Board Meeting Reports

June 11, 2024

## Director's Report – Emily Wharton

Our new case management system (CMS) went live at the beginning of April. There were of course some expected and unexpected bugs and issues as is typical for a system change. Our data analyst, Wesley Majerus has worked especially hard to answer questions and follow up on remaining issues. Our staff have worked hard and demonstrated outstanding teamwork throughout the year-long implementation. We greatly appreciate the patience and hard work of all VR, IL and accounting staff in working through the bugs, getting used to the new system and rolling with the changes. Some functionality needed to be moved to the second implementation phase including the creation of several reports. The statistics typically provided in this packet were among them. We will endeavor to make end of program year statistics available as soon as possible after the June 30th end of year. However, priority will need to be given to the preparation of our federal quarterly report as our federal funder (RSA) is implementing yet another set of changes to this more than 400 column report. Results of this and all RSA reports for all VR agencies can be found on the <https://rsa.ed.gov> website.

Currently, the Iowa State Independent Living Council (SILC) is in the process of selecting who will be the Designated State Entity (DSE) for their federal funding.  IDB previously served as the DSE for the SILC and has offered to serve in this role again.

Our semi-annual New Staff Seminar was held in early April with 9 participants. We were delighted to have Commissioner Coleman in attendance. Commissioners are always invited and welcome to attend this weeklong overview of the mission, vision, values, history, administration, programs, funding, partnerships, and other topics related to our agency. It is always wonderful to get to know our new staff members and help them to feel more knowledgeable about and comfortable in our organization. In the past I have run this training, but this responsibility has been passed on to our Center Director, Karly Prinds. She has done an excellent job carrying forward this important tradition.

State Fiscal Year 2025 will be an exciting year as our agency will be celebrating 100 years of service to blind Iowans. Connie Mendenhall is heading up the team that are planning celebrations and commemorations of our centennial and will have more information to share as planning progresses.

# CFO – Cheri Myers

## Federal Grant Update:

Enclosed is the Grant Report as of 4/30/2024. We have moved to spending the FY24 Vocational Rehab grant and we have spent all we can on the FY23 Vocational Rehab grant given the limit of the restricted Pre-ets.

## Budget Report:

Enclosed is the budget report on State FY24 through 1/31/2024. 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.

## Iowa Advantage Conversion:

The State of Iowa has moved to a new cloud-based version of I/3, the state accounting system called Iowa Advantage. The conversion went well, and our verification checks on data all came back clean. We are still exploring all the functions of the new accounting system and have found some that expedite the payment process.

## State Fiscal Year End:

The accounting team is already working on and planning for State Fiscal Year End on 6/30/2024. We are cleaning up outstanding authorization payments, contacting vendors for invoices, verifying date of obligation on all transactions, etc.

## Other:

Jonna Modde has left IDB and have hired Damian York as the new Accounting Technician 2. Damian has a bachelor’s degree in accounting and over 4 years of Accounts Payable experience. He started on June 3rd, and we are quite excited to have him join the accounting team.

# Communication – Connie Mendenhall

The second quarter of 2024 has been a busy in the Information Access area of Iowa department for the Blind.

A large part of the IDB staff is still learning and adjusting to the new Case Management System. One of my responsibilities during the conversion and initial post conversion months is to monitor the communications between the system vendor and IDB staff. As the staff becomes more familiar with the new system, they are identifying possible bugs and areas for improvement. I provide support to Emily Wharton and Sarah Willeford with the project management piece of this conversion.

The two new Rehabilitation Technology Specialists, (RTS), have both completed their Center training and are working with the third RTS to create a new curriculum and training format to provide the effective Technology training to the most clients. The RTS’s are developing in-house “Tech Crush” events making it possible to bring groups of clients in for training. This same platform can be used in the field to work with clusters of clients in the communities.

We have three RTS staff members. Two of the RTS staff are Training Focused, these two work with the VR clients on technology training as outlined and requested by the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. They are also available to assist with Self-Weeks, LEAP and I.L. Integration when extra staff are needed. Our third RTS is a Workplace Focused staff member, the objective of this position is to work with the clients and their employer to find and set up workplace accommodations as requested by the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. The Workplace Focused RTS staff member also works with the IDB staff on training objectives and is currently in the process of cross training to provide back-up for the I.T. staff.

