**Board Meeting Reports**

**March 31, 2023**

# Director's Report – Emily Wharton

Library Director Sarah Willeford and I presented to the Education Appropriation Subcommittee on Monday, February 6, 2023. We gave a 20-minute presentation regarding IDB services and the impact that the contract termination, with the Department of Education, is having on blind and low vision Iowa students. The districts are telling us that they cannot afford braille and large print.  We have deep concerns on how this will diminish the already low literacy rates among blind and low vision students in Iowa for years to come. We have seen how low literacy has made assisting blind and low vision youth obtain employment significantly more difficult.

In her Condition of the State address, Governor Reynolds announced she would be introducing a state government realignment bill. The realignment bill would contain the following items pertaining to IDB.

* IDB will remain an independent agency. It will be considered a non-cabinet agency.
* There will be language modifying Iowa Code 216(B) to change how the IDB Director is appointed. Currently the Director is hired and fired by the Iowa Commission for the Blind. This language would have the IDB Director hired and fired by the Governor.

Item 1 means that IDB will continue to operate as we are now with no changes.

Item 2 was outlined in Division 13 of HF662 and SF514. It would substantially decrease the authority of the Commission and by extension, blind consumers. Having the IDB Director appointed by the Commission Board has allowed the Director to act in the best interest of blind Iowans even when this was in conflict with the interests of other larger state agencies. It has also allowed for stable leadership that continued through several administrations.

On February 13th, I attended the Senate State Government Committee meeting and could not in good conscience appear to give support to Division 13 of the realignment bill. A number of blind consumers and advocates attended this meeting and shared their reasons for opposing Division 13. They spoke about what IDB has done for them and other blind Iowans. SF514/SSB1123 was approved by the subcommittee and full State Government Committees. It was later passed by the full Senate. On February 22 and 23, 2023, as consumers and advocates testified against Division 13 in the House State Government Committee hearings. Chair Representative Bloomingdale was moved to tears by the testimony from blind Iowans and commented that this level of support indicated that I was doing a good job as Director. The realignment bill passed committee and the full House without amendment. As of March 23, 2023, it awaits the Governor’s signature, and it is said that it will receive that signature very soon. Upon enactment, the IDB Director will serve at the pleasure of the Governor. Rep. Bloomingdale stated during the floor debate that the Governor’s office intends to retain me as Director. I was told by the Governor’s Chief Operating Officer that the Governor’s office has no plans to terminate my appointment or seek to umbrella IDB under IWD at this time.

Commissioner Ryan passed away on November 18, 2022. Commissioner Amy Salger was appointed on February 28, 2023, to complete the remainder of the term which ends April 30, 2025. We welcome her to the Commission and appreciate her willingness to serve.   Michael Hoenig has been appointed to the term beginning May 1, 2023, and ending April 30, 2026. We appreciate his willingness to return to the Commission. Currently there is one vacant commission position with the term ending April 30, 2024.

During our March 7th quarterly Corrective Action Plan (CAP) review call with RSA, we were able to nearly complete most of the financial findings. We will not be able to clear the finding regarding the infrastructure funding agreement (IFA) that is required under WIOA as this requires cooperation from all core partners and Iowa Workforce Development will not be able to fully participate until realignment and the resolution of issues with the local areas. RSA is taking this into consideration. We are working with three different technical assistance centers to create policies that will satisfy the remaining programmatic findings. The Board Approval Policy included for approval in the Board Packet is in response to one of the CAP findings as well and the passing of this policy will resolve that finding.  RSA has reviewed and approved the included draft.

At the RSA meeting this week, I asked whether the Iowa Commission for the Blind will be in compliance with the regulations after the passage of Division 13 of the realignment bill or if we will be required to create an SRC (State Rehabilitation Council) like the general agency has. I was notified today that RSA views the Commission as providing sufficient oversight.

## Technology Report

* We have begun work on the migration to our new case management system and are on track for a fall 2023 go live.
* We are planning a Technology Fair for the afternoon of May 19th where those who are interested can see the latest in access technology and speak with vendors and access tech trainers.
* We have begun our website re-design as part of the Governor's statewide website update project.
* Rehabilitation technology specialists are now holding weekly office hours for VR clients.

