**Board Meeting Reports**

**December 6, 2022**

# Director's Report – Emily Wharton

On November 18, 2022, our long serving Commission Board Chair, Sandra Ryan, passed away after a year-long battle with cancer. Her dedication and service to our agency and the blind of Iowa was extensive, wide-ranging, and nearly inexhaustible. She was a mentor, leader, braille proofreader, speaker, listener, writer, editor, Braille Challenge judge, and any other role that needed filling. Her passion for braille and braille literacy, her belief in the capacity and potential of blind people, her joy in speaking with the students of the Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center, and so much more will be truly and deeply missed. A week before her passing, Sarah Willeford, Roxanne Book, Karen Cunningham, and I had the pleasure of presenting Sandi with the 2023 Elizabeth Perowsky Award. To read the press release about this, visit https://blind.iowa.gov/news/idb-announces-2023-elizabeth-perowsky-volunteer-award-recipient.

While Commissioner Ryan can never be replaced. I have asked the Governor's office to appoint a replacement for the Iowa Commission for the Blind. We are also waiting on an appointment to fill the seat vacated by Commissioner Jacobsen's resignation in late August. We are hoping to have at least one appointment before December 6 in order to conduct an official quarterly meeting. If the Governor does not appoint anyone to either of the two vacant positions, we will be unable to hold our quarterly meeting as an official meeting and will hold a general public information session with no actions being proposed or taken as this cannot be done without a two-member quorum.

We are completing the contract negotiations for our new IL and VR case management system with Tyler Technologies. We hope to have the contracts signed very soon and it will go into effect on January 1, 2023. The new system will make case documentation, RSA911 reporting, and quality assurance checking significantly easier and less time consuming. While there will be a learning curve, teachers and counselors will come to find the new system will save them time and increase communication with colleagues and clients.

We have submitted our first report for Corrective Action Plan with the Rehabilitation Services Administration and will be meeting with them to discuss. We are working on our end of federal year reports for the IL Program.

On September 30th, Connie Mendenhall began work as our Chief Information Officer. During her short time in this position, she has completed an internal communications tool training project, facilitated IDB's participation in the Festival of Trees and Lights to Benefit Blank Children's Hospital, and gotten our IL public service announcements onto I Heart Radio stations in central Iowa. She has begun work on a day at the capitol that will be held in February, participated in job fairs, and gave presentations to local groups. We are very pleased to have her on board and are very excited to see how she will continue to improve our outreach and communication in the coming year.

Our rehabilitation technology specialist, Amena Thomas, has been working with IWD to try to make the computers at Iowa Works Centers accessible to blind job seekers. IDB clients had reported that the NVDA that we had previously worked with IWD to install was no longer available on the customer machines. We were having difficulty getting a response from IWD to get this fixed until I sent a message directly to Director Beth Townsend. We were then able to connect Amena with the person in charge so they could work together to solve the problem. Unfortunately, after we had been told that the NVDA profiles were working, we found out that they had not been fully tested and were not working. Amena is again working with IWD to resolve this. These types of issues have been going on since the early 2000s and the implementation of WIA, however, we will continue to work to make sure that blind Iowans have the same access to America's Job Center services as their sighted neighbors. I will continue to be very vocal in my concerns regarding attempts to push through center certifications and gloss over accessibility barriers on the Statewide Workforce Development Board.

We are continuing to try to work with the Department of Education to finalize our contract for personnel costs for SFY23. Our Assistant Attorney General was sent the contract by DE, we do not know why, and she is trying to negotiate reasonable reporting conditions as the terms that DE proposed would have caused our staff to spend more time tracking their time than actually working on the production of the materials.

CFO – Cheri Myers

## Federal Grant Update:

Enclosed is the Grant Report as of 10/31/2022. The quarterly RSA 17 was submitted, the annual RSA 425 for the younger blind grant has been submitted and the RSA 425 for the older blind grant is in process. The older blind RSA 425 is due 12/30/2022.

We have not drawn down on the FY22 Vocational Rehabilitation grant as IDB received over $900,000 in Social Security Cost Reimbursement that federal regulations require to be spent before drawing down federal grant funds. The Social Security funds have been spent in accordance with federal regulations and we can now proceed in spending down on the grant.

## Budget Report:

State FY23 through 10/31/2022 is enclosed in the packet. The report included compares year to date to the annual budget based on state fiscal year. I added a brief explanation in column F on any item that appeared to be over budget to date. The Gifts and Bequests report is at the bottom of the FY23 Budget report.