As we work to grow our Outreach program I am continuously meeting with various groups and organizations to give presentations in house and out in the communities. I am working with other departments within IDB to expand our Outreach efforts and increase our community partnerships both in Des Moines and around Iowa.

My largest Outreach event so far is our Centennial Celebration. A work group has been created with staff members from all outward facing departments, I will be meeting with the Friends of the Library in July to coordinate involvement and will be reaching out to the consumer groups for ideas and volunteers.

Second Quarter Outreach Events

March 2024

3-14-2024 – University of Iowa STEM and Psychology

3-15-2024 – Optometric Assistants Association Two tours

3-25-2024 – Tour DM Pride

April 2024

4-1-2024 – Presentation Mercy Rehabilitation Hospital

4-4-2024 – DM Art Center Tour Guide Training – 2 sessions

4-10-2024 – Presentation Easter Seals

4-15-2024 – Tour Drake Rehabilitation Student

4-16-2024 – Tour with Science Center Staff

4-23-2024 – Cerro Gordo S.A.L.T Event

4-24-2024 – Fim Maker Possible Documentary Tour

4-30-2024 – Presentation/table Marion Community School District Services Fair

May 2024

5-2-2024 – Tour with MHFA film crew

5-14-2024 – Attend Ames Public Library Strategic Planning meeting

5-15-2024 – Presentation Employee and Family Services Inc.

# Education and Training – Ambrose Fowler-Harney

The Education and Training Team (ETT) is wrapping up the Young Adult Transition Program (YATP) this week. The students involved are putting together a luncheon to celebrate the end of the year and to thank individuals outside of the ETT who have been a part of their education this year. The students have been involved in working with multiple groups across varied activities in the community, which has allowed for a lot of growth and learning for the students in the Spring Semester of 2024.

YATP has started to initiate its outreach and is contacting students to begin to schedule workshops and meetings for the Fall. YATP is also in the process of onboarding a new student for the Fall as well. The ETT is also preparing for the summer staff to start with their training on 5/20/24 and students to start arriving on June 10, 2024.

The ETT is excited for the amount of activities and community partners we’ll be working with for the Summer program to enhance and produce environments that facilitate self-advocacy, empowerment, and independence.

# Independent Living Program - Kimberley Walford

## IOWA SOLUTIONS FOR AGING WITH INDEPENDENCE AND LONGEVITY (SAIL) SUBCOMMITTEES

Below is the mission and vision. We were given a choice to select one Domain to work with out of five Domains.

The mission statement is**:** To understand, plan for and address aging issues across multiple sectors and systems. To ensure everyone has access to person-centered services and support needed to age well within their community of choice.

The vision statement is**:** All persons in Iowa age with independence and health across their lifespans.

Aging Domain for Aging with Economic Security (AES) is to address**:** Being financially secure as I age.

The outcome from participating is to propose strategies and initiatives under this domain.

Our second AES meeting resulted in discussions around these topics:

* Prevention of disability (Primary and secondary prevention)
* Accessibility and affordable including:
  1. Housing
* Health Care: Regular and recurring health care, acute health care access, post-acute care rehabilitation, outpatient rehabilitation
* Long term, community-based services and supports.
  1. Specialized based on individual needs.
  2. Home and community-based
* Medicaid Estate Recovery Policy & Other Insurance Policies including home modification, non-covered medical device, gaps, etc.
* Resource Navigation
* Employment and employer engagement

Several discussion points were placed in a “Parking Lot” for our next meeting.

## STATE PLAN FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING (SPIL)

Under our current SPIL, it requires that the Iowa Department for the Blind and Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) to attend Center for Independent Living (CIL) Board Meetings.

