“Need more training in running business”*

1. Would you be willing to move/relocate for employment?

27 respondents answered this question

| Yes | 14 or 51.85% |
| --- | --- |
| No | 6 or 22.22% |
| Other | 7 or 25.93% |

Of those that chose Other, some responded with a comment. Some of those are:

*“Family lives in area and would not want to move away. All things need (i.e. grocery store) are close to where lives.”*

*“I hope not”*

*“It is not feasible because of the housing benefits I currently receive”*

*“Due to financial reasons.”*

*“unsure”*

1. Since you said you were working, do you feel that the services you received from DBVI helped you get ready for employment?

31 respondents answered this question

| Yes | 23 or 74.19% |
| --- | --- |
| No | 7 or 22.58% |
| Not sure | 1 or 3.23% |

Some comments about this question.

*“Yes, but I'm always trying to be more useful to the store so they will find a way for me to use an iPod scanner.”*

*“Started own company when closed with DBVI”*

*“Only knew about the iris program. Miss more than 3 days you get kicked out of the Rehab center. You were receiving chemo treatment.”*

*“Services from Steve and Robin Thayer assisted you in employment. Very satisfied.”*

*“Got my mind set- going to the Iris Network- Rehab center- got me back into the workforce.”*

*“Explain software packages to employer.”*

*“Want you to take an easy job- small list of careers. Didn't feel that it was helpful.”*

*“helped me maintain my employment with visual aids and. It was very helpful.”*

*“Everything I’ve done I’ve done it on my own except for financial help with school. Completed applications out on own. Did have a job coach but only helped with 1 or 2 interviews”*

*“already employment needed help keep job”*

1. Is there anything else that you would like to comment on that we have not asked you?

102 respondents answered this question and 38 did not answer. This was an open comment field, no choices were given, respondents could respond freely.

*“Transportation is the greatest challenge for people who can’t drive. Most volunteer drivers don’t want to drive to her rural area.”*

*“Resources need to be explained. Faster turn around time. Things took too long.”*

*“some stuff hard to get- sources from the State. ex. weigh packages- can't see the scale- looking for a talking scale but can't buy through Amazon. Process takes so long. Time consuming process- could be shortened to the needs of the person. Shouldn't take weeks/months to get things done.”*

*“Everyone has been absolutely terrific. Helped me in so many ways. Been very fortunate to have had the people that I have had on my case.”*

*“I went to the Iris Rehab center and felt that it was helpful, but I have not yet obtained employment as transportation is an issue.”*

*“Could have done a better job because they didn't find a job.”*

*“Feel DBVI needs to do more outreach. Too many b/vi do not know DBVI exists. DBVI services are excellent but much, much more outreach needs to be done.”*

*“excellent job in helping me ease into technology”*

*“Service is extremely important but at the time I was receiving assistance, many of the programs were not necessary. DBVI staff very professional. Mock interview - did not go well. Degrading. Disheartening when people are spoken down to because of their visual impairment - by employers' perspective. Issue - no driver’s license and no trans.”*

*“DBVI does fantastic job. Has had services at various times. "DBVI could use more funding"!”*

*“I am having a hard time with SSI. Thought I was getting SSDI because of previous work he. I’ve paid in a lot but receding the benefit.”*

*“My caseworkers were switched around a lot and there wasn’t very good communication. Would like more communication with the agency.”*

*“DBVI is "the bomb". Professional. Courteous. Would like to have number for DBVI more accessible.”*

## **DBVI Staff Survey**

This survey was sent via Survey Monkey to all DBVI staff located statewide. This was the most effective method for gathering confidential responses from all the staff at DBVI.

DBVI is split up into 5 regions with a total of 36 positions. 4 positions are currently vacant.

The positions are;

1 Director, 1 Assistant Director (Vacant), 3 Regional Managers, 1 BEP Administrator (Vacant, but duties are being fulfilled partially by 1 Regional Manager) 1 BEP Program Assistant, 1 Secretary, 1 Rehabilitation Consultant, 11 Orientation and Mobility Instructors, 3 Blindness Rehabilitation Specialists/Transition Consultants, 5 Rehabilitation Counselor I/Independent Living Case Managers, 7 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II’s (1 of which is vacant) and one Office Associate (vacant)

Of the 32 filled positions within DBVI, 26 responded to the survey which equals to an 81% completion rate.

Some questions allowed respondents to have multiple answers and therefore the totals will be more than 100. The percentage is calculated by using the number of people that chose that selection and dividing it by the total respondents who could have chosen that selection.

