**Board Meeting Reports**

**March 15, 2022**

# Director's Report – Emily Wharton

In early January, we were pleased to learn that Governor Reynolds had supported our state appropriation request and included the full requested amount in her budget. Governor Reynolds continues to be a strong supporter of IDB. This budget was introduced as [SSB3148](https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ga=89&ba=SSB3148) on February 17. We are watching to make sure there are no surprises or differences as the bill moves through the Senate and House. To see our SFY23 Ask Overview visit <https://blind.iowa.gov/ask23>
To read our compilation of success stories from 2021, visit ([https://blind.iowa.gov/success21/](https://blind.iowa.gov/success21/)](https://blind.iowa.gov/success21/%5D%28https%3A//blind.iowa.gov/success21/%29)

On March 3, the State Workforce Development Board approved the biennial revisions to our WIOA Unified State Plan. Keri Osterhaus worked very hard as part of the core partner team to make revisions and communicate the document and process to stakeholders. We were hoping to see a draft of the Workforce Re-alignment Consultant’s report to include data and observations into the Unified State Plan, however, it was not yet available as of this writing. I received a request for more information on March 3rd from the consultant. I have been participating in SWDB strategic planning for the past several months. We are making progress toward creating a plan that will help to focus the SWDB’s work and increase engagement.

On March 4, Governor Reynolds announced the re-appointment of Commissioner Geneva Jacobsen. We are very pleased that Commissioner Jacobsen will continue to provide quality oversight and leadership for our agency. Senate confirmations of appointees should occur soon.

On January 28, we received our draft RSA Monitoring Report. We submitted our responses on February 11th. Our requested error corrections were accepted by RSA. At the time of this writing, we are waiting for RSA’s response to our comments and the final report. We expect the final report to contain corrective action plans for a few findings. We are not in compliance with WIOA currently because our state does not have an infrastructure funding agreement (IFA) between all core partners. IDB is the smallest core partner and cooperation, and prioritization of this agreement is required of all core partners. Leadership changes, new computer systems, and local workforce restructuring have combined to continuously push this agreement down the priority list. I have shared this concern with my SWDB goal working group to make them aware that this will be an issue for all partners and to factor this into the goals that we set for the WIOA core partners in the strategic plan. We requested technical assistance in a number of areas including supported employment and our current memorandum of understanding (MOU) with IVRS which RSA has cited as out of alignment with regulations. We have already put in place measures to track period of performance for obligations and encumbrances, document processes, and properly version policy to meet expectations RSA shared with us back in July 2021 during the virtual monitoring sessions.

In June, San Diego State University will be in Iowa to perform our triennial Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) as required by WIOA. They will be sending out surveys and conducting meetings with stakeholders. We are hoping to release our request for proposals (RFP) for a new case management system for our VR and IL programs within the next six weeks. Because of the federal budget approval process, we have not yet received our FFY22 VR or OIB grant awards. We will need to delay the release of the RFP until we have the ability to draw down our full grants.

In the building, we have moved the Technology Resource Center (TRC) to the first floor where Aids and Devices was once located. We believe this will be more convenient for clients and patrons as well as our technology staff. Room 320 on the third floor is now an additional meeting space seating 12-14 people. With COVID numbers falling, we are having more public and IDB events in the building. We appreciate the Friends of the Library, ICUB and NFBI for volunteering with the youth weekend retreats and Braille Challenge. To view our Building and Facilities Procedures, visit <https://blind.iowa.gov/manual#build>.

At the February All-Staff Meeting, we held an interactive discussion regarding the use of state resources and what is considered public information. We are continuing our work to make IDB an agency based on truth rather than power. On the recommendation of our cross-divisional Client and staff Safety Workgroup, we are looking to schedule Crucial Conversations training for all staff this spring or early summer. This workgroup has also developed language to add to our client rights and responsibilities documents. These documents can be found at: <https://blind.iowa.gov/policies-1>. I would like to thank Nami Wallace, Zach Ellignson, Joe Wiegl, Sarah Baebler-Hall, Monica Veneski, Connie Mendenhall, Ross Polpeeter, Chelsea Van Gorp and Keri Osterhaus for the hard work they have put in during the past year. These volunteers had to have open conversation about very sensitive issues. While this work was not easy, it has been very beneficial to our agency and to those we serve. The spring session of our New Staff Seminar will be held the week of April 4th and we plan to have

seven participants this session.