The SFY24 budget has been submitted and the review process will begin shortly.

## WorkDay Conversion:

The conversion to WorkDay has been moved back to May 2023. End to end testing has started and all of the accounting staff will assist in testing each area of WorkDay at least one procedure in each. Testing is going slowly.

## Other:

* Have increased Patrick Bremhorst, Accounting Clerk 2, to a full-time position.
* The first month of billings to School Districts has been produced and submitted.
* The holiday season has begun, and this creates shortened payroll processing time for my department. We have planned accordingly so prevent any delays in payroll processing.
* We have been recently able to spend some of the reverted funds for FY19 and FY20.

# Education and Training Team – Helen Mejia

## Personnel

* Andrew Joines resigned his position as a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher effective November 15. We are currently accepting applications to fill his position.
* Quinn Haberl accepted a position as an Independent Living Rehabilitation Teacher effective November 25. IL Teacher, Kelsi Hansen has graciously agreed to assist in covering a handful of clients in the Cedar Falls area, and the rest of his clients have been divided among other teachers. We are currently accepting applications to fill his position.
* Jessica Katzung left to take another position. We are seeking a replacement Youth Services Worker
* Currently interviewing for the Living skills Instructor position for YATP.
* The posting is live for staff to apply to work the 2023 LEAP summer program. While applications will be accepted through January 3, interested individuals are encouraged to apply through the GovernmentJobs site as soon as possible as we are conducting interviews as we receive applications.

## Pre-Employment Transition Services

September 2022 LEAP Weekend Retreat Summary - "Back to the Future" by Ross Pollpeter

During the weekend of September 23-25, 14 young adults journeyed to IDB to test their wits and fortitude, much like the pioneers before us. These pioneers risked everything, taking great chances and overcoming obstacles, in order to reach their future. That's what our clients are doing, overcoming their blindness by learning skills and building confidence. During the retreat, students participated in activities such as:

* Making homemade ice cream using 3 methods
* Playing old-fashioned games
* Visiting the Nelson Pioneer Farm near Oskaloosa where they examined antique farm equipment and churned butter
* Eating dinner at Drake Diner
* Conducting food STEM experiments
* Playing the IDB version of the classic computer game, Oregon Trail.
* Much like the movie Back to the Future, each became a young adult, risking everything, so, their future is ensured. Let's make sure we welcome them back during the next retreat in October and be their Doc Brown to their Marty.

October 2022 LEAP Weekend Retreat - “Carnival” by Sarah Elmore

During the weekend of October 28-30, 17 young adults joined us at IDB for a weekend filled with activities and lessons that you would experience at a carnival. Students practiced their listening skills with the audio description of the Little Rascals complete with popcorn, discovered fun facts while feeding and petting animals at Hovick Farms, and challenged themselves to manage their tokens and tickets as they ran booths, navigated the carnival, and played the games. Our department thanks many of IDB’s organizations and departments as we acknowledge this weekend would not have been the success it was without the support; clean and ready rooms, keys made, games made and borrowed, popcorn machine, spaces taken over, braille created, and items prepped. Thank you!

* 18 students are currently registered to attend the December retreat, where activities will include a cooking competition, several challenges to work on teamwork and communication skills, and a “Next Top Model” style activity to work on how to carry and present oneself in a professional manner.
* Spring retreats are scheduled for January, February, and April.
* 19 unique participants have attended retreats so far this year, including 5 who had not previously attended a retreat or LEAP program.

## Young Adult Transition Program

* One of our six students will be graduating in December. The student is currently looking for employment in their home community.
* Students continue to work on their individualized goals in areas including cane travel, independent living, career exploration, money management, access technology, and braille.
* Students joined the Center for their Thanksgiving meal and participate in some business classes with the center.
* We are working on confirming new students for the 2023-2024 school year.

## Client Training

* Approximately 115 clients are currently receiving services from a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher.
  + - This number is significantly lower than in previous quarters. The drop was expected as part of our implementation of more clear goals and expectations last year.
    - 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.
* 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.
    - Applications are still being accepted for the March and May sessions.
* 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: 1,000. 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.

# Independent Living Program - Kimberley Walford

## Updates: Administration for Community Living (ACL) and the Office of Independent Living (OILP)

ACL and OILP announced to the State Independent Living Council (SILC), Centers for Independent Living (CILs), and State Independent Living Programs that they are in the process of revising the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) instrument and instructions, as well as developing a SPIL portal to allow grantees to submit their SPILs through their Q90.

