Board Meeting Reports

September 19, 2023

## Director's Report – Emily Wharton

We are submitting, for Commission Board approval, a level funding budget for SFY25. We greatly appreciate the support that we received from the legislature for SFY24.  While we do not know if our Department of Education contract will be extended into SFY25, as things stand currently, we feel fairly confident that at our current funding level, we will be able to support braille services to students, meet VR maintenance of effort, and support our IL program with its current number of staff. We will also be requesting a capital appropriation to support the continuing repairs to our building. This request will cover tuckpointing the south and west faces of our building, completing the remaining roof upgrades, replacing our mail lift, and refurbishing the chiller.

On September 1, we were notified that as of October 13, all IT staff in all Iowa state agencies will be placed under the Office of the Chief Information Officer within the Department of Management. No job duties will be changed, and IT staff will continue to reside at the IDB office where they currently are at.  Agencies will continue to pay the salaries. As of this writing, we are awaiting more information and which IDB staff will be affected.

For the past couple of weeks, contractors have been hard at work replacing the flooring in the Center classrooms on the second floor. When removing the carpet from the computer lab, we discovered that the wood floor beneath could be restored. Portions of the hallway are being tiled. We are hoping that visitors can come and check out the new floors within the next few weeks.

The VR and IL case management system migration continues to progress. We discovered that an additional sprint would be needed, and the schedule was adjusted to go live with the new system in early December. This will allow our intensive training for staff to occur during the All-Staff meeting week in November.

On September 20th, I will be out of the office for an extended period of time. Members of the leadership team have graciously volunteered to cover various duties while I'm out.   Kim Walford will be hosting Director's Forum, Keri Osterhaus will cover CSAVR/NCSAB, IESBVI, and state workforce board meetings. Sarah Willeford will provide general leadership, cover the CMS project management, and attend meetings with the Governor's office.   I so deeply appreciate all the support that all the members of the leadership team have given me.

# CFO – Cheri Myers

## Federal Grant Update:

Enclosed Grant Report as of 8/31/2023.

## Budget Report:

Enclosed is the budget report on State FY23 through 8/31/2023 and State FY24 through 8/31/2023. The report included compares year to date to the annual budget based on state fiscal year. The Gifts and Bequests report is at the bottom of the FY24 Budget report.

We submit the SFY25 budget shortly. As we have been instructed to submit a flat operating budget that is also attached. We will be submitting an additional Capital Ask for ongoing building maintenance and repairs.

## Iowa Advantage Conversion:

The State of Iowa is moving to a new cloud-based version of I/3, the state accounting system called Iowa Advantage. The initial phase of moving the existing functions of I/3 is being planned and is reported to be completed by March 2024. Currently we have been requested to clean up different fields and directories and we are in the process of doing so.

# Communication – Connie Mendenhall

The focus this quarter has primarily been on working with Tyler Technologies as we work on Sprint user testing to identify issues as we prepare for the new Case Management System launch this fall.

We have been working on a tracking system for all the requests our I.T. staff receive on a daily basis. The system is a ticket tracking system that the entire IDB staff uses and allows us to track and identify training, system, and equipment issues. The ticket system also allows our I.T. staff to prioritize and maximize their time to work on all projects as they are presented to them.

Continuing to promote IDB across the state of Iowa, in the last quarter we have participated in job fairs, health fairs, and public state events. We continue to have tours of the building on a regular basis. Included below is a list of events and tours scheduled through my office, this list does not reflect all tours and events for the last quarter.

IDB staff have attended:

* Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services Job Fair
* Cortiva Family Health Fair
* Iowa Developmental Disability Conference
* Participated in the Iowa State Fair parade

Our tours this quarter included:

* Program director of a master’s program for teachers at a western Iowa college
* Accessibility Services Director from Grand View college
* Elite Eye Care - Entire staff other than doctors

# Education and Training – Connie Mendenhall

In July I accepted the temporary role of filling in as the Youth Program Administrator/manager. We started off the summer with 12 LEAP students and ended the summer with 10. Four of our LEAP students participated in Center classes, with the remainder of the students working in classes on campus at Grand View. This summer our LEAP students faced some new challenges and changes. The students worked through the challenges and changes, and all left with smiles on their faces and excited to return next summer.

* LEAP activities this summer included: Adventureland, toured the Art Center, Canoed, learned to fish with a staff member from the DNR, axe throwing, Sky Zone Trampoline Park, and Botanical Center.
* There were several speakers at their weekly STEM classes including a Forensic Scientist and a DM Fire Chief.
* The students prepared a fantastic lunch with chicken enchilada casserole, rice, black beans, and fruit salad for the families on their last day.

