Board Meeting Reports

September 17, 2024

# Interim Director's Report – Sarah Willeford

Please find the submission for the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2025 budget for Commission Board approval. The total requested amount for SFY 2025 is $120,019. This includes:

* **$53,019** in state appropriations, which will enable us to access an additional **$129,347** in federal funds designated for cost-of-living expenses.
* **$67,000** to restore the funding no longer provided under the State Plan for Independent Living.
* **$559,000** in capital appropriations to replace the chiller at the IDB building.

These funds are crucial for accessing further federal funds and supporting our Independent Living program.

I want to extend my gratitude to the Iowa Council of the United Blind for inviting IDB staff to speak at their 2024 annual convention. Additionally, thank you for presenting resolutions to both IDB staff and the Commission Board. In response to Resolution 2024-2 concerning the IDB website, we have developed goals and a plan to enhance the website, ensuring it effectively reflects the programs and services offered by the Department.

Our efforts in agency-wide team building and communication continue to enhance cross-agency collaboration. Notable examples include our work on the new case management system and the planning for our upcoming Centennial Celebration. The Leadership Team is concentrating on leveraging our collective expertise to optimally serve our youth through various programs and services.

# CFO – Cheri Myers

## Federal Grant Update:

Enclosed is the Grant Report as of 8/30/2024. After a discussion with RSA, it was clear that they wanted IDB to spend all the FFY23 grant if possible. As I determined that we would be able to make the State Match and MOE on the FFY24 grant, we moved to spending all Pre-ETS on the FFY 23 grant and will continue to do so until 9/30/2024 as all we have available to spend is Pre-ETS. This will not spend down the entire FFY23 grant but it will be under $500,000.

## Budget Report:

Enclosed is the budget report on State FY24 through 8/30/2024. The report included compares year to date to the annual budget based on state fiscal year. This is the final for FY24 and where we end the state fiscal year. The budget report for State FY25 through 8/30/2024 is also included.

## Proposed Budget FY26:

The proposed budget for FY26 is also included for your approval. The instructions were to do a flat budget, so the same as FY25. We do see that the flat budget from FY24 is putting IDB in the position of needing to ask for an increase to allow for the coverage of the COL increase for FY26.

## Iowa Advantage Conversion:

We continue to learn the new accounting system and are working on resolving any problems with the converted files for fixed assets. After the end of the state fiscal year, it is anticipated that more features will be added to Advantage similar to what was expected out of WorkDay.

## State Fiscal Year End:

State Fiscal Year End has been successfully completed and the GAAP package submitted. The CFDAs on each grant and the SEFA in total still need completing and it is best to do so as soon as possible after completing the GAAP package.

## Other:

Stephanie Clark, Accounting Tech 3 has resigned, and her last day is 9/26/2024. Stephanie is transferring to ABD. The position is posted, and I hope to interview and hire by 9/26/2024.

# Communication – Connie Mendenhall

During the third quarter of the year Emily Wharton retired and I moved into the position of Project Manager for the Case Management System conversion project. We are still working with Tyler Technologies to wrap up the transition. All data has been migrated from our old system, eForce, and moved into the new system.  Day-to-day case management is now handled through the new system. We submitted the first RSA 911 report out of the new system in August of 2024. We will continue to work with the vendor, Tyler Technologies, through the first quarter of 2025 to work on bug fixes, reporting requirements and system improvements.

Requests for tours and speaking engagements typically decline during the summer months of the year and this year has been no different. This has allowed for time to focus on our Centennial Project. We have been working with a marketing company to update our logo, flyers and other marketing and outreach materials. The new logo design was selected, and we have begun using it on letterhead and other items. The new logo incorporates the old logo with the outline of the state of Iowa and IDB in braille withing the outline, the words Iowa Department for the Blind are below the state outline, this is surrounded by a dark blue circle with the words 100 YEARS in the top half and OF EMPOWERMENT in the lower half of the circle. The outline of ribbon ends are on the outer edges in the center of the circle, the left end reads 1925, the right end reads 2025. In addition to the logo the marketing company has finalized a new tri-fold flyer layout that we can update in house. I am working with the I.T. staff to add the software and software licenses so we can update our marketing materials in house rather than using an outside source.

The new RTS staff members have all completed training and are working with clients in their communities, virtually, and in-house at the agency. The RTS staff has launched a “Tech Crunch” program and will begin holding regular sessions in October 2025. The RTS staff provided various tech sessions to the LEAP students over the summer including a session on the importance of keeping private information private and how to safely and securely navigate the world of technology.