CFO – Cheri Myers

## Federal Grant Update:

Enclosed is the Grant Report as of February 28, 2023. We have received all the Grant Award Notices for Federal Fiscal year 2023. The large Vocational Rehabilitation grant was increased to $7,461,836 increasing the required State Match to $2,019,532. The Independent Living for Older Blind grant was decreased to $299,759 which requires a State Match of $33,306. The Independent Living for Younger Blind grant was increased to $69,612 increasing the State Match to $7,741. The result is an increase of $119,647 needed in our State Appropriation for State Match purposes.

## Budget Report:

Enclosed is the budget report on State FY23 through February 28, 2023. The report included compares year to date to the annual budget based on state fiscal year. We are 58% of the way through the State Fiscal Year. State Vehicle Operation appears to be running over budget for the year. This is in part due to the increase in cost of gas. The conducting of the Statewide Needs Assessment has increased the Prof & Scientific Services expense. IT equipment increased due to laptops that needed to be replaced due to problems with JAWS functioning with the operating system and the procurement of a new case management system. The case management system has received prior approval from RSA and the majority of cost will be covered by federal funds. The Gifts and Bequests report is at the bottom of the FY23 Budget report.

The SFY24 budget has been submitted and the Governor and Legislature have not recommended an increase in State Appropriation.

## WorkDay Conversion:

Human Resource functions including payroll and employee Expense reimbursements have been converted to WorkDay. All other WorkDay conversions have been put on a hard stop by DAS. It is unclear what to expect at this time.

## Other:

* Kelli Brennan, Accounting Technician 2, has been promoted to an Accounting Technician 3 upon the resignation of Jeremiah Shar.
* Currently recruiting for a for an Accounting Technician 2.

# Communication – Connie Mendenhall

Our Legislative Open House Day at the capitol on February 20, 2023, was a great event. The Center students baked cookies, bars, and bread for the event. The YATP and Center students worked together to package the snacks for the event. This event provided IDB with the opportunity to discuss our programs and services with the Legislators, their staff, and several other groups in the rotunda that day.

Presentations have been given to a boy scout troop and members of the Lion’s club. I am looking forward to presenting to the medical staff management team at Dallas County Hospital and a group at Mary Greely Hospital to discuss our programs, services and how to live with blindness. Several tentative events are scheduled for the summer. These events include participating at the Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council’s 2023 Make Your Mark! Self-Advocacy Conference, having a booth on a Saturday at the Des Moines Downtown Farmer’s Market and participating in the Iowa State Fair parade.

# Education and Training Team – Helen Stevens

## Personnel

* Andrew Ross Krischel began work as the Independent Living Skills Coordinator for YATP beginning January 4. Ross has a BA in English from Graceland University with endorsements in Special Education and Secondary Education, as well as an MA in Education from Morningside College. He previously taught special education to transition-age youth.
* Samantha Fuller began work as a Youth Services Worker January 12. Sam is an Iowan with a variety of previous experience with youth.
* Norma Boge-Conyers began employment as a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher beginning March 13. Norma is a blind Iowan with a Master’s Degree in Vocational Rehabilitation Administration from Drake.
* Lerone Walker began employment as a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher March 20. He holds the National Orientation and Mobility Certification and a master’s degree from Louisiana Tech.
* Chelsea Van Gorp resigned her position as Communications Instructor for the Young Adult Transition Program effective March 20. Applications are being accepted to fill this position.
* We are still in the process of hiring an additional Youth services Worker, and our final team members for this year’s LEAP summer program. I look forward to sharing more in June.

## Pre-Employment Transition Services

December Weekend Retreat Summary

Rising Stars

By Ross Pollpeter

At our December retreat, 13 students focused on teamwork to present themselves in the best positive light. In one activity, students explored what it means to be a negative and a positive influence on a team by acting in various roles to plan a group vacation. For Hell’s Kitchen, teams of students used their kitchen skills and creativity to prepare homemade pizzas, charcuterie boards, and desserts to be judged by our panel of IDB judges. At Next Top Model, students didn’t put on a fashion show, but they did have to present themselves by demonstrating emotion through actions, facial expressions, body language, and music. Together they learned to put their best foot forward and be the next rising star.