At the March 1st meeting of the Elected Committee of Blind Vendors, I shared that BEP Administrator, Kathy Roat has resigned effective April 1. We thank her for her work with this program over the past two and a half years. BEP Counselor Roxanne Huffaker has also resigned effective March 9. This BEP has had many challenges over the years, and this will be another opportunity to evaluate current and future program needs in order to obtain the best possible personnel combination moving forward. We are looking at obtaining a BEP management application that will allow us to receive reports electronically and manage all aspects of the program within a web interface in order to reduce paperwork and the staff time associated with it. Program Supervisor Keri Osterhaus and I are working on defining duties and creating job descriptions that will best meet our overall agency needs, the needs of the VR division, and the needs of the BEP. Operators and other stakeholders are encouraged to share ideas with Keri or I.

CFO – Cheri Myers

## Federal Grant Update:

Enclosed is the Grant Report as of 2/28/2021. The preliminary FFY22 grant award notices have been received but not the full awards. This is typical as we can receive the grants in increments.

## Budget Report:

Enclosed is the budget report on State FY22 through 2/28/2021. The report included report compares year to date to the annual budget based on state fiscal year. A brief explanation has been added in column F on any item that appeared to be over budget to date.

The Gifts and Bequests report at the bottom of the FY22 Budget report.

## WorkDay Conversion:

The state conversion to WorkDay is progressing. The accounting staff are now busy preparing conversion worksheets as well as doing their standard duties. Grants management, Procurement, Budget, and Financial Accounting are planned to be converted by the end of September 2022.

## State Fiscal Year End:

State fiscal year end is quickly approaching, and the staff have been working hard to ensure that accounts payable are up to date and the payment of authorization is up to date.

## Other:

* The FY21 audit has been completed and one finding was noted and corrective action and procedures implemented. The FY22 audit has already begun and is scheduled to end in April.
* The final NRLI seminar that I was to attend has again been delayed due to COVID concerns.
* Have hired a part-time Accounting Clerk 2, Peggy Halterman. Her training is going well.

# Education and Training Team – Helen Stevens

## Personnel

* Katy Olsen accepted the position of Cane Travel Instructor for the Young Adult Transition Program effective February 14. Katy is a native Iowan. Katy worked IDB’s LEAP program for 3 summers, and then received her master’s degree in Orientation and Mobility from Louisiana Tech.
* We are still in the process of hiring for several other positions and anticipate having more announcements in June.
* We are just slightly too early to announce this year’s summer program staff. They will be joining us for initial staff training, called Staff Camp, March 25-27.

## Pre-Employment Transition Services

* 8 youth participated in the September youth weekend retreat.
* 9 youth participated in the October youth weekend retreat.
* 9 youth participated in the December youth weekend retreat.
* 13 youth participated in the January youth weekend retreat. Activities included playing accessible computer games, building spaghetti towers, solving an escape room created by Director Wharton, shopping at a mock concession stand, and either learning how to navigate a touch screen or write computer code. Students also participated in a discussion about internet safety and privacy.
* 13 youth participated in the February youth weekend retreat. Activities included a Scavenger Hunt with ICUB, a couple STEM activities, string ball, and either activities to learn the braille alphabet or increase braille reading speed. Some students also participated in the braille Challenge, and all students participated in the STEM Fest held in conjunction with the Braille Challenge.
* We have had a total of 17 different students participate, and 7 new students have attended their first retreat this year. We have additional new students signed up for April.
* Our attendance is still significantly lower than it was prior to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is beginning to grow again.
* Education and Training Team members and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are working hard to connect with new students and encourage them to participate. We appreciate assistance connecting with more youth, in particular in the 14-16 age range.

## Young Adult Transition Program

* One student completed the program in December, and another joined the program in January.
* Students continue to make progress on their individual goals, and we continue to recruit new students for the 2022-2023 school year.