The ACL has delayed the SPIL that was due in 2023. It is now due in 2024. However, the SILC and CILs must make a decision as to the following options. Their options can include a technical amendment to the current SPIL, which means they just adjust the dates of the current SPIL plus update the Chair, etc., then everything else stays the same for the next year; or

They can do a substantial amendment to the SPIL. Doing a substantial amendment would require a substantial effort regarding amendments including having public input and rewriting of goals.

We have an IL Network meeting November 30, 2022, at Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services in Des Moines, then our IL Annual meeting December 1st which will be virtual where Directory Amy Robasse plans to discuss matters related to the SPIL so I will learn more at that time regarding what action will be taken.   
  
**Independent Living (IL) Integration**IL Integration was held Sunday, October 23 through Friday, October 28, 2022. The Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independent Center and staff once again graciously partner with the Independent Living program and staff to provide one full week of training to four IL participants; one of which was a mentor. During this week of training, IL participants engaged in training using their learning shades to put into practice alternative skills for everything from cooking, cane travel, to technology just to name a few.   
  
After regular business hours program staff organized and encouraged IL participants to meet with the Iowa Council of The Blind Des Moines Chapter and the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa; each organization provided a meal and program. We understood from IL participants that each organization had a unique approach, and they enjoyed their evening. We appreciation our working relation with both organization and our hope is to continue to work partnership as with IL participants we believe it is very important to connect those we serve with other blind Iowans so they might have an opportunity to meet others here in Iowa to share and learn from them as well as to network.  
  
Iowa Department for the Blind’s IL Integration training program provides a platform for IL participants to develop self-confidence, and a positive attitude about themselves and their blindness which is generally reflected more so near mid to the end of the training week. The skills participants have learned upon completing Center training is one we encourage they continue to practice after going home and to follow-up with once their IL teacher during their home visit. Its very important to keep the momentum going and encourage that they practice what was learned everyday and as often as possible.   
  
On Friday, their last day of training program, IL participants have a dedicated time with the IL and Center program administrators to candidly provide constructive feedback about their training. They talk about their experiences, what they have learned, and what we might do to enhance the next training experience. We always value feedback that is relevant, and that will help us to focus on making any positive change to grow and/or improve our training program and the overall training experience for the next group of participants.

Here are a few comments made about the October 2022 training program:

* I would give the staff an “excellence” due to their patience in how they are with everyone’s level of knowledge and skills. Also needed to always can adapt to anything.
* Enjoyed shop the most due to being a crafter all my life and being able to do that again meant to world to me.
* I enjoyed braille more than I thought I would and want to continue after leaving.
* During this experience, I learned a lot about myself that I need to trust people more and that I can do things without my sight. I have now gained trust in wearing my mask that I can do it all day and be just fine. This also goes with trusting my cane more than shuffling to get where I need to go.
* Even though I have my own shop and tools at home, I learned some good pointers and safety measures I would have never thought of.
* I loved the family type atmosphere.
* My favorite class was computers. I got to really get into using screen reader programs. I really look forward to being using one daily.
* I have officially gone through the braille code, so I got to start reading on an e-reader.
* Having more one-on-one training would be beneficial for a more focused experience.
* Rated training (rounded up due to decimal rating on a scale of 1 to 5): 4

Our next IL Integration is scheduled for Sunday, June 4 through Friday, June 9, 2023.

## Independent Living Program Survey

After active clients complete their program training and their case record is closed, a survey is mailed to each person. The survey contains nine questions, and the tenth question asks for comments, thoughts, or concerns, in other words, general feedback. This year, we found it necessary to contact individuals by phone to get adequate survey responses. The program administrator, nor an Independent Living Teacher were permitted to make those phone contacts. This step was purposeful to ensure the respondent would answer all survey questions candidly as possible. The individual also had the option to opt out of taking the survey; in other words, no one individual was forced to take the survey.

Below, you will find the survey results from #1 through #9. If you wish to access the comment section of the survey, please email Kim.Walford@blind.state.ia.us and those results can be supplied to you.