The RTS staff will soon begin holding “open office hours”. These office hours will provide an opportunity for our staff members to reach out for quick help sessions for their phones and computers. With the frequent updates to technology being able to provide our staff with a resource for quick 15- or 20-minute tutorials will encourage an open line of communication across the agency.

# Education and Training – Ambrose Ball-Harney

The ET Team started the Young Adult Transition Program (YATP) on 9/3/24. Currently we have two students enrolled in the program and both students have voiced that they are excited and looking forward to the school year. YATP will continue to work with community partners and IDB staff to provide multi-layered learning opportunities and experiences to move students toward empowerment and self-advocacy. The ET Team is also hosting its’ first weekend retreat this weekend (9/6/24). The ET Team has also expanded the number of weekend retreats taking place throughout the school year, aiming to increase awareness and opportunities for students. This weekend retreat students participating will be focusing on college prep with multiple universities coming to discuss and expand upon various facets of upper academia.

# Independent Living Program - Kimberley Walford

## STATE PLAN FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING (SPIL)

The current three-year SPIL will end September 30, 2024. The State Independent Living Council (SILC) and Centers for Independent Living (CILs) developed and ratified their new 2025-2027 SPIL.

## INDEPENDENT LIVING (IL) INTEGRATION

At the time of this report, we scheduled a weeklong IL Integration starting September 9th and concluding around noon on the 13th. Five Independent Living clients have registered and plan to join us on Sunday September 8th. They will start by receiving a tour of our building, then engage in an “icebreaker” activity, followed by a nice hot meal during the dinner hour. Afterwards, they may relax and socialize if they wish.

The training week will be rigorous as usual; however, we believe it will provide IL clients with many opportunities to learn and grow! We also appreciate partnering with the Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center’s Director, the outstanding staff of the Center, and the Center mentors they assign to the IL clients for the entire week. Assigning mentors has been an effective strategy to assist IL clients to have productive conversations with their assigned mentor who is also a role model, as well as develop the skills and gain confidence throughout the week that they can take back to their homes and communities.

We again have the pleasure of having the Iowa Council of the United Blind of Des Moines and the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa Des Moines Chapter sponsor an evening with IL clients. These consumer groups provide a great meal, present an educational program about their membership, and allow time to meet with other blind Iowans. We appreciate their continued support and participation with registered IL clients, the information they share during their program, and through their introductions making it known that no one needs to be alone; that is, there are peers, advocates, memberships and support networks available if anyone so chooses to reach out and participate.

Tentative 2025 schedule for IL Integration:

* Sunday, March 23 to Friday, March 28, 2025
* Sunday, June 22 to Friday, June 27, 2025
* Sunday, September 21 to Friday, September 26, 2025

## MULTISECTOR ON AGING OVERVIEW

The Division of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) within Iowa Health & Human Services launched a project that has brought together government agencies, community partners and nonprofits to plan for and address aging issues across a person’s lifespan. The project, called “Iowa Solutions for Aging with Independence and Longevity,” or "IA SAIL,” has been gathering information from people across Iowa through steering and subcommittee meetings, surveys and a road tour this summer of 2024.

Iowa HHS will draft a Multisector Plan for Aging (MPA), including aging with disabilities plan, at the end of 2024 to ensure all people of all ages and abilities have access to the right services and supports to age well across their lifespans and in their communities. The Iowa Department for the Blind was invited to participate with the MPA and I represent this group. From this group, there are several subgroups with different MPA Priorities to address including:

* Aging in Place – Choosing to live where you want to live
* Aging with Economic Security – Being financially secure as you age
* Living Better Longer – Having good health as you age
* Support Care Givers – Having community supports as you age
* Engaging All Ages & Abilities - Staying active and social within your community as you age

HHS is holding road trips and town hall sessions that are open to the public, where all who are interested are invited to share insights, give suggestions and discuss concerns as they work to meet the needs of Iowans in all phases of the aging process. Following are the available remaining Town Hall meetings scheduled for 2024, as posted on their website:

* [October 10](https://hhs.iowa.gov/events/iowa-solutions-aging-independence-and-longevity-ia-sail-town-hall-4) 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. | [Virtual](https://www.zoomgov.com/meeting/register/vJItceitrzsrH2Th2gytbpGO7szdt07eTEM)
* [November 1](https://hhs.iowa.gov/events/iowa-solutions-aging-independence-and-longevity-ia-sail-town-hall-6) 3 p.m. – 4 p.m. | Prairie Ridge Integrated Behavioral Healthcare, 320 N. Eisenhower Ave. Mason City, IA