* On April 18, 2024, A2I Center for Independent Living out of Iowa City held their Board meeting at 6:30 PM.
* At this time, it is unknown whether the new 2025 to 2027 SPIL will recommend representatives from our department to attend CIL Board meetings. We will learn more after the SPIL is published for public comment.
* On April 26, 2024, the State Independent Living Council (SILC) met with Department management to discuss a Letter of Interest from we submitted to become their Designated State Entity (DSE) to administer Subchapter B and Subchapter C funding. This discussion was precipitated given that IVRS had announced they would be moving in a different direction, focusing on employment, therefore, was giving notice that at the end of the current SPIL they would terminate their DSE role and responsibilities. It was understood though that IVRS agreed to help facilitate the transition of their responsibilities as SILC’s current DSE to the new DSE once SILC’s voting members cold vote in a new DSE. There is one other state agency who expressed interest in becoming SILC’s DSE, so they will be meeting with that agency in the coming weeks.

## INDEPENDENT LIVING (IL) INTEGRATION

We are moving forward with program planning for our IL Integration June 23 through 28, 2024. IL Teachers recently submitted their nominees. We will be reviewing all nominees then meeting with our staff to talk more about the upcoming IL Integration activities and nominees.

We certainly want to recognize and thank the local Chapters of ICUB and NFBI for their dedicated sponsorship and support of our IL Integration program and activities. The IL Integration program has had a tremendous impact on many people who have attended, and these two consumer groups have helped to bridge the gap with IL Integration participants.

## TYLER CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND TRAINING

Staff and I have spent a lot of our time over the past several months working diligently within our new case management system (CMS). There has been much to work out as would be with any new CMS; however, we continue to move forward.

## STAFF UPDATES

Maggie Boelman successfully completed her Center training and is now shadowing IL teachers in the field and others at the department as part of her educational requirements. We are very pleased to have Maggie on our team. We believe she will be completing her field training very soon.

Quinn Haberl has been a dedicated member on our IL team. Recently, he learned about a position within the Oregon State VR program with their IL Older Blind program where he applied, was interviewed, offered, and accepted their position. In Quinn’s words, he said the city has “superior public transportation options” and is “designed” to be “more conducive to pedestrian activity.” It really was an offer he couldn’t refuse. Quinn announced his resignation; however, due to his unwavering dedication to our program, he plans to stay with us through July 12. While he has built very strong ties with our IL team, he knows we support his decision to move forward on this journey to learn and grow even more. We will certainly miss Quinn and do wish him much success.

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

## Library Updates

The Elizabeth Perowsky Volunteer Workshop and Luncheon was held on Friday, April 19th at the Iowa Department for the Blind. We were excited to recognize all the wonderful volunteers and the hard work they have done over the past year. The volunteer narrators gave 685 hours, recorded 105 Books and added 400 hours of audio to our collection. Our volunteers who assist in prepping, cleaning and repairing audio players for check out by patrons worked on over 600 players. Don Wirth received the Florence Grannis Library Service award. The Elizabeth Perowsky Memorial Volunteer Award was awarded to Sue Ketelsen. Sue took the lead on transcribing graphic novels and pictures books using audio description. Her first projects contained over 250 pages and over 1,000 images to describe. She has continued to narrate numerous graphic novels along with magazines. Congratulations and a huge thank you to all our volunteers.

The Instructional Material Center (IMC) Team has completed the implementation of another module to the Athena Ordering Portal currently being used by schools to order accessible educational materials. The second module allows our IMC staff to track production of non-educational materials such as collection books and materials for other agencies and organizations. The module also adds production tracking for materials being transcribed into audio.

The Youth Summer Reading program will begin in June. This year’s theme is Read, Repeat, Renew. Programs will be conducted virtually on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 2:00-2:45 pm. The activity kit for each week will be mailed to participants. Youth can join Denise Bean, our Youth Librarian for Guest Quest Mondays, Adventure in Arts on Wednesdays and STEAM Theme Fridays.

The library will also be hosting an 8-week STEM experience for teens 14 years and older this summer. The programs will include special guest speakers throughout the summer introducing different topics and hands-on STEM activities.

The library is proud to announce that there is a finalist from Iowa competing in the Braille Challenge finals. Nathan Deeds is a finalist in the Varsity group for the second year in a row! He has been invited to compete at the National Finals on June 23 and 24 at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.

## Library Programs and Outreach

Youth Programming:

* Summer Reading Program will begin in June for our youth patrons. This year’s theme is Read, Repeat, Renew.
* Youth Service Librarian, Denise Bean and will be visiting public libraries this summer 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 in 2024 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 as we follow Interstate 80 from the west coast to the east coast reading books about or set in each state we pass through. Participants will also receive a tactile map of the United States with I-80 featured. 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.

# Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center Report – Karly Prinds

The Center had one graduation and one termination this quarter. Currently, we have four students and four staff in training. We have six or seven students scheduled to start the Center between June and August, so we are excited about this.

The Center has been busy with our spring activities. Students went to the mall in April, and in May, we went antiquing as well as volunteered with Habitat for Humanity. We are scheduled to go to Pella in June, a tour of the Art Center in July, and to the Iowa State fair in August.

We hosted our first programs of the year in March, which included our March Self Week and March IL Integration. As stated in the last board report, these program clients learn alongside our Center students during classes as well as mingle for dinner in a more relaxed setting so that our clients get a taste of our intense Center training and understand how important this training is. Our hope and plan is that with these programs, clients will have more confidence, and then come to our Center for more intense training so that they will gain these nonvisual skills in all areas and be successful moving forward throughout their life. There was a lot of great interaction, mixing and mingling with our Center, Self-Week, and IL participants and it was very positive, which is always great to see!

Zach Ellingson, our Travel Instructor, was featured in the April issue of DSM Magazine. Some of us went to the unveiling party on April 30, and I was so proud of Zach as he did a great job as always, representing not only himself, but the Iowa Department for the Blind and the great training he and our instructors provide.

We had our first New Staff Seminar from April 22-26, and it was the first official one I have hosted. It was great to get to spend the week with 9 of our new staff members. I have the privilege of meeting staff when they first come to IDB as they start in the Center, but it was nice to talk with them further and have other representatives speak to them about the history of IDB, and how each department runs smoothly and works together as a whole.

Christian Fosselman joined our team as a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher on April 26, and he is currently in Center training. We are happy to have him on our team and continue to build up our team of Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers. We are in the midst of Center Generalist interviews and hope to fill this position soon.

Summer is upon us and we are looking forward to a busy next few months in the Center and with our VRT’s.

# Vocational Rehabilitation – Keri Osterhaus

## Program Updates

IDB’s Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program currently has 443 clients accessing services. This program year, we have taken 147 applications for services and 25 of them since April 1, 2024. Since July 1, 2023, 123 individuals have been determined eligible for services and 13 have been determined eligible for services since April 1, 2024. One-hundred thirteen plans for employment have been developed with IDB clients over the past year. 86 students are enrolled in high school and 64 students are enrolled in post-secondary or graduate level education programs.

IDB counselors continue to work with educators across Iowa and attend IEP meetings to support and provide services to blind students. Counselors and other IDB staff participated in the IESBVI Spring Family Conference in April where they networked with providers, educators, and families, in addition to hosting an information booth. IDB also participated in transition resource fairs at local high schools in Waukee and Marion and at Southwestern Community College in Creston.

IDB supported several students to attend the Building My Future Iowa event at the Iowa State Fairgrounds in April 2024. This was a hands-on career immersion event available to Iowa high school students. Several career pathways were represented, including manufacturing, healthcare, law enforcement, military, culinary, agriculture, construction, IT and Cybersecurity and many more. Students had the opportunity to talk with employers and participate in hands-on activities to assist them in identifying a variety of potential career pathways.

This past spring, one of our VR counselors participated in the Iowa Educators Customized Employment Course, a course developed through a partnership between the Department of Education and Griffin Hammis Associates, with support from IDB, IVRS and other stakeholders. Through this course, participants, working in teams around specific students, learned and practiced strategies related to customized employment to engage students in age-appropriate assessments, help students to identify their strengths, interests, goals, preferences, and other areas to support career development and post-secondary outcomes. The counselor shared that the course has assisted in developing relationships with the school and with the local area education agency as they work together to support the student in reaching their goals. This has proven to be a valuable activity to our counselor who is now using the strategies learned with additional students and other individuals she is working with.