We have five YATP students returning this fall, one student is currently attending both YATP classes and Center classes to complete IEP goals and transition over to the Center by January 2024. We have an active retreat schedule planned for 2023-2024 starting with a Halloween kick-off week in October.

# Independent Living Program - Kimberley Walford

## Independent Living Integration

Our IL Integration training event was held in Des Moines Monday, September 11 through Friday, September 15. Five participants arrived on Sunday, September 10th where they were able to settle in, then took a tour of our agency, were served a meal, and had an opportunity to socialize for the evening.

## Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) One-Time Supplement FY23

Rehabilitation Service Administration (RSA) distributed additional funds using the statutory formula for each program. These funds represented a one-time supplement and were not considered an addition to the State’s annual formula award that we received for Fiscal Year 23. This federal fiscal year, we received approximately $3,500 and we have already expended those funds.

## Statewide Plan for Independent Living (SPIL)

The Independent Living Network includes the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and State Independent Living which includes Iowa Department for the Blind and Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation.

In the Fall of 2019, SILC and CILS conducted a Consumer and Public input survey on specific disability priorities from the disability community. The results were utilized to prioritize the goals in the Iowa SPIL. This SPIL is a continuation of the previous SPIL, with a few modifications as the CILs and SILC felt the goals, objectives, and activities of the previous SPIL were valuable ways to strengthen the Independent Living network, and the Consumer and Public Input Survey confirmed that these were still priorities for the disability community.

It is now time for the IL network to look at the survey result again and work on the SPIL for 2024-2027.

## Marketing Campaign

We continue our program marketing efforts in follow-up to the Time to Be Bold (TTBB) digital marketing campaign for our Independent Living for Older Individuals Who Are Blind (ILOB). We are sending information and brochures to eye clinics, assisted living centers, nursing homes, Area Agencies on Aging, and Centers.

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

## Library Updates

The library had a busy summer providing summer programs, outreach, and continued work with school districts.

Our Youth Summer Program, *Find Your Voice*, was held June 5th through July 24th with programs held virtually on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Activity boxes were sent to participants each week, so they had everything they needed for the activities, crafts and more. Twenty-seven were registered for this program which is an increase from last year. The Thursday Summer Library Program, *STEM in the Library* partnered with the LEAP Program to provide in-person programs each Thursday with a focus on STEM and career exploration. Guest speakers provided information on STEM careers and activities. Speakers included Aquaponics, Polk County Conservation, Crime Scene Investigator, Iowa Reapers, NASA, and a Fire Chief. Youth Service Librarian, Denise Bean visited 10 public libraries this summer to provide the program, *When Storytime Comes to You*, connecting with communities across Iowa with a program focusing on the story of Louis Braille, braille, and hands on activities.

The library hosted two Summer VISTAs and two Teacher Externs this summer. The Summer VISTAs are part of the AmeriCorps Summer VISTA program and a partnership with Central College. The Teacher Externs are part of the Iowa Governor’s STEM Council’s STEM Teacher Externship program. The Summer VISTAs assisted Denise Bean, Youth Services Librarian, with all aspects of the Summer Reading Program and outreach programs held this summer. The Teacher Externs assisted with library functions while learning more about the Library, Department, and accessibility, with the goal of taking that knowledge back to their students and classrooms.

The library’s new courses for Iowa educators who are working with students who use braille started in July with 17 registered participants. The two courses will provide a guided pathway to Braille knowledge, expertise and becoming a certified Braille Transcriber. Course 1: Introduction to Braille Transcription will cover Lessons 1-12 in the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled Instruction Manual for Braille Transcribing and will be held from July 10 – December 15. Course 2: Braille Transcriber Certification, held from January 8, 2024 – August 16, 2024, will cover Lessons 13-20 and will include submission of the final manuscript to be reviewed for certification. Our hope is to provide training on braille transcription and increase the number of braille transcribers available to our students throughout Iowa.

The Instructional Material Center (IMC) has begun to work with vendors and contractors providing braille and large print transcription in setting up their access to the production tracking software called Athena. The new system is available to school districts to place orders and vendors/contractors will be added to a similar portal to receive and track projects and assignments that have been ordered for students. This will provide everyone involved in ordering, procuring, assigning, and producing student materials with the ability to track their work status.

The IMC Team worked throughout the summer with school districts to ensure materials would be ready for students when they began school in August. This fall the IMC will continue to work with school districts on the changes in student material procurement implemented by the Iowa Department of Education, training on Athena to place orders and outreach to provide more information about the library and IMC services.

