Board Meeting Reports

December 5, 2023

## Director's Report – Emily Wharton

On November 14, Sarah Willeford and I met with Governor Reynolds and her top staff to discuss our SFY25 budget request. IDB is requesting a level general appropriation and approximately $392,000 in capital improvement funding. The meeting was very positive. The Governor makes her budget known to us at the time of the Condition of the State Address at the beginning of each legislative session.

In response to the statewide engagement survey conducted by the Governor's office, IDB is undergoing a IDB Team Building Plan which includes a comprehensive communications charter process. This process is designed to create clear expectations for communication within divisions and across the agency. We have been told that there will be another statewide engagement survey conducted before the end of the calendar year.

On October 13, the State of Iowa consolidated all information technology positions within the Department of Management, Division of Information Technology (DOM-DOIT.) Due to IDB's extensive need for accessibility expertise and support, DOM decided to return our 2 IT staff to IDB's supervision under a 28D agreement. This has led to no change in daily operations.

The implementation of the Tyler Technologies Independent Living and Vocational Rehabilitation Case Management System (CMS) is proceeding. The Go-Live date has been moved back to January 30, 2024. This will allow Tyler to implement necessary accessibility fixes and implement integration with the state accounting system.  Tim West, who handles databases for the Library, is assisting with the case management system data migration.

# CFO – Cheri Myers

## Federal Grant Update:

Enclosed Grant Report as of 10/31/2023.

## Budget Report:

Enclosed is the budget report on State FY24 through 10/31/2023. 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.

# Communication – Connie Mendenhall

I am interviewing to fill the remaining Rehabilitation Technology Specialists positions. Enrique Mejia was offered and accepted one of the Rehabilitation Technology Specialists positions. Enrique has been working as the Communications Instructor in the Iowa Blindness empowerment and Independence Center and has been transitioning to his new role while interviews are being conducted for the Center position.

The Leadership Team is continuing to work on the IDB Team Building Plan. This plan will improve communication from the top down and across the entire agency. The Communication Team and I are working with the departments across the agency to create a Communication Charter to improve communication across the entire agency.

I along with the I.T. staff continue to encourage use of our Help Ticket system in Slack. This goal of this system is to streamline response time for technology support issues. The ticket system also provides a tracking mechanism to identify consistent system issues and staff training issues.

I am looking forward to promoting IDB across the state of Iowa. We are on the calendar for the Legislative Open House again this year. IDB will have a table set up in the Capitol Rotunda on the morning of January 25, 2024. I am working with several communities across Iowa to schedule speaking engagements and bring groups to our building here in Des Moines.

# Education and Training – Connie Mendenhall

My primary focus for the last quarter has been on YATP as I filled in as the interim Education Training Program Administrator. Ambrose Fowler-Harney accepted and started the position of Education Training Program Administrator on November 2, 2023.

The YATP students transition from the LEAP summer program back to the YATP school year went smoothly. The students have adapted to the changes in schedule and staff well. As we have begun filling the vacancies the students have been understanding and accommodating with “substitute” instructors and fluctuating schedules. Jennifer Brown was offered and accepted the position of Travel Instructor for the YATP program, Jennifer has been working for IDB as a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher. Jodie Schabilion was offered and accepted the position of Communications Instructor for the YATP program. Jodie is a licensed teacher; she was a middle school Home Economics teacher. Jodie will be finishing her Center training up by the end of the year, she will make an excellent addition to the YATP staff. An overall change was made to the students schedule this fall, the students now arrive on Monday and return home on Fridy instead of remaining at IDB over the weekends.

This semester YATP had the first successful transition of a student from YATP to the Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center. The student has already completed a Center drop off and his first small meal in Home Management.

# Independent Living Program - Kimberley Walford

## Independent Living Annual Grant Reporting

It is that time of year where we are required to report out a collection of information and data and submit it to Rehabilitation Service Administration (RSA) for our Title VII, Chapter 2 grant funding (Independent Older Blind program) and Administration for Community Living (ACL) Title VII, Chapter 1, Part B funding (serving individuals under the age of 55 years). Both reports are currently in progress and due to both federal agencies no later than December 30, 2023.

## Independent Living Program Manual

In response to the upcoming migration to a new case management system and general updates notably needed to our IL program manual, the IL team and I are working collaboratively to ensure program, and where applicable, organizational standards are in place to provide guidance on how to handle certain situations. This manual will also serve as a reference for our division employees, or anyone else who may have an interest in referring to it when they have questions or need clarification on any policy or procedure.