### **Survey Questions and Responses**

1. Job Duties

The majority of the respondents in this survey are staff that work directly with consumers/clients in the field. While administrative and Supervisory staff have limited contact, every position within the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired has some direct client interaction.

1. Do you hold a certification?

None of the respondents skipped this question

|  Yes | 23 or 88.46%  |
| --- | --- |
|  No | 2 or 7.69%  |

1 or 3.85% stated other and wrote Associates Degree

1. Can you identify any training areas related to blindness, overcoming employment barriers, or secondary disabilities that staff or yourself need to improve service delivery to clients?

23 responded to this question and respondents were not given choices but could simply write in a response.

 5 responses included Cortical Vision Impairment (CVI) as a training need, and 5 also responded to the need for more technology training for use with clients.

Some individual responses;

*“Better understanding of the neurological and psychological make up (Blindisms) of individuals for greater rehab assessment and appropriate service delivery to support individuals with various cognitive deficits and successful employment outcomes.”*

“*I believe staff in all areas would benefit from overall disability training. Certain staff may not understand that we treat the whole person and not just the vision issues. I see a huge struggle with parents of kids with allowing their child to experiment or follow through with training. I see several mid 20-year olds who are capable of working not have the motivation or desire to work. O&M caseloads, consistency across the state.”*

*“technology with clients, secondary disabilities (autism, mental health, dementia, etc) - when do we discontinue services because we are working outside of our realm of services and therefore they need to receive services focused on their secondary disability?”*

*“Using apps on smart phones; working with individuals who have progressive or fluctuating vision loss - accessibility of devices/equipment and information in work environment”*

1. What are some challenges you face in your daily work?

25 respondents answered this survey question and 1 person skipped it.

Respondents were given 6 options for and could pick more than one response;

| Lack of Funds |  44% |
| --- | --- |
| Lack of Community Services |  52% |
| Lack of Administration support |  16% |
| Client indifference |  44% |
| No challenges, everything is awesome |  0% |
| Other, please specify |  68% |

For the 68% that chose other time management and workloads were identified as challenges. Some individual responses were;

*“lack of transportation in out-lying areas”*

*“not enough time; increased paperwork/documentation (directly related and indirectly related to my job), too much awesomeness to do, not enough TIME to do it all. need tighter team work across our blindness agencies...still too many silos”*

*“A public generalized belief that "blind" people (this includes the visually impaired cannot work.”*

*“Limited public awareness and misperception about people who are B/VI, lack of resources for people who do not speak English, low expectations from families, inconsistent services in different regions, limited CRP's especially those with experience with B/VI, ongoing AT support”*

*“Politics - state and federal; layers of approval for necessary services and equipment - wait time or lack of approval interfere with daily operations and growth of program and individual self-employment; having to "stay under radar"; Retirement of older BEP managers and limited influx of new managers (client pool)”*

1. How many years have you worked in the blindness field?

All 26 respondents answered this question and were given 5 choices

| 1 year or less |  0% |
| --- | --- |
| 1-5 years | 8 or 30.77%  |
| 5-15 years | 9 or 34.62%  |
| 15-25 years | 3 or 11.54% |
| 25+ years | 6 or 23.08%  |

1. What do you consider the biggest obstacle to securing employment for folks that are blind and visually impaired?

26 respondents answered this question and no one skipped this question.

Respondents were given 6 choices and could choose more than one response.

| Lack of employer knowledge on blindness skills | 13 or 50% |
| --- | --- |
| Clients not motivated enough to work | 9 or 34.62% |
| Clients not ready, need more extensive rehab services | 7 or 26.92% |
| Lack of transportation | 18 or 69.23% |
| VR counselor caseloads are too large to provide adequate  |  |
| guidance and counseling | 2 or 7.69% |
| Other | 5 or 19.23% |

For those that chose Other

*“Poor health. As I am not a VR counselor, I not sure if I am as qualified to answer this question.”*

*“More and more students have multiple impacting conditions and need functional life skills”*

*“Not enough time as I am part time only”*

*“Inaccurate public perception of the abilities of people who are B/VI, it's often a combination of lack of education, work experiences, training, transportation and employer bias”*

*“administrative only”*

1. Has your work changed dramatically since the implementation of WIOA?

24 respondents answered this question and 2 skipped the question.

| Yes | 9 or 37.50%  |
| --- | --- |
| No | 15 or 62.50%  |

13 of the respondents to this question commented:

*“I continue to provide the same level of service to clients as I did before.”*

*“Honestly, I'm not sure how it has impacted O&M”*

*“Documentation and data collection changes.”*

*“not sure if it is WIOA based or change of DBVI leadership -- the two came at the same time”*

*“paperwork/documentation and time just spent TRYING to understand it”*

*“Greater focus on transition aged youth who often are not interested in receiving services, removal of Homemaker status in VR puts more clients into IL with less funding for adaptive equipment/tools”*

*“More focus on pre-employment services.”*

1. Do you plan to retire in?

26 respondents answered this question and no one skipped the question.

