Board Meeting Reports

May 13, 2023

## Director's Report – Emily Wharton

We recently were notified that Sandra Ryan has been selected to receive a Governor’s Volunteer Award for outstanding commitment and service.  This award is being given in recognition of service making a difference in the life of countless blind Iowans through service in many roles; advocacy, mentoring, braille proofreading and public service as a four-term member and Chair of the Iowa Commission for the Blind. Her husband, Kent Ryan, will be accepting this award on her behalf at the June 15th ceremony.

On May 19, IDB hosted our semi-annual Technology Fair. IDB technology staff gave short tech talks about using Chat GBT, selecting the right mobile phone for you, accessing print on paper, and accessing entertainment. We had two technology vendors demonstrating access technology, the Iowa Can Connect Program sharing information, and library staff demonstrating e-readers and other digital devices and services. We appreciated consumer organizations providing a table to showcase member activities. We will soon be planning the next Tech Fair to be held in the fall.

We are continuing to work on several systems improvements that will make us more efficient in serving blind Iowans. The Tyler case management system implementation is proceeding on schedule. The system will go live in late November. We have upgraded our training and guest internet services to allow us to provide more and larger training opportunities in our building.  All State of Iowa websites are in the process of undergoing an upgrade and redesign.  that will allow us to better share information and resources. The new website should be live by the second week of June and can be found at the same location as it has been for the past several years: <https://blind.iowa.gov>.

There is no news regarding the remaining vacancy on the Iowa Commission for the Blind. I have been told that they are still searching but intend to fill the position. I would encourage anyone who is interested to contact either Megan Hall or Jane Dufoe at the Governor's office for more information about their process.

IDB's budget has been signed by the Governor giving IDB a general fund appropriation of 3,043,503 for state fiscal year 2024. We greatly appreciate this support from the legislature. It will make a huge difference in our ability to provide educational materials in alternative formats to blind students and services to Independent Living clients throughout Iowa. To help all stakeholders better understand how IDB is funded and what affects our budget, we have created an overview document that breaks it all down. You can currently find this document at: https://blind.iowa.gov/funding. I would appreciate feedback on anything you find confusing or any way we can further make our processes and functions easier for citizens to understand.

As a part of the Commission Board Approval Policy passed by the Iowa Commission for the Blind at its march 31, 2023 meeting, the Iowa Commission for the Blind will review the IDB Manual at the June 13, 2023, meeting. This can be found at https://blind.iowa.gov/resources-and-publications/policies-and-guidelines/employee-manual. To see the complete schedule of policy and procedure reviews, visit: https://blind.iowa.gov/board-approval-policy.

# CFO – Cheri Myers

## Federal Grant Update:

Enclosed is the Grant Report as of 04/30/2023. We have received all the Grant Award Notices for Federal Fiscal year 2023. The State Match for the FY23 Vocational Rehabilitation grant must be spent by 9/30/2023.

## Budget Report:

Enclosed is the budget report on State FY23 through 04/30/2023. The Gifts and Bequests report is at the bottom of the FY23 Budget report.

The SFY24 budget has been signed by the Governor. The budget system is now open, and we will be finalizing the SFY24 Spending Plan in the budget system. Meeting with unit managers to assess any changes needed to help them better manage their units.

## Other:

* Stephanie Clark has been hired as an Accounting Technician 2; Stephanie will start on 6/12/2023.

# Communication – Connie Mendenhall

## External Communications

During the second quarter of 2023 I have given a presentation about IDB’s programs and services to the senior citizens group, hosted a table at Lovejoy Elementary career fair, participated in a tour and Q&A with a Des Moines Register reporter. I have two events on the calendar for June, the Director of Accessibility Services from Grand View college will be coming in for a tour and Q&A. I have been invited to give a presentation on blindness and finding your own voice at the Elly Public Library’s Building an Accessible Community town hall. The Volunteer committee hosted a Volunteer Open House and I have given a presentation to the Des Moines DOES #25 to encourage people to volunteer.