Roxanne Book retired from her position as Braille Coordinator for the library in July. The open position was posted, and Jerry Cole has accepted the position of Braille Coordinator beginning Sept 1, 2023. Jerry previously held the Braille Transcriber position for the library. We wish Roxanne the best and welcome Jerry into his new role.

Interviews began in August for the open Program and Community Engagement Librarian (Librarian 1) position.

## Library Programs and Outreach

Youth Programming:

* Fall programming will begin in September and will include weekly virtual story times, Crafting Your Story, and monthly Makerspace Monday programming that will be held in-person and virtually.
* The Story Box Program will continue throughout the year. A box of activities, crafts, books, and book lists is sent each month around a theme to connect youth patrons with our collection and fun learning activities.
* Youth Service Librarian, Denise Bean and will be visiting public libraries this fall to provide the program, When Storytime Comes to You, focusing on the story of Louis Braille, braille, and hands on activities.

Adult Programming:

* The Peek-a-Box Program will continue throughout the year for patrons, ages 18 years and older. Each month patrons in the program receive a special box filled with books – audio or braille or large print – and goodies centered around a theme. Patrons who opt for audiobooks will receive a cartridge with 10-20 books dedicated to the theme of the month.  Patrons who choose to get braille or large print will receive 1-3 books around the theme.

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 May 2023, June 2023, July 2023, and August 2023

Library Patrons Added: 140

Library Material Circulation

Total Circulation: 113,765

Braille: 888

Large Print: 235

Digital Books: 109,286

Magazine Issues: 3,171

Digital Players: 185

Library Collection

Total Books Added to the Library Collection: 4,312

Braille: 1,244

Print/Braille: 91

Large Print: 151

Digital Books: 2,826

Instructional Materials Center Orders Received

Total Orders Received: 315

BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) Usage

Total Books Downloaded from BARD: 17,070

Audio: 15,083

Braille: 1,987

BARD Active Accounts: 561

Newsline Service Usage

Current Subscribers: 1,789

New Subscribers: 13

Telephone Calls: 9,900

Web Sessions: 36,773

“In Your Pocket” Deliveries: 34,034

E-mail Deliveries: 8,796

Iowa Newspaper Accesses: 100,162

National Newspaper Accesses: 7,437

International Newspaper Accesses: 544

Blog Usage

Library – Turning the Pages Blog

Visitors: 1,160

Views: 2,781

Instructional Materials Center Blog

Visitors: 503

Views: 1,843

Library Podcasts

Library News Monthly Podcast: 4 produced

Listens Online: 45

Sent Out on Cartridges: 2,229

Library Chat Podcast: 4 produced

Listens Online: 34

Braille Bits Podcast:

Listens Online: 229

Programming Statistics

Adult Programs Held: 9

Adult Program Attendance: 123

Youth Programs Held: 35

Youth Program Attendance: 567

Outreach Programs Held: 31

Outreach Program Attendance: 1,042

Total Programs Held: 75

Total Program Attendance: 1,732

# Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center Report – Karly Prinds

## Center Students

We currently have six Center students and two staff in training. During this current quarter we had one student graduation. We had a busy summer in the Center, as we hosted four LEAP students; one of these students turned 18 in August and has now joined our Center. We do have a current YATP student who is in the process of completing the IEP in order to transition into the Center in early 2024. We have a new student who will be starting on September 25. We will also be working together with the YATP program to help teach these students this fall.

## Activities

* Staff and students traveled to Pella on June 16 to explore the town square, where there were a variety of shops. They chose to visit a meat market, Dutch bakeries, and several different restaurants. This allowed them to travel in a rural community.
* On June 28, the students visited the Des Moines Airport to attend a TSA hosted training to learn how to travel in any airport setting as an independent blind person. They learned such things as using escalators, walking through the TSA security line, finding their assigned gate, and retrieving luggage from the baggage claim.
* On August 3, staff and students toured the Art Center followed by lunch out to practice their transferrable skills out in the community. Students also attended the Iowa State Fair on August 18 as is a long-standing tradition. Everyone had a great time and did very well using their cane travel skills and practicing community engagement.

This year, students who had attended the Center for three months or more were required to attend one of the national conventions held by the American Council of the Blind and The National Federation of the Blind. Students were given information regarding each convention provided by the affiliate leaders, representing each organization. Three students who attended this year chose the National Federation of the Blind’s convention in Houston Texas. They worked hard on networking, self-advocacy, time management, advanced cane travel skills, and career exploration.

We had four students attend our July Self-Week. This intensive weeklong program helps our clients who may not be able to attend the Center currently, make an informed choice regarding their future training needs. They are able to receive six months’ worth of training in five days, which very much gives them a boost in their nonvisual skills. Classes they attended daily were Technology, Braille, Home Management, Cane Travel, and Business Class.