## Client Training

* Approximately 100 clients are currently receiving services from a Rehabilitation Technology Specialist.
* Approximately 150 clients are currently receiving services from a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher.
* In January, instructors began a process of creating SMART goals to help clients more effectively make progress with the skills they need to learn for successful employment.
* This process involves prioritizing only a few goals at a time so a client can focus and make meaningful progress toward each goal, and clearly outlining the amount of practice needed for clients to be able to master new skills.
* This has already resulted in increased progress for some clients. Other clients have realized that they are currently unable or unwilling to devote the time needed to learn a particular skill, and so have decided to forego training in that area at this time.
* 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.
* 9 clients are scheduled to participate in the March self-week session. Last year we started combining business class with all center and self-week students for the week, and in October we had our first joint activity. The plan is to continue this collaboration going forward to help increase self-week students’ exposure to the center.
* We are finalizing attendance for the May session and anticipate having significantly more students attend in May than in March. We believe that the decline in COVID cases and the nicer weather is helping more clients become open to attending. Additionally, instructors have done a great job promoting self-week with their clients.
* Self-week sessions have been scheduled for July, October, March and May during Program Year 2022, and applications are now being accepted.
* Approximate total number of direct services recorded as provided to clients by VR Teachers, Rehabilitation Technology Specialists, YATP or LEAP staff members so far during program year 2021, which began July 1, 2021: 2,400. These services include Disability Related Skills Training, Job Readiness Training, Rehabilitation Technology, 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.
* Program year 2020: 3,000
* Program year 2019: 3,100
* Program year 2018: 1,600
* As anticipated, we continued the trend of recording more services in quarter 2 than we had during the same quarter in any previous year.

# Independent Living Program - Kimberley Barber

## Alma Pedretti Charitable Foundation Grant Application

On Monday, October 18, 2021, in collaboration with the University of Iowa Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) and Independent Living (IL) teacher Susan Howard, we applied for a Hilker-Pedretti Charitable Foundation grant with focus on a new pilot project to be administered under our Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) IL program. The foundation offered $5,000. We elected not to accept the foundation grant as we requested a grant of $39,826.94 to fund the project. We are eligible to reapply in the future if we wish.

## Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC)

It was announced by OIB-TAC that our Independent Living program had been awarded Intensive Training and Technical Assistance (T&TA) through the Older Individuals who are Blind programs from the OIB-TAC starting January 3, 2022. This was announced to the Commissioners though my last board report. When attempting to organize a meeting with OIB-TAC, it was discovered they could not issue TA again given they previously assisted our agency within the last five years. Instead, their staff offered to provide some telephone consultation as we needed.

## Iowa Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), Executive Director (ED) Retirement

Through the last Commission Report, Dawn Francis, Executive Director (ED) of Iowa Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) announced she would retire the end of business on December 31, 2021. The SILC Executive Committee immediately posted that position and after the close of the post, started scheduling job candidates for interviews. Eventually, Vienna Hoang of Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services and I; both non-voting members of SILC, were invited to be a part of the SILC Executive Committee meetings where discussions were being held about the various job candidates and their qualifications. A job offer was finally made to a qualified job candidate and on February 28, 2022, Amy Robasse accepted the position as ED of the SILC. Since this time, the SILC Executive Committee has been helping Amy to acclimate to the position and her duties. She is pleased to be onboard and ready to move forward.

## Independent Living Brochures

Last Commission update, there was information shared that our Independent Living brochure concepts were completed on paper. Several printing companies were contacted for quotes; however, I was able to obtain one company who responded to obtain a quotation. 818: A Tiny Design Empire owned by Melissa Carlson reached back out. She was interested in our project and asked that we scan then email our brochure concepts, so we did. She plans to reply and supply us with any recommendations to help us finalize our brochure projects. The recommendations should include any production/printing costs.

## Delta Gamma Volunteer

Another follow-up regarding Abby Winkelbauer, Drake University Delta Gamma service member. We met to discuss what their sorority could do to help our Independent Living program. She discussed a fundraiser that they hold in the spring where Delta Gamma raises about $3,000 annually. She reported they donate approximately half of the proceeds raised to an organization of choice. If their fundraiser goes well, we discussed that the designation could be used to help defray the cost of finalizing and printing our Independent Living brochures. She will be checking with their Drake accounting department to see if it’s possible to donate any funds earned from their upcoming fundraiser to our IDB Gifts & Bequests Foundation. She will get back to us with their decision.

## IL Integration

IL Integration for those under the age of 55 is now confirmed and planned for Sunday, April 10 through Friday, April 15, 2022. We will have five clients, one of which will be a mentor. IL Teachers Connie Mendenhall and Lori Berglund will be staffed to help the Center during that training week. Our newest IL Teacher, Alyssa Munstermann, will be shadowing to learn the ropes. We are looking forward to a busy yet fun filled training week!

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

## Library Updates

The library held the Iowa Regional Braille Challenge on Saturday, February 26th at the Iowa Department for the Blind. Eight students and their families attended the event in person, while 9 other students tested remotely with their TVI. Once the testing was complete, participants and their families could attend our STEM Fest where they could make snow, plant a seed, learn about coding, and much more! We would like to thank all of our volunteers who made the day a great success.