January Weekend Retreat Summary

Tech It Out

Students participated in a variety of technology-themed activities. For example, students worked on fine-motor and basic home-maintenance type skills by taking apart technology and learning about the different components. They then worked on orientation and appropriate behaviors while smashing the technology using a variety of methods. Students finished the process by creating art sculptures from pieces of the technology using hot glue or super glue. Students did some basic HTML coding to create a text adventure game, learned about binary and following directions by creating necklaces or other items with their name in binary, worked on social skills through speed networking, and attended a career panel with several blind people employed in various technology roles.

February Weekend Retreat Summary

Science & Engineering

By Ross Pollpeter

Last weekend 12 students arrived, across Iowa they're from,

Engineers or scientists perhaps one day they become.

All excited, energetic, eager to explore,

Projects and activities planned, students asking for more,

Designed landing craft for their egg astronauts, dropped them from the stairwell,

Only one survived, 4th floor was the final farewell.

Engineered mousetraps, spoons, craft sticks and tape into catapults,

Shot ping pong balls at Helen and her castle with hilarious results.

Some students challenged their knowledge of braille,

Testing their skills, reading, and writing. They could not fail.

Each took turns overseeing a table at the annual STEM Fest,

Making beach balls float, "Wingardium leviosa.” Their project was one of the best.

Fantastic movie night, Gravity had students on the edge of each seat, tense with fear. Explained science, effects of zero gravity, momentum, mass and weight, reentry into atmosphere. Students seemed to have much fun with our Science & Engineering theme, two months later in April, they return to do the adventure again at Ogden Iowa’s Sunstream.

* Our final retreat of this school year will be held April 28-30.
* 24 unique participants have attended retreats so far this year.
* 9 new students have attended a retreat who had not attended a retreat or LEAP program prior to this school year.
* We are still accepting applications for youth ages 14 - 21 to attend our 2023 LEAP program, which will be held June 11 - August 11 on the campus of Grand View University. Students can still attend even if they are unable to make it for the entire summer.

## Young Adult Transition Program

* Our student who graduated in December is back home and obtained employment in the community.
* Another student graduated in February after completing all IEP goals.
* Students continue to work on their individualized goals in areas including cane travel, independent living, career exploration, money management, access technology, and braille.
* We are still working to finalize enrollment for the 2023-2024 school ear. We are anticipating six to eight students at this time.

## Client Training

* Approximately 100 clients are currently receiving services from a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher.
	+ It is believed we have reached the bottom of the decline in numbers we have had over the past year with our implementation of more clear goals and expectations.
	+ Clients who have been exited from the VR teaching program are those who have been unable or unwilling to put forth the time needed to make progress toward their goals, and more accurately reflects the number of clients who are actively working with a teacher.
	+ While it may sound counter-intuitive, in most cases it is better for a client not to work on a skill at all than to work on it half-heartedly. For example, if a client decides to learn braille, but does not practice between lessons, the client will move through the lessons slowly, and frequently become frustrated by material he does not remember. The client is more likely to gain the impression that braille is hard, not useful, and/or he is incapable of learning it. If instead a client waits to learn braille until she has the time to practice, she is more likely to learn it well enough in a short enough timeframe to remain motivated and actually incorporate it into her life.
	+ Clients are encouraged that they can begin teaching again as soon as they are ready, and they continue to work with their Rehabilitation Counselors on their employment-related needs, or whatever is needed for them to be able to constructively participate in training.
	+ We have also had a number of clients exit the program because they have met their goals. It has been extremely encouraging to see an increase in the number of clients learning the skills they need in a timely manner and moving on with their lives. We look forward to seeing this number continue to increase as teachers are able to provide more consistent services to these clients.
* Self-week:
	+ Of the eight clients who participated in the July self-week session, three are currently in the Center.
	+ Six clients participated in the October self-week session, one of whom is now in the center. Others made significant progress toward completing their individualized training goals.
	+ 8 clients are scheduled to attend the March session.
	+ Attendance is still being finalized for the May session.
* 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: 1,700. 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 Barber

FY22 IL federal reports were finalized by December 30. Of possible interest, the cost of Independent Older Blind service per person for FY22 was $1,669.21 in comparison to FY21 the cost was $1,542.41. During the same two fiscal years, we served two fewer clients from FY22 as compared to FY21.