## Internal Communication

The Communications Team hosted a team building Carnival event at the May All Staff Meeting. The staff were divided into eight teams and participated in eight carnival types of games with lunch provided. The goal was for the teams to make it through all the games with all team members participating and through the food line in the allotted amount of time. This event encouraged each team to work together on time management and game strategies and encouraged participation from all staff members at an individual level by splitting the staff up into teams many staff members got to work with staff members they rarely talk too. The games were run by the Leadership Team who encouraged the teams on. There were three categories the teams were working to win, team that won the most game tickets, team that completed all eight games and the team with the best team participation level. The event was a huge success.

We are continuing to work with Tyler Technologies on testing the new Case Management System and working with OCIO on the new website launch. These two new systems will improve and streamline how IDB works with our clients and all Iowans looking to us for answers to their questions.

Looking forward IDB is scheduled to walk in the Iowa State Fair parade on August 9. LEAP will be wrapping up the summer with a Family Fun/Information Day. I am working on two Outreach projects, the first is a “top ten list” for cell phone stores. This list will touch on the many questions blind customers and their family members ask when purchasing a new cell phone. The list will also provide blind customers and their families with contact information to reach out to IDB to learn about our programs and services. The second project is a similar list for care centers, assisted living facilities and medical facilities. This list will remind the staff of the simple things they can do when working with a blind patient, also this lest will provide IDB’s contact information and encourage the staff, patients, and their families to reach out to IDB regarding programs and services.

# Education and Training Team – Helen Stevens

## Personnel

* Elizabeth Rouse, Kacey King, Kaden Green, Kyle Garcia, Rosanna Scott, and Trinh Ha have joined IDB as our 2023 LEAP staff. These temporary employees, along with our Young Adult Transition Program staff, run our residential summer program for youth ages 14-21.
* Katy Olsen resigned her position as cane travel instructor for YATP effective May 19.
* We continue interviewing for our vacant Youth services Worker and Communications instructor positions.

## Pre-Employment Transition Services

April Weekend Retreat

By Sarah Elmore

April 28th-30th a group of 10 students attended an adventurous weekend retreat at Sunstream Retreat Center in Ogden, Iowa. Students were challenged to try new things and work as a team. We witnessed brave moments, full participation, players encouraging each other and even better, supportive peers when someone advocated for themselves that it was too much. Every student in attendance tried the ziplines, shot an arrow at archery, tasted daring foods, searched for treasure in buckets of worms and crickets, relay raced their way through skill-based challenges, and completed group ropes challenges. The positive attitudes from this group of students were outstanding! This was the first retreat our team had the attending YATP students as student leads. They accepted the responsibility and exceeded expectations. At times, the weather was chilly, but in all, this retreat goes down in the books as one of the best!

* 24 unique participants attended retreats this year.
* Nine new students attended a retreat this year who had not attended a retreat or LEAP program prior to this school year.
* 15 students have applied so far to attend the 2023 LEAP program, which will be held June 11 - August 12 on the campus of Grand View University. Students can still attend even if they are unable to make it for the entire summer. 5 students have elected to attend the convention of the National Federation of the Blind as part of LEAP.

## Young Adult Transition Program

* Our school year ended May 19.
* Students made particularly strong progress this year in the areas of independent living and orientation and mobility.
* Five students are enrolled for the 2023-2024 school year.

## Client Training

* Approximately 110 clients are currently receiving services from a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher.
* As anticipated in March, this number is beginning to increase again, and we are excited to be able to partner with more clients to work toward their training goals.
* Self-week:
  + Of the eight clients who participated in the July session, three have since attended the Center.
  + Six clients participated in the October session, one of whom attended center training afterward. Others made significant progress toward completing their individualized training goals during the week.
  + Eight clients attended the March session, all but one of whom were first-time attenders. Most of these were clients relatively new to IDB.
  + Six clients attended the May session, one of whom has set a start date for beginning Orientation Center training this summer.
  + The next sessions will be held in July and October.
* Approximate total number of direct services recorded as provided to clients by VR Teachers, YATP or LEAP staff members so far during program year 2022, which began July 1, 2022: 2,200. These services include Disability Related Skills Training, Job Readiness Training, Pre-ETS Job Exploration and Counseling, Pre-ETS Work Based Learning Experiences, Pre-ETS Counseling on PSE Enrollment Opportunities, Pre-ETS Workplace Readiness Training, and Pre-ETS Instruction in Self-Advocacy.