February’s Makerspace Monday program for youth and families had participants partnering with ArtForce Iowa to create art pieces for the *I AM Skywalk Activation Project*. There will be two 4’ x 5’ canvases with the “I AM” braille quotes printed out and adhered to the surface of each canvas. One canvas, painted in beautiful, blue jewel tones will have, in braille, the words "I AM" on the surface. The other canvas, also painted in beautiful, blue jewel tones will have, in braille, the words "I AM" along with the floral "I AM " letters adhered to the canvas surface, above the braille text. Both canvases will be sealed with epoxy resin, so they can be touched by the observer and read. This project is designed to be a sensory, interactive set of works.  The canvases will be installed on a skywalk wall at 701 Grand Avenue no later than March 31st.

Youth Services Librarian, Denise Bean, completed the 2021 program When Storytime Comes to You for Iowa Public Libraries. Denise provides a storytime for the community members at the public library introducing braille and the story of Louis Braille. This fall she visited 13 public libraires and had 216 participants in the program. Denise will be visiting more Iowa public libraries this spring.

The Library issued a request for proposals (RFP) for Instructional Material Center production tracking software. The RFP process should be completed by the end of March 2022.

The Instructional Materials Center Team has developed a series of short videos explaining how braille materials are created, the guidelines followed to produce materials and what educators can do to ensure students receive the best high-quality braille for students when they need it. The videos are being released in blog posts and also have a page on the IMC blog, idbimclibrary.blog.

Due to on-going supply-chain issues, the National Library for the Blind and Print Disabled has notified libraries that the current and potentially future large print Talking Book Topic publications will not be mailed to patrons. Because this is an important resource for patrons, the library is offering a customized Talking Book Topics created just for the patron and their reading preferences. The library will send patrons a large print copy containing the sections of Talking Book Topics they are interested in, along with the order form. For example, if they like romance and true crime stories, the library will send patrons just those sections from the current Talking Book Topics. Patrons can add as many sections as necessary. Talking Book Topics can also be sent on an audio cartridge with a large print order form or accessed online.

The Department and Library will be taking part in the Des Moines Book Festival on Saturday, March 26th from 9:00 am – 7:00 pm in Downtown Des Moines by providing a hands-on braille activity in an activity nook and conducting two introductions to braille workshops, one for adults and one for families. At the festival participants can hear nationally acclaimed authors, engage in exciting discussions, discover new books, purchase merchandise perfect for book lovers and celebrate your favorite stories in a vibrant community celebration.

The Elizabeth Perowsky Volunteer Workshop and Luncheon will be held on Friday, April 22nd at the Iowa Department for the Blind to recognize all the wonderful volunteers and the hard work they have done in the past year.

## Winter and Spring Programs

The Library will be hosting several programs this fall and winter for patrons of all ages.

* The Great Reading Challenge (GRC) is a six month long reading challenge open to adults 18 years of age or older who are a patron of the Iowa Library for the Blind and Print Disabled. To complete the challenge, you need to read 12 books between January 15, 2022 and July 15, 2022. The challenge of the GRC is to read books that fit into one of the many categories on the Mission page in ReadSquared.
* Makerspace Mondays are being held on the second Monday of the month. It is offered both in-person at IDB or families can register to receive an activity kit and link to the activity video sent to them. Over 18 families are currently participating in the program.
* Story Time and Crafts with Denise is held on Friday either virtually at 10:00am or in-person at 3:30pm.
* Our Braille Babies and Books for Kids programs continue year round. We have over 150 actively participating in our Books for Kids program which each month sends books to homes and schools to promote reading and braille.