Respondents were given 4 choices;

| The coming year | 0% |
| --- | --- |
| 1-5 years | 5 or 19.23% |
| 5-10 years | 5 or 19.23% |
| More than 10 years | 16 or 61.54%  |

1. Do you feel that your direct supervisor is available to you and is able to adequately support you in your work?

26 respondents answered and no one skipped this question

| Yes | 24 or 92.31%  |
| --- | --- |
| No | 0% |

No one specifically answered NO but 6 or 23.08%

wrote a response to the question

*“Sometimes... supervisor manages a great deal of territory and statewide needs take priority over local issues.”*

*“My supervisor meets w/me on a regular basis, we have regular staff meetings and is always available by phone.”*

*“supervisor is available, upon request...having her present in the region more would be helpful to see/be more a part of the team happenings in the region”*

*“Sometimes, supervisor is located in another office”*

*“I can always reach my supervisor with questions/concerns.”*

*“she is very available”*

1. Please include anything below that you wish to include about your professional experience in DBVI or about client service delivery.

16 of the respondents answered this question and 10 respondents did not provide any response.

Some examples of the responses are as follows;

*“I appreciate the support we get from DBVI to attend trainings and conferences”*

*“I feel that there is lack of consistency in how services are delivered between different regions and parts of the state”*

*“The nature of the clientele has changed. There are more and more students with multiple impacting conditions. Visual impairment may not be the main concern. There are more and more children with cortical visual impairment”*

*“Need to budget for upgrades for instructor tech devices. Cellphones and iPads should be updated every couple of years to keep up with the changing technologies and updates. Also having state cars that can handle the climate we live in is CRUCIAL for service delivery, need to continue to keep that in mind as state cars are swapped out due to high mileage. Also continued support for remote working and realizing that we spend 3/4ths of our time outside the office working. Having desk space is fine but not as necessary as having great internet connections while outside the office.”*

*“I have enjoyed working for DBVI as it allows you to be creative in meeting the needs of the clients and how to deliver the services.”*

In summary, DBVI staff generally feel supported although they do identify some training areas that would assist them in their jobs. One training area that appeared multiple times was the need for training with consumer with a secondary disability.

They also identified transportation as the largest barrier for consumers obtaining or maintaining employment. Many perceived consumers as not being motivated or lacking the necessary skills to acquire employment.

## **DBVI CONTRACTED STAFF SURVEY-Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) Catholic Charities Maine and Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (VRT) Iris Network**

This survey was sent to Catholic Charities staff and the Iris Network staff that work with DBVI clients aged 14 and above that are also seeking or will be seeking competitive employment outcomes.

Catholic Charities holds the contract with the State of Maine to provide supportive services to school aged students that are blind and visually impaired directly in the educational setting. (TVI) The survey was sent to 17 TVI’s.

The Iris Network holds the contract with the State of Maine to provide a range of vison rehabilitation services to clients as it pertains to their employment plan (VRT) The survey was sent to 11 VRT’s.

28 partnered staff had the potential to take this survey for our Assessment. 12 responded to the survey, which is a 42% completion rate.

### **Survey Questions and Responses**

1. Please specify your job duties.

Respondents were given 4 choices; 12 respondents answered and no one skipped this question

| Direct service with clients |  12 or 100% |
| --- | --- |
| Administrative |  0% |
| Supervisory |  0 % |

Other 1 or 8.33% added “vision consultation”

1. Do you hold a certification?

12 respondents answered this question and no one skipped this question

| Yes |  12 or 100% |
| --- | --- |
| No |  0% |

1. Can you identify any training areas related to blindness rehabilitation, overcoming employment barriers, or secondary disabilities that staff or yourself need to improve service delivery to clients?

9 respondents answered this question and 3 people skipped this question and respondents were not given choices but could simply write in a response. Some examples

*“Employment barriers, which still remains a big issue for the people we serve.”*

*“Nothing specific but there is room for additional opportunities to meet and learn the needs of potential employees from individual with VIP who are working. I think we all need additional training on how to work with potential employers and media on employment issues”*

*“More direction and training for transition age students that are leaving high school and going into college or work”*

*“Ways to support student with visual impairment and multiple disabilities in career preparation.”*

1. What are some challenges you face in your daily work?

12 respondents answered this survey question and no one skipped it.