On February 15, 2023, the Tyler Technologies team met with the IL program administrator to learn more about how Independent Living side of our eFORCE case management system. Subsequent meetings have been planned as the new case management system configuration.

On February 15, 2023, we also had a new IL office volunteer. The volunteer will be working to assist the IL secretary on Tuesday mornings and Thursday afternoons.

In March, the Older Blind Technical Assistance Training Center (OIB-TAC) is sponsoring a training conference in Savannah, Georgia. The training will include topics regarding essential elements on policies and procedures, case management, measures, monitoring, and planning. At the June meeting will provide an update from this conference.

## Independent Living Integration & Community Based Trainings

* Our IL Division is planning for our next Independent Living Integration training event in Des Moines which is scheduled June 4th through June 9, 2023. This is an in-depth group training lasting for one full week and is generally offered 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, Council of the United Blind (ICUB) Des Moines Chapter and the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa (NFBI) Des Moines Chapter. IL teachers are excited to get this next training event underway as it appears there may be several IL clients who will be up for nomination and consideration for participating.
* Independent Living Teachers continue to plan for Community-Based Trainings (CBTs). CBTs were scheduled January 11, February 21, and February 23, 2023. This training is a small group training held in respective communities around the state; however, at times we do hold them at the Iowa Department for the Blind when there is interest from those living close near the Des Moines area. The training curriculum is customized by the IL Teachers as much as possible to optimize every participant’s learning experience to ultimately help them reach their respective training outcome.

**Partner Meetings**

* In December 2022, Statewide Independent Living held their Annual Meeting. At that meeting the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and Centers for Independent Living discussed a Day at the State of Iowa Capitol on January 25, 2023. The next IL Day on Capitol Hill for 2024, the SILC Director requested the entire 1st floor rotunda on January 23, 2024.
* On January 13, 2023, Olmstead Consumer Task Force met. The following is a basic summary of some of the topics shared:
1. Iowa Finance Authority known approved additional funding and allocated $500 million in funding 36 affordable rental units targeted to seniors in Iowa City, homelessness assistance programs across Iowa, and other affordable home ownership projects. IFA is collaborating with partner organizations to assist in meeting housing needs for individuals moving from Glenwood.
2. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Director Kelly Garcia responded to the topics as follows:
3. That refuges may be able to address shortages in nursing assistant and childcare workforce issues.
4. Iowa Medicaid Enterprise is constantly reviewing other state’s programs and suggested the Medicaid Town Halls to propose specific suggestions for improvement.
5. It was noted that the one Olmstead member noted that the Executive Committee requested an update on the availability of data for the Olmstead Plan. DHHS is creating a spreadsheet to review the different groups, task forces, commissions, committees, the purpose, and what they are required to do, and the membership, and who is served.
6. The Olmstead Chair, Paula suggested the Olmsted Consumer Task Force identify the most preferred data points and ask DHHS to publicly display it. Ms. Garcia suggested reviewing the existing dashboards and determine additional datapoints that may be possible. Another Olmstead member suggested that the Taskforce compare the data dashboards, focus data requests, and how often to request her presence at OCTF meetings.

## Independent Living Forum

February 8, 2023, we held our IL Forum. IL Division staff and IDB’s Director attends these quarterly forums to provide updates and information to the public. All IL forums are recorded then following a podcast is uploaded to our IDB website. There is a link on the IDB website called “Podcasts” noted here: <https://blind.iowa.gov/podcasts>.

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

## Library Updates

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 work on the next phase of the project has begun and will be the implementation of an 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 requiring the school districts be billed directly for accessible educational materials. This also includes providing training on the new Athena program to order materials.

The Library Team also attended several conferences to help provide information about the Library and the Instructional Materials Center. Staff also had opportunities to present at some of these conferences focusing on accessibility. These included the Iowa Technology in Education Connection, Future Ready Iowa Summit, and the Iowa Library Online Conference.

The Iowa Regional Braille Challenge was held on Saturday, February 25th with 14 students participating in-person or testing remotely. Following the Braille Challenge from 2:00pm – 4:00pm the library partnered with the South-Central Regional STEM Council (Iowa Governor’s STEM Advisory Council) to host a STEM Fest that was open to the Braille Challenge participants and the public. Over 20 organizations and groups provided accessible STEM activities which also included demonstrations by IDB Center staff in both the kitchen and the shop. Over 60 attended the Braille Challenge and 170 attended the STEM Fest.