# Independent Living Program - Kimberley Walford

## Independent Living Staff

It is with mixed emotions to share that Susan Howard, one of our senior Independent Living Rehabilitation (ILR) teachers announced earlier this month that she will retire October 31, 2023. She has been with the Iowa Department for the Blind for 36 years, starting her career with us right after finishing college. Her work ethic is exceptional, and personality will be missed. I am absolutely delighted to have Susan continue her service with us for yet another few months; however, I realize those days are numbered. Susan hopes to spend more time with her family, to enjoy a little traveling, and as her time permits, she will volunteer for the Independent Living (IL) program. In the meantime, and in advance, we all wish Susan heartfelt congratulations on all her hard work over the many years of service she has contributed leading up to her impending retirement. It is well deserved!

## Independent Living Integration

Our IL Division has an upcoming IL Integration training event in Des Moines which is scheduled June 4th through June 9, 2023. For those who are unfamiliar with IL Integration, this is an in-depth group training lasting for one full week. We generally offer this training at least two times per year. Planning is coordinated in collaboration with the Iowa Blindness and Independence Center staff and their administrator, along with two consumer groups. The two consumer groups include the Iowa Council of the United Blind (ICUB) Des Moines Chapter and the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa (NFBI) Des Moines Chapter, both who have already committed to participate. We currently have a September IL Integration planned as well and are planning to invite eight clients to participate. IL teachers are excited about both upcoming trainings event as we understand these training events are paramount to clients need to -develop self-confidence and positive attitudes about their blindness.

## Marketing Campaign

* The National Research and Training Center (NRTC) created the Time to Be Bold (TTBB) digital marketing campaign for Independent Living for Older Individuals Who Are Blind (ILOB). They continue to run their campaigns and update resources about the services available to individuals with vision loss who are 55 and older. They share all this information via Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn on their website.
* Independent Living staff continue high engagement campaigns such as face-to-face speaking engagements, visiting Senior Centers, Health and Educational Fairs, and contact with eye doctors.
* Launched a campaign targeting customers through a mailing who would more than likely refer new applicants to our IL program from Northeast Iowa. This will happen now county-by-county for all 99 counties.

# Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped Report and Statistics – Sarah Willeford

## Library Updates

The library has launched two new courses for Iowa educators who are working with students who use braille. The two courses will provide a guided pathway to Braille knowledge, expertise and becoming a certified Braille Transcriber. Course 1: Introduction to Braille Transcription will cover Lessons 1-12 in the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled Instruction Manual for Braille Transcribing held from July 10 – December 15. Course 2: Braille Transcriber Certification held from January 8, 2024 – August 16, 2024, will cover Lessons 13-20 and will include submission of the final manuscript to be reviewed for certification. Our hope is to provide training on braille transcription and increase the number of braille transcribers available to our students throughout Iowa.

The library has completed the implementation of the new Instructional Material Center (IMC) production tracking software called Athena. The new system is available to school districts to place orders. The IMC continues to work on the next phase of the project within the Athena module that will allow vendors to use a similar portal to receive and track projects and assignments that have been ordered for students.

The IMC Team continues to work with school districts through the changes implemented by the Iowa Department of Education and is currently working on an updated Memorandum of Understanding for School Districts for the ordering requirements and costs.

The library attended the Des Moines Book Festival on Saturday, March 25th. We had tables with braille activities and information about the library and the Department. The library tables were visited by over 300 people throughout the day. Braille activities and information was also taken to the Together We Can ASK Resource Center Conference in May. Over 60 individuals visited our table and received information.

The library would like to welcome our Summer VISTAs and Teacher Externs who will be joining us this summer. Chance Palm and Mami Salima will be joining the library staff on June 5th for 8 weeks to assist with the Summer Reading Program and other outreach activities. Chance and Mami are part of the AmeriCorps Summer VISTA program and a partnership with Central College. Alexandra Lifka-Reselman and Chandra Keairnes will be joining the library staff for six weeks starting in June as part of the Iowa Governor’s STEM Council’s STEM Teacher Externship program. Alexandra and Chandra will assist with library functions while learning more about the Library, Department, and accessibility, with the goal of taking that knowledge back to their students and classrooms.