## Program Marketing

The Independent Living team has completed a very large project to market our Independent Living program in 99 counties in follow-up to the federal marketing campaign, “Time To Be Bold: If you can’t see something say something.” We have received invitations to speak with respective assisted living groups across Iowa about the Time To Be Bold campaign. Independent Living Teachers are prepared to respond to share some information about that federal campaign who has been advertising; however, more importantly they will be quite prepared to share very important program and service information we offer through the Iowa Department for the Blind and our Independent Living program.

This year we reached all 99 counties to ensure our print material reached our targeted market such as ophthalmologist and optometrist, Tribal Centers, Area Agencies on Aging, Department of Human Services, and other various partners that would potentially meet with our potential targeted market.

Our program marketing team included Susan Howard, Julie Skinner, Marcella Edmonds, and volunteer team member, Mary McGee. This project is now complete; however, all individual Independent Living teaching staff continue their efforts to promote our Independent Living program through speaking engagements and outreach on a regular basis. The efforts of the entire Independent Living team, they help strengthen our program through engagement and open doors to invite Iowans who believe they might benefit from our service to apply to the Department for services.

## Quarterly Independent Living Forum

The Independent Living program holds a forum quarterly via ZOOM to provide the public with information and program updates. The November meeting was held November 15, 2023, with a Podcast available shortly thereafter.

The 2024 Independent Living Forum schedule starts at 1:00 p.m. and is scheduled as follows: February 21, May 15, August 14, and November 13

## Independent Living Integration

Currently, our teams are beginning to look ahead to 2024 in scheduling our Independent Living Integration sessions. We have yet to officially schedule any firm dates; while this is subject to change, we are currently considering three months for next year. We will be firming up the dates of training very soon and will make official announcements of the training dates once we can get them nailed down. The tentative discussions regarding the months to hold training include: March 2024, June 2024, and September 2024.

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

## Library Updates

The library’s fall programming began in September for all ages. More details can be found below in the Library Programs and Outreach section.

The Book Bundles Program has gotten off to a great start as well. It is a program for school classrooms and libraires. The Book Bundles have ten books each in braille or print/braille or large print and are checked out to the classroom or school library each month giving them a small collection to make available to students. Denise Bean, our Youth Services Librarian is also visiting school libraries and classrooms with her outreach program to make connections.

The Instructional Material Center (IMC) Team continues to work with school districts regarding changes to the ordering and procurement of accessible educational materials including training on production tracking software called Athena to place orders. The IMC is also working with vendors and contractors providing braille and large print transcription in setting up their access to Athena. This will provide everyone involved in ordering, procuring, assigning, and producing student materials with the ability to track order statuses.

The IMC is also offering Braille Transcriber courses for Educators. The first course started in July covering Lessons 1- 12 in the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled *Instruction Manual for Braille Transcribing*. It introduces braille and transcription. Our certified braille transcribers on staff are serving as mentors as the participants work through the lessons in the manual and in the online class and resources the IMC Team created to go along with the manual. There are 17 registered for Course 1 which will end in December. Participants who complete Course 1 will be invited to continue to Course 2 which covers Lessons 13- 20 in the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled *Instruction Manual for Braille Transcribing*.  This course also includes the submission of the final manuscript to be reviewed for certification.  Course 1 will also be offered again starting in January.

The Friends of the Library provided funding to allow the library to purchase two 3D printers, updated equipment for our Virtual Programming Studio where Zoom programming and podcasts are produced.

The Iowa Regional Braille Challenge will be held at the Department on Saturday, February 24, 2024.

## Library Programs and Outreach

Youth Programming:

* Fall programming began in September and includes 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.
* The Library Chat Book Club started in October as part of the monthly Library Chat podcast. Library staff announce the book they will be reading during the podcast and discuss it next month. Patrons can read along with the staff and provide reviews, discussion questions and other information throughout the month which is featured on the podcast.

Outreach

* In October the library will be presented at the Iowa Library Association Conference providing a day long pre-conference on accessible materials, a shorter session about the library services and an information booth in the vendor hall.

## 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.

# Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center Report – Karly Prinds

## Center Students

We currently have 7 Center students and one staff member in training. One of our Center students transitioned from the Young Adult Transition Program (YATP) into the Center as of November 1, which we are happy to say this date of transition was earlier than expected. During this quarter, we had one student termination.

## Activities

Our students have been busy with various activities and programs; these include:

IL Integration week (September 10-16), Self-Week (October 1-7), traveling to the Center Grove Apple Orchard (October 19), volunteering for our youth weekend retreat (October 27-29), fundraising for the student body the week of November 13 which includes All Staff meeting, and the Friends of the Library Holiday concert, and holiday tree cutting (November 30). Furthermore, November 15 was our annual Thanksgiving dinner with the Center and YATP students and staff. This dinner was prepared by our Center and YATP students. Similarly in December, we will have a holiday meal that will be prepared by our Center staff for our students.