## STAFF UPDATES

It is my pleasure to announce that we have a new Independent Living Rehabilitation Teacher, Irene Vega, who started employment with us on Friday, August 30th. She has completed several on-onboarding activities then began our Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center for training and certification on Thursday, September 5th. We are pleased she has joined us and eventually will serve the Eastern Iowa corridor and several South and Eastern Iowa counties; in total 17 counties. These counties will include Cedar, Clinton, Des Moines, Iowa, Jackson, Jasper, Johnson, Jones, Keokuk, Lee, Louisa, Mahaska, Marion, Muscatine, Poweshiek, Scott, and Washington.

## INDEPENDENT LIVING SUCCESS STORIES: CONTRIBUTION MADE BY LORI BERGLUND

In March, a 75-year-old IL client from Dickinson County spent five days exploring Spain with a London-based travel company called TravelEyes. The company was founded by a blind entrepreneur to provide independent group travel for people who are blind or partially sighted. The groups consist of an equal number of blind and sighted travelers. The client had a wonderful time. She maintains contact with some of the other blind travelers she met on her trip and can’t wait to book another adventure soon!

A Humboldt County IL Client in his 90s has started documenting his life story and told his IL teacher about growing up with his famous childhood friend. As a teenager, the client left his home in the Southern US to travel North for work on a pipeline. He continued that career until a few years ago when he retired. He told about asking his childhood friend to come along at the time to work with him on the pipeline. The friend said he couldn’t go because his family wanted him to stay home and keep playing the guitar. Shortly before his childhood friend passed away about seven years ago, they reunited backstage at a concert where Glen Campbell was performing in Branson, Missouri. The client laughed and said, “I guess he [Glen] made the right choice to keep playing guitar.”

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

## Library Updates

The Youth Summer Reading program was held in June and July. This year’s theme was Read, Repeat, Renew. Programs were conducted virtually on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The activity kit for each week was mailed to participants so they would have the materials needed for each week. Thirty-two youth patrons joined Denise Bean, our Youth Services Librarian for Guest Quest Mondays, Adventure in Arts on Wednesdays and STEAM Theme Fridays. The library also held an 8-week STEM experience for teens 14 years and older this summer. The programs included special guest speakers introducing different topics and hands-on STEM activities.

The Instructional Material Center (IMC) Team added another module to the Athena Ordering Portal for schools to order accessible educational materials. This module allows educators to also search for and request devices (ie. Braille eReaders, embossers, Perkins braillers) and STEM Kits for students.

The library is currently working on a project to update and bring together the library and Instructional Materials Center blogs to provide one location to find information on all the services provided through the library. It will also include the online learning management system which is currently being used for the Braille Transcriber Course for Educators.

The library participated in several large outreach events this summer. In June the library had a booth at the Des Mones Farmer’s Market where staff were able to share information about the library and the Department. Over 600 people visited the booth. The library had an information booth at the Iowa Reading Conference where staff connected with educators from around the state. In August, the library staff had a table with information and braille activities at Kids Club during the Iowa State Fair.

## Library Programs and Outreach

Youth Programming:

* Crafting Your Story Afterschool Program will begin September 15th. The program is held virtually every Tuesday from 4:15 – 5:00pm.
* Makerspace Monday’s for families will begin on October 14th. They are held on the second Monday of the month at 6:00pm October – May. Virtual and in-person options available.

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.
* 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

This summer has been a busy one. We have 12 attending the center currently, (three students and nine staff in training.) We have two new students starting in September. We had one graduation in July and one termination in August. We have another graduation scheduled for the beginning of October. We had two LEAP students attend Center classes with us over the summer, and one has now transitioned into the Center fulltime as of August 20.

We had a student who chose to attend the National Federation of the Blind convention in Orlando, FL along with two LEAP students. He traveled throughout the convention Center and to many different meetings in the hotel where the convention was held, and each day to and from the hotel where we stayed, about 15 minutes away. He networked with many people and after attending the BEP networking meeting, has chosen to pursue this as his career after his graduation in October.

Students toured the Art Center in September, we will go apple picking in October, have our Thanksgiving feast in November, and holiday tree cutting in early December.

We had two Self Weeks this summer as well as an IL Integration week, which our Center hosted students in classes and had a relaxing dinner breaking bread together with both programs. One of those Self Week students will start in the Center on September 16. Our next IL week is September 8-13, and our next Self Week is October 6-12.