1. 100% of those surveyed felt that our services were adequately explained.
2. 100% of those surveyed reported services were delivered timely.
3. 100% of those surveyed reported that teachers listened to their ideas and involved them in the planning of their services.
4. 100% of those surveyed received the kind of training they desired and felt it did meet their needs.
5. 100% of those surveyed reported they were provided with information and resources to other agencies.
6. 100% of those surveyed reported they felt better about themselves after participating in our IL program services.
7. 96.7% of those surveyed reported they felt better about their further after participating in our IL program services
8. 96.7% of those surveyed reported they were able to maintain or gained independence as a result of participation in Independent Living program services
9. Former clients ranked the most valuable service received as follows (ascending to descending):
   1. Developing a more positive attitude about themselves and their blindness
   2. The training they received
   3. The information they were provided about services and resources available through other agencies (ex. directory assistance, newspaper, local support groups)

The IL team is looking to discuss and potentially redesign a new IL program survey. The new survey, if and when completed would not be readied until October 1, 2023.

## Staff Updates:

Quinn Haberl is finalizing his work as vocational rehabilitation teacher on November 24th and will become an Independent Living Rehabilitation teacher for our division on Friday, November 25th. His first day of training with our division will be Monday, November 28. After he completes his training with us, Quinn will be covering the Eastern Iowa Corridor to include Tama, Benton, Linn, Jones, Jackson, Poweshiek, Iowa, Johnson, Cedar, and Clinton Counties. Currently, Susan Howard is covering these counties along with Kelsi Hansen to ensure client and applicant services are delivered.

Under our IDB policy, instructors are required to complete continuing education training every five years. They must attend center classes for up to one month until they are able to demonstrate tasks as outlined within our policies while wearing learning shades. Mark Edge successfully completed his training in the week of November 14th. The next staff member that will be starting her continuing education will be Monica Venesky. That will take place either near the end of January or February 2023.

## Annual Federal Program Reports:

Annual federal program reports for Rehabilitation Service Administration (RSA) and Administration for Community Living (ACL) shall be submitted upon the due date. RSA will be due by December 30, 2022. ACL due date is generally set the same time; however, the SILC Director, Amy Robasse sets the date due generally prior to the due day. A due date from Ms. Robasse has not yet been provided.

# **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. It is a cloud-based platform designed to simplify the process of placing and handling orders, managing inventory, and tracking the production of books to meet student needs. The new system is available to school districts to place orders. Training has been provided to educators and the IMC Team is planning more for the upcoming months. The IMC Blog has also been revamped to provide information and resources. The next phase of the project 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. A memorandum of understanding between the school districts and IDB has been developed and information on cost assistance continues to be shared.

The first IDB Virtual Book Festival was held on Saturday, September 24th from 10:00 am – 12:30 pm. We celebrated all things books and reading over Zoom. Author Reid Forgrave joined us to discuss his book *Love, Zac* which was followed by sessions on different book and reading topics. The Patron Services Team used Zoom Event Hub to allow for simultaneous sessions with library staff and volunteers presenting on different topics. The sessions were recorded and will be featured on the Library blog this winter for those who were unable to attend.

The Library Team also attended several conferences in September and October 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 include the School Administrators of Iowa Conference, Iowa Technology in Education Connection Conference, Future Ready Iowa Summit and the Iowa Library Association Conference.

Planning has begun for the 2023 Iowa Regional Braille Challenge. It will be held on Saturday, February 25th. Following the Braille Challenge from 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm IDB and the Library will partner with the South Central Regional STEM Council (Iowa Governor’s STEM Advisory Council) to host a STEM Fest.

The library is currently interviewing to fill the position of Accessible Media Specialist.

It is with mixed emotions that we announce the retirement of Karen Eis. Her last day will be January 6, 2023. She has been an outstanding addition to both the library and IDB teams with almost 40 years of service. Her contribution in different roles within the library have been integral to its success and growth. To celebrate her well-deserved retirement, the library will host a farewell party on Friday, December 16th at 2:00 pm in the Assembly Room.

## Library Programs and Outreach

Fall Youth Programming:

* Afterschool Program, *Crafting Your Story*, 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 will begin in September on the second Monday of the month at 6:00 pm 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.