## Library Programs and Outreach

Youth Programming:

* Summer Reading Program: Find Your Voice will begin June 5th through July 24th. Programs will be held virtually on Monday, Wednesday and Friday with activity boxes sent out the week before with everything participants need for the activities, crafts and more. Over 25 youth have signed up and our numbers continue to grow.
* Thursday Summer Library Program: STEM in the Library partners with the LEAP Program to provide in-person programs each Thursday with a focus on STEM and career exploration.
* Youth Service Librarian, Denise Bean and our summer staff will be visiting public libraries this summer to provide the program, When Storytime Comes to You, focusing on the story of Louis Braille, braille, and hands on activities.

Adult Programming:

* The Peek-a-Box Program began offering patrons, ages 18 years and older, a program to receive a monthly box of books and goodies just for them.  Each month patrons in the program receive a special box filled with books – audio or braille or large print – and goodies centered around a theme. Patrons who opt for audiobooks will receive a cartridge with 10-20 books dedicated to the theme of the month.  Patrons who choose to get braille or large print will receive 1-3 books.
* And the adult Summer Reading Program will launch later this summer with reading challenges and activities.

Online and Social Media

Library Blogs

Turning the Pages Library Blog. Find information on library services, programs, and resources. http://iowalibrary.blog

Instructional Materials Center Blog. For educators and transcribers. Information on accessible educational materials, braille transcription, universal design and more. http://idbimclibrary.blog

Podcasts

Library News. A monthly podcast by library staff about upcoming library events, programs, latest books and more.

Library Chat. A monthly podcast by library staff where we review books and podcasts on all types of subjects.

Braille Bits. A podcast reviewing each Braille Bits lesson and a discussion with a special guest about braille.

Social Media

Follow Twitter, like us on Facebook and check out the great resources on the IDB YouTube channel.

Library Statistics

For February 2023, March 2023, and April 2023

Library Patrons Added: 93

Library Material Circulation

Total Circulation: 86,503

Braille: 547

Large Print: 198

Digital Books: 83,258

Magazine Issues: 2,358

Digital Players: 142

Library Collection

Total Books Added to the Library Collection: 2,904

Braille: 804

Print/Braille: 70

Large Print: 113

Digital Books: 1,917

Instructional Materials Center Orders Received

Total Orders Received: 222

BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) Usage

Total Books Downloaded from BARD: 11,925

Audio: 9,986

Braille: 1,939

BARD Active Accounts: 627

Newsline Service Usage

Current Subscribers: 1,776

New Subscribers: 14

Telephone Calls: 7,537

Web Sessions: 24,334

“In Your Pocket” Deliveries: 27,121

E-mail Deliveries: 7,926

Iowa Newspaper Accesses: 75,859

National Newspaper Accesses: 5,580

International Newspaper Accesses: 641

Blog Usage

Library – Turning the Pages Blog

Visitors: 936

Views: 2,010

Instructional Materials Center Blog

Visitors: 522

Views: 1,520

Library Podcasts

Library News Monthly Podcast: 3 produced

Listens Online: 180

Sent Out on Cartridges: 1,926

Library Chat Podcast: 3 produced

Listens Online: 261

Braille Bits Podcast:

Listens Online: 241

Programming Statistics

Adult Programs Held: 7

Adult Program Attendance: 385

Youth Programs Held: 36

Youth Program Attendance: 483

Outreach Programs Held: 6

Outreach Program Attendance: 143

Total Programs Held: 49

Total Program Attendance: 1,011

# Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center Report – Karly Prinds

## Center Students

Currently in the Center we have four students and six staff in training. This current quarter, we have one graduation scheduled for June 2. During this quarter as well, we have had three student terminations. Between the months of May through August, we have six students who have dates scheduled to start Center training. We are also planning to have two of our Summer LEAP students join us in Center classes and activities, which we are very much looking forward to.

On March 31, Luis Gutierrez started his new position as our Generalist. He will be finishing up his Center training on June 23, where he will then begin his job duties. We are very happy to have him on board!

In May, the Center students cooked and hosted a dinner with our Self Week students. There was a lot of wonderful camaraderie and conversation, and we have two participants from that Self Week who will be starting the Center this summer!