The library will be participating again in the Des Moines Book Festival on Saturday, March 25th. We will have tables with braille activities and information about the library and the Department.

The library would like to welcome Josh Estabrook. Josh began as Digital Recording Specialist for the Library in February and is currently in training. We look forward to having Josh on our team.

## Library Programs and Outreach

Youth Programming:

* Afterschool Program, Crafting Your Story, is held each Tuesday afternoon at 4:15 pm on Zoom. Each month there will be a new theme and families who register will receive a program supply kit in via mail. Average of 15 have signed up each month.
* Makerspace Mondays are held on the second Monday of the month at 6:00pm in-person at IDB or participants can receive the activity kit and video to do the projects at home. Average of 5 attend in person and 18 receive the activity kit and video each month.
* The Story Box Program began in January 2023 offering young patrons, ages 0 through 18 years old, a program to receive a monthly box of books and themed selected gifts that highlights the Youth Library’s 9 Book Neighborhoods: Favorites, Our World, Stories, Fairy and Folk Tales, Concepts, Transportation, Rhymes and Songs, Nature, and Celebrations. Each month young patrons in the program will receive a special box filled with books – audio or braille or large print – and goodies centered around a neighborhood theme.

Adult Programming:

* The *Peek-a-Box Program* began in January 2023 and offers 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 will 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.

## 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 November 2022, December 2022, and January 2023

Library Patrons Added: 95

Library Material Circulation

Total Circulation: 83,859

Braille: 813

Large Print: 266

Digital Books: 80,341

Magazine Issues: 2,307

Digital Players: 132

Library Collection

Total Books Added to the Library Collection: 2,545

Braille: 389

Print/Braille: 63

Large Print: 105

Digital Books: 1,988

Instructional Materials Center Orders Received

Total Orders Received: 82

BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) Usage

Total Books Downloaded from BARD: 11,721

Audio: 10,315

Braille: 1,406

BARD Active Accounts: 605

Newsline Service Usage

Current Subscribers: 1,762

New Subscribers: 6

Telephone Calls: 7,004

Web Sessions: 20,361

“In Your Pocket” Deliveries: 23,679

E-mail Deliveries: 10,162

Iowa Newspaper Accesses: 73,798

National Newspaper Accesses: 4,746

International Newspaper Accesses: 656

Blog Usage

Library – Turning the Pages Blog

Visitors: 999

Views: 2,071

Instructional Materials Center Blog

Visitors: 460

Views: 1,420

Library Podcasts

Library News Monthly Podcast: 3 produced

Listens Online: 237

Sent Out on Cartridges: 1,658

Library Chat Podcast: 3 produced

Listens Online: 214

Braille Bits Podcast:

Listens Online: 312

Programming Statistics

Adult Programs Held: 5

Adult Program Attendance: 73

Youth Programs Held: 33

Youth Program Attendance: 497

Outreach Programs Held: 9

Outreach Program Attendance: 296

Total Programs Held: 47

Total Program Attendance: 866

# Orientation Center Report – Karly Prinds

## Orientation Center Students

* The Center currently has eight students and an additional four staff in training. WE had a student who graduated on February 17, and we will have another student who will graduate on March 3.
* We had our holiday meal on December 20, where all our Center staff nonvisually cooked lunch for our students. We will not ask our students to do anything we would not do ourselves, so they observed us prepping for lunch.
* Our students were busy in the kitchens baking lots and lots of cookies, banana bread, and lemon bars for our Day at the Capitol on February 20. Everyone did well working as a team to get this accomplished, and the event went well with lots of positive feedback!
* We are planning our spring activities; just a few include, heading to Pella for Tulip Time, touring the Des Moines Art Center, and volunteering for Habitat for Humanity.

## Maintenance/Facilities

Our facilities team has been making needed repairs to our building. A new ADA compliant shower was installed in the fifth-floor north restrooms, and we have also been making needed repairs to our roof as well.