I am happy to report that we are now fully staffed in the Center and on our Vocational Rehabilitation Teaching team. Tasara Hamilton started as our new Center Generalist on July 8. We have had four Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers start as well, and I will list the names and their start dates: Chandler Smith on August 2, Echoe Lacaille on August 5, Jessica Katzung on August 9, and Cierra Robinson transferred to us from the youth program on August 16. We are very happy to have these new teachers with us and are looking forward to having them on our team!

Nami Wallace and I were invited to attend an outreach presentation/luncheon with other panelists at Habitat for Humanity’s facility on August 20. We have been volunteering with them for several years now, so it was an honor to be on this panel to answer questions of their staff about what we do here not only at IDB, but the equality and opportunities for blind people.

# Vocational Rehabilitation – Keri Osterhaus

## Position Vacancies and Changes

Carol Manning was hired as the new DeafBlind Specialist. This individual will be working with clients who are DeafBlind, and those who are blind and hard-of-hearing throughout the state of Iowa. She will be providing guidance and counseling, pre-employment transition services, training services and other VR services to clients. In addition, she will focus on providing support and technical assistance to employers, community rehabilitation providers and other stakeholders. Carol began her position on September 21st and is in the Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center completing her training.

## Program Updates

IDB’s new case management system through Tyler Technologies (Tyler), the Iowa Department for the Blind Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living Case Management (CMS) has been implemented. IDB currently has 442 clients accessing vocational rehabilitation services. This program year began on July 1, and we have taken new 16 applications for services and 15 individuals have been determined eligible for services and 8 plans for employment have been developed with IDB. IDB staff are continuing to work with the production team to improve the system and to pull our reports. IDB has developed learning guides and provides training to staff using the system.

IDB continues to expand our partnerships with veteran service organizations across the state. In August, IDB had the privilege of hosting a transitioning military member through the Defense Department’s SkillBridge Program through Iowa Workforce Development. In addition to this partnership, IDB has been participating in community events across the state, providing information through presentation and hosting booths. JR Beamer, Careers Instructor, has been attending regular meetings with Veteran Affairs (VA), Veteran Readiness Employment Program (VRE), VA hospitals, VA Veteran Centers, the Iowa Department of Veteran Affairs, and the IowaWorks Veteran team as well as other service agencies to build partnerships and promote IDB services to Iowa veterans, service members, and their families.

This summer Rebekah Traver developed a partnership with Thrive employment services to provide the ACRE national certification program for Employment Specialists. The training program is in collaboration with the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Employment, Rachel Rounds with the Virginia Commonwealth University and began on July 1, 2024. The ACRE training has been offered many strategies and resources for IDB staff to use when engaging with Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP’s) for employment services. Rebekah is also working on developing partnerships with CRPs across the state and providing training to their program staff on IDB’s supported employment services.

IDB is continuing to build our programs for students receiving pre-employment transition services. This summer IDB partnered to develop two additional programs to equip students with the skills needed to transition to the workplace and college. The first program is Generation Next which prepares students for interpersonal skills building such as strengthening relationships, working on communication techniques, building self-confidence, managing stress, and developing foundational leadership skills. This is a program offered through a partnership with Dale Carnegie that we have done in the past, but this year we delivered a hybrid version and use both virtual and in person programming. This allows students an opportunity to better interact with the program facilitators and provide them with much needed time to practice the skills together while building relationships across the state. The program began in August, and we will have three additional sessions this fall.

IDB partnered with Sky’s the Limit which offers training focused on preparing for college. In August, students participating in the training were able to work on their skills using blindness techniques as they learned from successful individuals both academically and professionally who just happen to be blind. They had the opportunity to travel to a college campus, learned about collaborating with campus disability services offices, learn about essential resiliency strategies and discover assistive technology and note taking skills necessary to be successful in college. IDB plans to host a similar program in January 2025.

IDB’s LEAP program partnered with our Business Enterprises Program this summer to provide workplace readiness and work-based learning experiences to students. Participants had an opportunity to work on job preparation and interviewing skills before interviewing and being accepted into a work-based learning experience where they were able to work in the field with operators. IDB plans to continue building this program to give students an opportunity to learn about the BEP program and small business ownership.

As high schools are back in session, our VR teams are gearing up for IEP meetings, local school plans, and school visits. IDB is looking forward to continuing to develop year-round opportunities for students to receive training and are excited to explore new partnerships to expand opportunities for students.