Respondents were given 6 options for and could pick more than one response;

| Lack of Funds |  41.67% |
| --- | --- |
| Lack of Community Services |  25% |
| Lack of Administration support |  16.67% |
| Client indifference |  25% |
| No challenges, everything is awesome |  33% |
| Other, please specify |  33% |

For the 33% that chose Other, some individual responses were;

*“Funding being used for administrative support rather than client services, little opportunity for input on administrative decision -making related to client services, lack of support”*

*“Way too much paperwork!!!!”*

*“more work than there is time”*

*“Funding for basic training and demonstration equipment. More and more emphasis is being placed on clients to purchase necessary devices primarily for the IL population.”*

1. How many years have you worked in the blindness field?

12 respondents answered this question.

|  Less than one year | 0% |
| --- | --- |
| 1-5 years | 8.33% |
| 5-15 years | 50% |
| 15-25 years | 8.33% |
| 25+ years | 33.33% |

1. What do you consider the biggest obstacle to securing employment for folks that are blind and visually impaired?

12 respondents answered this question and no one skipped this question.

Respondents were given 6 choices and could choose more than one response.

| Lack of employer knowledge on blindness skills | 7 or 58.33% |
| --- | --- |
| Clients not motivated enough to work | 2 or 16.67% |
| Clients not ready, need more extensive rehab services | 5 or 41.67% |
| Lack of transportation | 6 or 50% |
| VR counselor caseloads are too large to provide adequate  |  |
| guidance and counseling | 3 or 25% |
| Other | 4 or 33.33% |

For those that chose Other

*“All of the above. VRCs oftentimes do not understand or have adequate knowledge in the multitude of co-occurring mental health and other disabilities; primarily autism and other development disabilities in both the general and DBVI departments.”*

*“parental expectations”*

*“education of employers, publicity and public education, lack of blindness background or certification of counselors in recent years, job clubs, employment opportunities formerly called sheltered, concern over loss of benefits”*

*“lack of appropriate jobs”*

1. Has your work changed dramatically since the implementation of WIOA?

11 respondents answered and 1 person skipped the question.

| Yes | 1 or 9% |
| --- | --- |
| No | 10 or 91% |

Comments:

*“The only difference is the number of younger age clients”*

*“More opportunities and funds to work on pre-employment skills with students”*

1. Do you plan to retire in?

12 respondents answered this question

| The coming year | 0% |
| --- | --- |
| 1-5 years | 17% |
| 5-10 years | 17% |
| More than 10 years | 67% |

1. What, if any, improvements in collaboration with DBVI would you suggest helping improve blindness rehabilitation services to individuals?

9 respondents answered this question and 3 skipped this question

*“Communication, collaboration with team”*

*“I find keeping open communication on shared clients is important along with shared planning and implementation of Expanded Core Curriculum training for students.”*

*“Working relationship is good and could improve with more direct involvement as opposed through management, Our concerns, suggestions and comments don't seem to be shared and we often hear second hand info from DBVI or do not hear at all”*

*“Develop stronger, and many more collaborations with industry and businesses. Fund more opportunities to create jobs either in through state hiring initiatives or start-up businesses dedicating to hiring people with disabilities. The VRCs need to be more in community with their clients and with less case management duties.”*

 *“More counseling about employment for clients”*

1. Please identify anything below that you wish to include about your professional experience in your own employment or about client service delivery.

4 respondents answered this question and 8 skipped this question, however 1 answer did not address this question and one person simply put “N/A” 2 respondent’s comments are below.

*“I am concerned that in recent years referrals have not been made at times to appropriate resources, that there has been less value placed on appropriate professional credentials as a means of cost savings, lack of pr or education among potential employers, management that is less responsive and not open to suggestions from professional staff, reduction of IL funding, removal of VR home maker status, not enough effort spent on transportation, loss of adjustment counseling services, loss of professional staff with years of expertise”*

*“It seems that the VRC caseload is too high for the VRCs to be effective with clients.”*

#  **Summary**

While there are many items you can glean from the survey, there are a few things that stand out as far as needs for the citizens of Maine that are clients or consumers of DBVI.