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

**Library Statistics**

For September 2022 and October 2022

Library Patrons Added: 104

Library Material Circulation

Total Circulation: 59,221

Braille: 797

Large Print: 248

Digital Books: 56,385

Magazine Issues: 1,673

Digital Players: 118

Library Collection

Total Books Added to the Library Collection: 1,775

Braille: 305

Print/Braille: 41

Large Print: 64

Digital Books: 1,365

Instructional Materials Center Orders Received

Total Orders Received: 115

BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) Usage

Total Books Downloaded from BARD: 7,803

Audio: 7,126

Braille: 677

BARD Active Accounts: 597

Newsline Service Usage

Current Subscribers: 1,755

New Subscribers: 5

Telephone Calls: 4,766

Web Sessions: 14,425

“In Your Pocket” Deliveries: 18,241

E-mail Deliveries: 7,207

Iowa Newspaper Accesses: 56,489

National Newspaper Accesses: 3,441

International Newspaper Accesses: 661

Blog Usage

Library – Turning the Pages Blog

Visitors: 579

Views: 1,145

Instructional Materials Center Blog

Visitors: 412

Views: 1,710

Library Podcasts

Library News Monthly Podcast: 2 produced

Listens Online: 96

Sent Out on Cartridges: 1,170

Library Chat Podcast: 2 produced

Listens Online: 102

Braille Bits Podcast:

Listens Online: 203

Programming Statistics

Adult Programs Held: 3

Adult Program Attendance: 23

Youth Programs Held: 21

Youth Program Attendance: 351

Outreach Programs Held: 9

Outreach Program Attendance: 490

Total Programs Held: 30

Total Program Attendance: 864

# Orientation Center Report – Karly Prinds

## Orientation Center Students

The Center currently has eight students. We have had three new students start the Center during the month of November and will have a new student start at the beginning of January as well. We have had three student graduations in this fourth quarter of the year; graduation dates were as follows: September 14, October 20, and October 21. We are very proud of these three students who graduated, as all three are currently working, going to school, and close to landing a successful job!

Our Center and YATP students served our annual Thanksgiving meal on November 16th. The food was delicious, and everyone worked really hard to make this a success!

On November 21st, the Center went to Cambridge Iowa to cut down a holiday tree, which was then beautifully decorated before the Thanksgiving break.

Since students cooked our Thanksgiving dinner, we will have our annual holiday meal on December 20th, that Center staff will cook for Center students.

# Vocational Rehabilitation – Keri Osterhaus

## Position Vacancies and Changes

* I am pleased to share that we have hired Kristin Hixenbaugh as our new Employment Supports Specialist. Kristin began her position on November 14, 2022. Kristin brings experience and skills in academic advising, recruitment, employer engagement, teaching, coaching and developing and implementing programs. In addition, Kristin developed work experiences and increased education and career opportunities for students in her former positions. Kristin is participating in training in the Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center.
* We have had to repost the Business Enterprises Program (BEP) counselor position due to lack of qualified applicants.
* We have posted a Deafblind specialist position. This position will focus on providing vocational rehabilitation services and consultation to clients who are deafblind.

# VR Program Updates

IDB has successfully exited 10 VR clients in competitive and integrated employment during the current program year. These individuals worked an average of 26.8 hours per week and earned an average of $15.47/hour. Since September 1, 2022, individuals closed in the following positions: bookkeeper, director/preschool teacher, dishwasher, music promotion producer, receptionist, stock clerks, sales floor and warehouse clerk/associate. There are twenty individuals working in positions that meet their employment goals.

IDB began partnering with the Technical Assistance Center on Quality Employment this fall. Through this partnership, IDB counseling staff will focus on improving services to clients who are in need of customized employment strategies and supported employment. IDB recently hired an employment supports specialist to assist in building relationships with our community rehabilitation providers as well as providing training and consultation to providers serving IDB clients. IDB will be reviewing current practices and developing and implementing new strategies to improve these services over the next year.

In October 2022, IDB hosted a successful Iowa Statewide BEP meeting. Vendors had opportunities to meet with suppliers from Atlantic Bottlers, USI, Pepsi, Vistar KC, and Farner Bocken regarding current industry trends, new products and supports. In addition, strategies to improve business success were shared and vendors had the opportunity to learn about national trends, updates and future activities related to the BEP.

BEP executive officer, Matt Nemmers and BEP counselor, Carrie Wadding joined our VR counseling staff to discuss BEP recruitment, program requirements and essential functions and skills of a BEP vendor. Matt also shared information regarding current and future BEP locations. IDB’s VR and BEP teams will continue to meet and discuss opportunities to promote and encourage participation in the program.

In January 2023, IDB will again partner with Dale Carnegie to provide the Generation Next program to blind students eligible for pre-employment transition services. We will be hosting this program using a virtual classroom. Instruction will be focused on self-advocacy and workplace readiness, including relationship building, developing communication skills, managing stress, and developing confidence.