## 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 2021, December 2021, January 2022, and February 2022

Library Patrons Added: 113

Library Material Circulation

Total Circulation: 115,467

Braille: 2,193

Large Print: 278

Digital Books: 109,525

Magazine Issues: 3,284

Digital Players: 187

Library Collection

Total Books Added to the Library Collection: 2,657

Braille: 194

Print/Braille: 69

Large Print: 183

Digital Books: 2,211

Instructional Materials Center Orders Received

Total Orders Received: 783

BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) Usage

Total Books Downloaded from BARD: 16,959

Audio: 13,423

Braille: 3,536

Average Number of Patrons Using BARD: 588

Newsline Service Usage

Current Subscribers: 1,735

New Subscribers: 8

Telephone Calls: 8,972

Web Sessions: 21,673

“In Your Pocket” Deliveries: 28,787

E-mail Deliveries: 10,861

Iowa Newspaper Accesses: 90,351

National Newspaper Accesses: 6,024

International Newspaper Accesses: 402

Blog Usage

Library – Turning the Pages Blog

Visitors: 1,328

Views: 2,869

Instructional Materials Center Blog

Visitors: 717

Views: 2,401

Library Podcasts

Library News Monthly Podcast: 4 produced

Listens Online: 313

Sent Out on Cartridges: 2,288

Library Chat Podcast: 4 produced

Listens Online: 313

Braille Bits Podcast:

Listens Online: 947

Programming Statistics

Adult Programs Held: 39

Adult Program Attendance: 135

Youth Programs Held: 39

Youth Program Attendance: 415

Outreach Programs Held: 12

Outreach Program Attendance: 149

Total Programs Held: 90

Total Program Attendance: 699

# Orientation Center Report – Karly Prinds

## Orientation Center Students

We have had two graduations in the last quarter. We currently have seven students and it’s a very energetic group!

A couple of weeks ago our students all went out to breakfast twice, and used their nonvisual skills each time as they were all shaded. Everyone learned a lot and had a good time while staff were in our quarterly meetings.

The center students will be cooking and serving dinner to the Self Week students on March 16. We also have IL Integration week in mid-April and are looking forward to this.

Our monthly tour days are going well. In January we had our biggest one yet, with five clients who attended. Center students make lunch for the tour days, and it is neat to see them all get together with the clients who attend. They have lunch together and chat about their time in the center. The attendees ask good questions, and it is an informative time for all.

We have great energy in the center and this is so exciting! It is always nice to see the students encourage and support each other.

# Vocational Rehabilitation – Keri Osterhaus

## Position Vacancies and Changes

* Ambrose Fowler-Harney has accepted the position of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. He will begin in his position on March 10, 2022.
* Sandra Giffrow has accepted the position of Secretary 1 for the Vocational Rehabilitation Team. She will begin in her position on March 21, 2022.
* Roxanne Huffaker has resigned her position of BEP counselor, effective on March 18, 2022. We have begun the hiring process to replace this position.
* Kathy Roat has resigned her position of BEP administrator, effective on April 1, 2022.

# Vocational Rehabilitation

**Client Outcomes:** Since the start of the program year, counselors successfully closed 18 VR cases in competitive and integrated employment. Individuals have closed in the following positions since December 2021: automotive service technician, automotive body repairer, dining room helper, food prep worker, independent living teacher, janitor, massage therapist, preschool teacher assistant, sales associate, small engine mechanic, team assembler, training and development specialist and transition specialist. The average weekly earnings for these individuals was $390.43, averaging 24.43 hours per week. There are currently 24 individuals in employment and counselors are working with them to ensure success in their positions.

**Training:** VR counselors participated in trainings related to Social Security Determination in addition to trainings with our Title 1 (Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth) and Title 3 (Wagner Peyser) programs.

**Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment:** IDB is in the process of working on our Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). The purpose of the CSNA is to assist IDB in identifying and describing the rehabilitation needs of blind Iowans. The CSNA informs the goals and priorities of the IDB State Plan and the Department’s understanding of its clients and their service needs. The CSNA requires a focus on the following needs:

* Individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment;
* Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;
* Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment systems;
* Youth and students with disabilities, including their need for pre-employment transition services;
* Need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs.

IDB is partnering with Interwork Institute at San Diego State University to conduct the assessment of vocational rehabilitation needs for Iowans who are blind or have low vision. IDB will be reaching out to current clients, staff, and other stakeholders to participate in the CSNA. The expected date for completion is December 2022.

## Business Enterprises Program (BEP)

Profitability benchmarks, both quarterly and calendar year annual figures, show that vendors collectively are within the healthy benchmarks as a percentage of sales.

Sales have substantially increased in one vending facility which recently has had focused attention -- new connections with facility leaders and the addition of electronic payment systems. Sales will continue to increase with new equipment being added. This recipe for success is one that IDB is working to assess and achieve throughout the program. A second prong suggesting the BEP can grow is that the Elected Committee of Blind Vendors (ECBV), at the March ECBV meeting, shared that they have embraced an awareness that remote working and supply shortages will be the norm for the foreseeable future and are now on-board to address the need for new ways of generating revenue.