Our VR team participated in Veteran Basics, Culture and Partnerships, a training through the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment’s Veteran Outreach training on April 1, 2024. This training focused on serving individuals who are veterans and service members. IDB has continued to participate in outreach activities to programs serving veterans and service members across Iowa. IDB has also provided trainings, participated in outreach events and provided information to programs including the Iowa Association of County Commissioners and Veteran Service Officers, Joining Community Forces, Blind Veterans Association, the River Valley Veterans Network and the VA’s Veteran Readiness and Employment program. IDB plans to attend additional Joining Community Forces Events through the summer months to continue this outreach focus. In August, IDB will be hosting a transitioning military member through the Defense Department’s SkillBridge Program through Iowa Workforce Development.

IDB provided training to a number of community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) across on topics related to Supported Employment services, vocational rehabilitation services, non-visual skills training and accommodations in the workplace. IDB is partnering with the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment (TAC-QE) to enhance supported employment services. IDB is working with the TAC-QE to provide additional training to CRPs across the state.

VR counselors have been busy this quarter making connections with businesses across the state and in other states to assist with employment outcomes and opportunities for VR clients. In southwest Iowa, IDB partnered with Blue Cross Blue Shield, Prairie Gate and the University of Nebraska Medical Center to assist with identifying accommodations and assistive technology to support individuals who are blind in education and employment. In northwest Iowa, outreach to Drilling Pharmacy and Wireless World occurred to develop work-based learning experiences for high school students; both locations received training in nonvisual skills and assistive technology. In central Iowa, partnerships are in the works with Unity Point and Project Search; IDB also provided training regarding IDB services, including assistance with identifying accommodations and assistive technology to support individuals who are blind in employment. Additional outreach has been done with a variety of employers such as Sugar Grove Goods, Accounting and Tax Professionals, Lee Enterprises, Starbucks, Caseys, Mustang Disaster Clean Up, EBY Manufacturing, Local 33 Plumber and Steam Fitters Union, North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters, IBEW 347 Electrical Workers Union, Hy-Vee, Blank Children’s Hospital and more! This outreach has helped to identify employers who are open to partnering with IDB to provide work experiences, job shadow activities and employment to high school students and adult clients. Additional partnerships continue to be developed to support current and future clients as well as employers.

IDB collaborated with core partners on the four-year State Plan which engages partners across our state workforce system to effectively deliver workforce development services throughout Iowa. The plan was submitted, and we are awaiting approval. Implementation of the state plan will be on July 1, 2024.

IDB is also working with local workforce development areas to complete local plans and memorandums of understanding. In addition, counselors have been meeting with local partners to participate in cross-training activities, ensuring that programs are aware of services being delivered in the local area. IDB partnered with the Central Iowa local workforce area to plan several job fairs to happen soon. IDB also participated in a tour of the Ottumwa Job Corps program where partners were able to collaborate on ways to support clients participating in education and training through the Job Corps programs.

BEP Counselors attended and completed “USI School”, a training opportunity hosted by U-Select-It, in which they were able to gain knowledge about USI’s lineup of machines including diagnostics, preventative maintenance, and repairs.  U-Select-It is an international manufacturer of vending equipment located in Clive, Iowa. BEP counselors also participated in a webinar on micro market security issues.  Micro markets are a common industry practice to evolve service at locations that once had vending or cafeteria services.

Matt Nemmers, BEP Executive Officer, created the “BEP Coffee Shop” this past program year, which has allowed program staff nationwide to collaborate on initiatives, ask questions, brainstorm opportunities, and discuss challenges. Matt Nemmers, BEP Executive Officer, was also recently selected to serve as a mentor in the newly launched mentor program tailored specifically for Randolph Sheppard to support new BEP leadership.

BEP has had several exciting additions which will expand opportunities to current and future vendors. In fact, IDB recently approved a license for a BEP vendor, and they will be eligible to bid on open locations as they become available.

Effective July 1, 2024, BEP will be the exclusive provider of convenience services to Polk County.  This includes bringing the Polk County Jail micro market and vending into the program’s responsibility; the location provides service to more than 300 staff and visitors on a 24/7, 3-shift schedule at the jail. The contract also includes other locations such as senior centers and Jester Park Visitor’s Center. This contract is for a 5-year term and will renew automatically for one-year terms after that. BEP also recently acquired the Veteran’s Health Administration’s new offices in Iowa City and features a micro market. The Cedar Rapids Post Office is transitioning to a full micro market. Our BEP team continues to explore new locations to grow our program and opportunities for vendors.