They had dinner with the Center students, which helped them receive information about daily life in the Center. Self-Week students also went out to eat downtown at a restaurant and traveled to a farmers’ market.

The Center also hosted IL Integration in June, and we will be hosting a second integration in the month of September. The IL students attend all Center classes alongside the Center students. These students get an intense week of training so they can transfer these skills back at home and in their communities. Each evening, they have a different scheduled activity planned. These activities include, getting together for dinner with each of the two consumer organizations, traveling out to a local restaurant, and having dinner which is prepared and hosted by our Center students. As you can observe, the business of the day is centered around a family style meal.

# Vocational Rehabilitation – Keri Osterhaus

## Position Vacancies and Changes

* Tasha Welsh accepted our Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor and joined our team VR team on June 21st. Tasha has experience in education, advocacy, and self-employment. Tasha is nearing completion of her training in the Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center (IBEIC) and will soon be in the field serving clients in western Iowa.
* Jeremiah (JR) Beamer accepted our Career Instructor / Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor position and joined our VR team on June 26th. JR has experience in counseling and assisting individuals in reaching their academic and career goals through prior work in Employment Services, Unemployment and as a Disabled Veteran outreach Program Workforce Advisor. JR will be completing the end of his training in the IBEIC soon and will begin working directly with students in our Young Adult Transition Program and the Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center.

## Program Updates

IDB Currently has 450 clients accessing vocational rehabilitation services. Thirty-four individuals have been referred or self-referred to the VR program since April of this year. Twenty-nine new plans for employment have been developed with new IDB clients and plans are being moved to implementation. 69 students are enrolled in high school and 64 students are enrolled in post-secondary training programs.

IDB successfully exited 4 VR clients in competitive and integrated employment since July 1, 2023. These individuals worked an average of 26.25 hours per week and earned an average of $21.50/hour. These individuals are working as a food prep worker, massage therapist, production worker and veterinarian assistant. There are currently 32 individuals working in positions that meet their employment goals.

IDB is continuing the process of reviewing and updating current policies. We are currently working with the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment and Customized Employment on our Supported Employment Policies. These policies are required of our Vocational Rehabilitation program.

IDB recently released a request for proposal for the purpose of providing training to students who are blind or have low vision and eligible for pre-employment transition services. There are programs available that could supplement the work IDB is already doing in this area and benefit students throughout Iowa. We are currently in the process of reviewing these RFP’s and plan to release recipients in the next month.

IDB is working with our core and required partners to begin the work on the next four-year State Plan which engages partners across our state workforce system to effectively deliver workforce development services throughout Iowa. We plan to have a draft of this plan by the end of the year and will be posting it for public comment after the draft is complete.

IDB is continuing to work with our core and required partners to update our Memorandum of Understanding in the local areas. This is an agreement that outlines the operation of the one-stop delivery system in Iowa. A requirement of the MOU includes an Infrastructure Funding Agreement which is a financial plan to fund services and operating costs of the system. All partners are required to pay a proportionate share of the infrastructure costs.

Business Enterprises Program: State Fiscal Year 2023 has brought a lot of opportunities to the Business Enterprises Program. Vendors saw an average net vendor income was over $50,000 in SFY 23. Our BEP team has been working hard to develop new contracts with Newton Village (a continuing care facility), the Ames Public Library, and the Johnston Police Departments to provide services to more than 20,000 potential customers each month.  We continue to provide newer and more appropriate equipment to improve the quality of service to our current locations.  This can be seen in many of our rest areas along Iowa’s interstates as well as in our various government locations.  Vendors are experimenting with new ways of offering service, including adopting a milkshake and smoothie machine at the 2nd Avenue Post office in Des Moines.

Currently, the BEP has 11 active licensed vendors and one new trainee.  A goal in the next year is to provide training and opportunities to share more information about the program and what it has to offer blind Iowans with both internal and external stakeholders at the Department. Additionally, we are exploring ways to empower trainees as they work towards becoming licensed vendors.

We are also looking at ways we can more fully carry out the purpose and intent of the Randolph-Sheppard Act by exploring new business models within BEP.  We are noticing that vendors are continuing to struggle with just-in-time ordering methods because of supply chain issues from distributors.  This, and many other topics including industry trends, business leadership practices, and current trends in access technology will be on the agenda for our annual statewide meeting being held October 13 in Des Moines.

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) and celebrates the contributions of workers with disabilities. This year’s theme is Advancing Access and Equity and our IDB staff is working in collaboration with local workforce development areas to promote and provide information highlighting NDEAM. More information about NDEAM can be found here: [National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) | U.S. Department of Labor (dol.gov)](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/ndeam)