# Vocational Rehabilitation – Keri Osterhaus

## Position Vacancies and Changes

* We hired Bruce Lambert as our new Small Business Consultant for the Business Enterprises Program. Bruce has experience in business management, recruitment, customer service, training, supervision, and finance. Bruce’s first day was March 1, 2023.
* Rebekah Traver has been hired as our new Employment Supports Specialist. Rebekah brings experience and skills in vocational rehabilitation counseling, academic advising, employer engagement, and college and career readiness. In addition, Rebekah has had experience in developing work experiences and other career opportunities for clients. Rebekah will begin her position on March 17, 2023. Kristin Hixenbaugh had resigned from this position in December 2022.
* We have had to repost the Deafblind specialist position. This position will focus on providing vocational rehabilitation services and consultation to clients who are deafblind. The position closes on March 12, 2023.
* Ambrose Fowler-Harney resigned from his position as Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in January 2023. We have posted his position and are in the hiring process to replace his position.
* We are also in the process of hiring a Career Instructor / Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to work directly with students in our Young Adult Transition Program and the Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center.

# Vocational Rehabilitation Updates

**Employment:** IDB has successfully exited 25 VR clients in competitive and integrated employment during the current program year. These individuals worked an average of 25.60 hours per week and earned an average of $16.02/hour. Since January 1, 2023, there have been 9 individuals closed in the following positions: business manager, cook, customer service, general and operations manager, janitor, orientation and mobility instructor, retail salesperson, stock clerk and warehouse manager/co-owner. There are currently 18 individuals working in positions that meet their employment goals.

Thirty individuals have been referred or self-referred to the VR program since January of this year. Twenty-five clients enrolled in post-secondary education and ten students eligible for pre-employment transition services have opened VR cases this program year. There is a total number of 94 students that are eligible for pre-employment transition services and 69 students served by IDB that are in

post-secondary education.

**Program Updates:** In January 2023, IDB started partnering with Dale Carnegie to provide the Generation Next program to blind students eligible for pre-employment transition services. This is hosted by using a virtual classroom. Instruction has been focused on self-advocacy and workplace readiness, including relationship building, developing communication skills, managing stress, and developing confidence. We are wrapping up a program this month and are looking forward to future programs being offered to students.

Pathful Explore (formally VirtualJobShadow.com) is part of the Pathful College and Career Readiness System and was purchased last year to provide pre-employment transition services to students who are blind. The program includes assessments, college information, videos specific to identified careers, resume assistance, cover letter guidance, and life skills information and trainings. Counselors have received ongoing training using this platform to be able to use with students who are developing their career goals. IDB has begun partnering with IESBVI teachers in using Pathful with mutually served students. A curriculum is being developed as a resource for counselors.

**Business Enterprises Program:** In February, the Iowa Department for the Blind and the United States Department of Agriculture signed a new permit for service covering the National Animal Disease Center in Ames, Iowa. This facility will feature three vending locations as well as a micro market on their campus; opportunities in the future include restarting their food service program. This encompasses approximately 9,245 square feet of space benefiting a Randolph-Sheppard operator.

IDB’s BEP team has worked with the Elected Committee of Blind Vendors to host and create live trainings for current vendors which are held over the zoom platform. These trainings focus on current needs of vendors, upskilling, use of technology for monitoring equipment and providing information needed to expand and grow businesses. These trainings are recorded and will be posted to the BEP’s website on a dedicated resource page for Iowa’s operators. This resource can be found at <https://blind.iowa.gov/BEPResources>.

Iowa will be hosting a regional BLAST training for BEP operators. Currently scheduled for June 14-16, Iowa’s Business Enterprises Program will be hosting the event in conjunction with the National Association of Blind Merchants. This training will feature updates from programs around the Midwest, updates on national issues, training on best practices, and a tour of the U-Select-It manufacturing facility in Clive, Iowa. The event is expected to draw attendees from around the country including Nebraska, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Kentucky.

**Workforce partnerships:** IDB continues to collaborate with IowaWORKS and Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services on a regular basis in local areas. Most recently, IDB participated in the one stop certification assessment process for the local workforce development areas. VR counselors also represent the Department on the Disability Access Committees in the local areas where program and physical accessibility of the one-stop office is the focus.

VR Counselors represented IDB at the bi-annual workforce training day in February in their local areas. VR Counselors had the opportunity to update the partners regarding IDB services, build relationships, tour businesses, provide training on accessibility and disability etiquette and meet with local employers.