The majority of the respondents of this survey were over the age of 50 with the highest percentage of them being over the age 70. This is in alignment with Maine’s increasing numbers of citizens over the age of 65 which is has increased from 15.9% on 2010 to 19.4% in 2016. (www.census.gov)

Transportation has been cited in past Comprehensive Needs Assessments as a barrier for Maine DBVI clients. This survey also found that to be reported, as a high percentage of respondents listed as relying on “family or friends” for their transportation needs. Also, it should be noted that in this survey the new transportation services of Uber were reported by some respondents to be used. However, while both staff of DBVI, and the contracted staff partners (VRT’s and TVI’s) as well as the employment seeking clients themselves reported transportation as a huge barrier, the survey results overwhelming (76.47%) report that the transportation methods they are currently utilizing are meeting their needs. Given that the majority of the respondents are retired, the method of using friends and family may indeed meet their needs, so this may not be a proper reflection of the needs of employment seeking clients. In contrast, 75% of the employment seeking clients in this survey (20 individuals) reported transportation as a barrier to them finding employment.

One of the goals currently in the state plan is to provide more outreach about DBVI services. This survey identified the need to do more outreach to employers about individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Employers need to learn more about the consumer’s unique strengths and capabilities and the services provided by DBVI.

Changing technology and keeping devices updated and the training needs of both staff, contracted staff and clients were identified in the survey as a need. However, when asked about preferred methods of communication, a high number (68.29%) reported that they utilize large print to receive information and only a small number self-reported that they prefer electronic communication but cost is prohibiting them from accessing information this way. No one identified that a lack of knowledge or skill is preventing them from electronic communication. Also, interesting to note is that 55% of respondents identified using a sighted reader as a preferred method. Again, this could be indicative of the age of the majority of respondents in this survey pool.

The elimination of Homemaker status will have an impact on the Independent Living (IL) program also administered by DBVI. Many respondents reported that they did not know about the IL program. Since there is a chance that many of these respondents will need services in the future, outreach should be done to let these individuals know that services will be available through the IL program, if needed.

Interestingly, while many (80%) of the respondents reported that their rights as a DBVI client were explained to them, an overwhelming (88%) number of respondents were not aware of the client assistance program (CAP). CARES, Inc. the current contractor for CAP services in Maine does report a small number of cases involving DBVI clients, thus while the clients feel they know their rights as a client, they may need better explanation of the services available to them through CARES, Inc, should they disagree with the services provided to them from DBVI.

In summary, even though Maine is a large and predominantly rural state with an aging population, DBVI is experiencing an increase in transition-aged and working aged consumers (according to the data). This could be the result of the loss of the homemaker closure coupled with the recent requirement to spend 15% of Title I funds on students with a disability. It could also be that the inverse is true and the increase in the transition-aged consumers is the direct result of the increased focus on activities for pre-employment transition services for students with a disability. This population is technologically savvy so there is a need to keep up with assistive technology and all the changes. Students and adults need to know what technology is available to assist them in their employment.

Throughout the three years, DBVI is serving a higher number of minorities. This past year DBVI has increased its outreach activities so there could be a direct correlation; however, this needs assessment has validated the need to continue with the outreach in many areas such as DBVI services, and Client Assistance Program and services.

The data shows a decrease in overall case costs. With all the new regulations, there has been an increased awareness of the changes through trainings, webinars, along with a much greater emphasis on being good stewards of the state’s funds by analyzing costs for reasonableness, necessities and cost effectiveness.

The data also shows that it is taking longer to close a case and fewer cases are being closed successfully. Since the average wage at closure is increasing each year from the average wage at application, a conclusion could be made that VRCs are working with consumers longer to better prepare them for quality employment outcomes. Maine has experienced a decline in Community Rehabilitation Providers so it could also be deduced that it is taking longer due to service providers availability is limited. However, there are a large number of consumers (self-reported and not disclosed) that have a secondary impairment in addition to their visual impairment. This assessment also demonstrates that there is a need for VRCs and contracted partners to receive more training on secondary disabilities. This knowledge might facilitate a case moving through the process quicker because the VRC would know more about the appropriate services for the client.

Transportation continues to be an unmet need in the rural state of Maine. While many of our consumers are taking advantage of some of the newer methods of transport such as Uber or Lyft services, Maine will likely never have the public transit systems of some of our more populated neighboring states. DBVI will continue to provide education, advocacy, and outreach, when appropriate, around how to access transportation for getting to work or around communities.

Overall, the information received from the surveys, both through telephone conversations and on-line, the data from the census, along with the data from our case management system validated many known unmet needs as well as identified new areas that DBVI needs to address to ensure that individuals, who are blind or visually impaired, are aware of, and receive the appropriate services to help them obtain or maintain quality employment in an integrated, competitive setting.

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