We will be having our IL Integration week June 4-9, where IL clients will join us in the Center. Our Center students will be mentors to these clients and will also be teaching a bit too. This not only helps our Center students gain confidence by doing some teaching of skills they have learned, but it really does show our IL clients that blindness is just a characteristic that does not hold them back.

We have been getting out into the community this spring. We were scheduled to go bowling on April 14, however an unforeseen bowling event at the alley caused us to problem solve and come up with an alternative plan at the very last minute. Students and staff ended up going to see a movie close by. Our students were able to work on important skills, such as customer service, carrying their food while using their cane, finding not only the correct theater where the movie was playing, but finding their seat, as well as using descriptive audio while at the movie.

On May 5, we volunteered with Habitat for Humanity, building ramps for wheelchair access into homes. Students and staff worked together as a team, carrying loads of lumber, as well as using various power tools, such as sliding compound miter saws, drills, and rotomatics to measure accurately.

On May 15, we volunteered at Living History Farms, helping to move heavy antique furniture into a new building, which involved students using their travel skills to safely navigate up and down stairs, while carrying heavy loads.

Just A couple upcoming activities we have scheduled include traveling to Pella for the day in June and touring the art center in July.

## Maintenance/Facilities

Our maintenance team has been keeping up with needed repairs around the building, such as alley repair and tuck pointing. We are currently working with Major Maintenance on our south roof repair.

# Vocational Rehabilitation – Keri Osterhaus

## Position Vacancies and Changes

* We hired Bruce Lambert as our new Small Business Consultant for the Business Enterprises Program and Rebekah Traver as our Employment Supports Specialist. Both Bruce and Rebekah successfully completed their training in the Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center on June 2, 2023. We are excited to have both of them begin their field training on June 5, 2023.
* We have offered a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor position to an individual to fill one of our open positions.
* We have made an offer to fill our Career Instructor / Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor position to an individual who will work directly with students in our Young Adult Transition Program and the Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center. We plan to have this individual begin training mid-June.

## Vocational Rehabilitation Updates

IDB Currently has 455 clients accessing vocational rehabilitation services. Thirty-one individuals have been referred or self-referred to the VR program since April of this year. Thirty-two new plans for employment have been developed with new IDB clients and plans are being moved to implementation. 59 students are enrolled in high school and 66 students are enrolled in post-secondary training programs.

IDB successfully exited 33 VR clients in competitive and integrated employment during the current program year. These individuals worked an average of 27.33 hours per week and earned an average of $17.63/hour. Previous report individual worked an average of 25.60 hours per week and earned an average of $16.02/hour. Since April 1, 2023, there have been five individuals closed in the following positions: food prep worker, laborers and freight, stock and material mover, lawyer, project manager and vending facility operator. There are currently 25 individuals working in positions that meet their employment goals.

IDB is in the process of reviewing and updating current policies. We are including for the Board’s approval our Referral, Application and Eligibility Policies in addition to a Trial Work Policy. These policies are required of our Vocational Rehabilitation program.

IDB recently released a request for proposal for the purpose of developing trainings for students who are blind and eligible for pre-employment transition services. There are programs available that could supplement the work IDB is already doing in this area and benefit students throughout Iowa. We plan to review proposals received in June.

On June 14-16, Iowa’s Business Enterprises Program and the National Association of Blind Merchants are partnering to hold the next regional BLAST training for BEP here in Iowa. This training features updates from programs around the nation, updates on national issues, training on best practices, and a tour of the U-Select-It manufacturing facility in Clive, Iowa. We are excited to be able to host this event at IDB!

IDB is working with our core and required partners to modify our current State plan to include changes related to the signing of SF514 which will go into effect on 7/1/2023. In addition, we have begun work on the next four-year State Plan which engages partners across our state workforce system to effectively deliver workforce development services throughout Iowa.

IDB is also working with our core and required partners to update our Memorandum of Understanding. This is an agreement that outlines the operation of the one-stop delivery system in Iowa. A requirement of the MOU includes an Infrastructure Funding Agreement which is a financial plan to fund services and operating costs of the system. All partners are required to pay a proportionate share of the infrastructure costs. A virtual IFA consultation session was held on June 1, 2023, regarding policy recommendations to update the MOU policy and outline the process for the development of the IFA and One-Stop Operating Budget. Following the session, current policy will be updated to ensure Iowa meets the requirements of a compliant MOU.