As mentioned above with the programs we hosted here at IDB, we had five IL clients attend our September IL Integration Week. These clients attended all classes alongside our Center students and learned a lot during their stay. They had dinner with our two consumer organizations (ICUB and NFBI), were hosted by our Center students for dinner, and at the end of the week, left with newfound confidence they didn’t realize they could ever have.

We had three students attend our October 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, learning how to navigate through the implementation of nonvisual skills to enhance their confidence. Self-Week students also went out to eat downtown at a restaurant and had plenty of practice exploring their environment. It was so refreshing to see them traveling in the evenings on their own initiative using techniques and standards taught during their daily Cane Travel classes.

We are currently in the midst of filling our VR Teaching positions. We have hired two teachers who will start early next year. It is exciting to continue to build this team and we soon look forward to being fully staffed.

# Vocational Rehabilitation – Keri Osterhaus

## Position Vacancies and Changes

* Tasha Welsh, VR counselor, completed her training and is now serving clients in western and southwestern Iowa. Tasha is eager to begin working closely with her clients. We are continuing to transition cases to Tasha’s caseload and plan to have all of these cases transferred by the end of the year.
* JR Beamer, Career Instructor / Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, completed his training and is working with the Young Adult Transition Program and the Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center to provide pre-employment transition services and job readiness services to clients participating in these programs. JR is working with VR counselors, instructors and clients to identify needed skills, training and support to clients as they work toward their employment goals.
* We are in the process of hiring a DeafBlind Specialist position. This individual will be working with clients who are DeafBlind, and those who are blind and hard-of-hearing throughout the state of Iowa. The individual will be providing guidance and counseling, pre-employment transition services, training services and other VR services to clients. In addition, this individual will focus on providing support and technical assistance to employers, community rehabilitation providers and other stakeholders.

## Program Updates

IDB currently has 459 clients accessing vocational rehabilitation services. This program year, we have taken 73 applications for services and 62 individuals have been determined eligible for services. Sixty-four plans for employment have been developed with IDB clients and clients are moving forward with accessing VR services. Seventy-eight students are enrolled in high school and 64 students are enrolled in post-secondary training programs.

As our numbers of students who are blind or have low vision continues to increase, we identified a need to provide additional opportunities for pre-employment transition services. IDB released a request for proposal (RFP) for the purpose of providing training to students who are blind or have low vision and eligible for pre-employment transition services. These RFPs were awarded to Sky’s the Limit, Clusiv, Helen Keller National Center, Public Consulting Group and Norman and Associates/Dale Carnegie. We have a team of VR staff currently reviewing program options and working with these recipients to identify future programming for students across Iowa.

IDB successfully exited 13 VR clients in competitive and integrated employment since July 1, 2023. These individuals worked an average of 29.77 hours per week and earned an average of $17.63/hour. The median wage for these individuals is $16.00/hour. At the time of the last report, there were four individuals closed in the following positions: food prep worker, massage therapist, production worker and veterinarian assistant. Since that report additional employment outcomes have been in the following positions: agricultural worker, building cleaning worker, cook, customer service representative, daycare provider, family engagement case manager, graphic designer, sales manager and shift manager. There are currently 31 individuals working in positions that meet their employment goals.

IDB continues to collaborate with core and required partners on the next four-year State Plan which engages partners across our state workforce system to effectively deliver workforce development services throughout Iowa. The State Workforce Board approved the following vision and goals:

Vision: An aligned, flexible, and streamlined workforce delivery system that meets the needs of employers and all Iowans for a skilled and diverse workforce.

* Goal 1: Increase the engagement and awareness of Iowa’s current, potential, and future workforce to the continuum of high-quality education, training, and career opportunities in Iowa.
  + Goal I Strategies:
    - Strategy #1: Align and implement an accessible, integrated service delivery model incorporating all workforce system partners.
    - Strategy #2: Ensure all Iowa students have opportunities for meaningful work-based learning experiences.
    - Strategy #3: Target services to underserved populations, including individuals with disabilities, minorities, returning citizens, women, rural Iowans, new citizens, veterans, etc.
* Goal 2: Increase employer engagement and awareness of the IowaWORKS system as the premier provider of business services for a skilled and diverse workforce.
  + Goal 2 Strategies:
    - Strategy #1: Support local workforce boards in the development and enhancement of sector partnerships.
    - Strategy #2: Create and implement a unified and collaborative business engagement model.
    - Strategy #3: Increase the awareness and engagement by employers in work-based learning opportunities.

The Department, core partners and required partners, are working to ensure that a draft of the state plan is available in December and will be available for public comment early in 2024. Following the comment period, additional updates will be made with a final submission planned for March 2024. Implementation of the state plan will be on July 1, 2024.