Board Meeting Reports

December 3, 2024

# Interim Director's Report – Sarah Willeford

On Friday, October 25, 2024, I met with the Governor regarding the IDB budget for SFY2025. The request included additional appropriations in the amount of $120,019as well as a capital appropriations request of $559,000. 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.

I would like to thank our commissioners, and the presidents of the Iowa United Council of the Blind and National Federation of the Blind of Iowa for attending the listening session on the hiring process for the Director of the Iowa Department for the Blind held by the Governor’s Office. It was a great opportunity to share insights, priorities, and concerns, and to help inform the selection of a candidate who aligns with our shared goals and values.

I want to extend my gratitude to the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa for inviting me to speak at their 2024 annual convention in October.

# CFO – Cheri Myers

## Federal Grant Update:

Enclosed is the Grant Report as of 10/31/2024. Federal reports are being filed for the federal fiscal year end and to finalize the FY 23 grant year.

## Budget Report:

Also enclosed, is a budget report on State FY25 through 10/31/2024. The report included compares year to date to the annual budget based on state fiscal year.

## Proposed Budget FY26:

The proposed budget for FY26 has been submitted and we are waiting to hear back from the Governor and the Legislators.

## Iowa Advantage Conversion:

Accounting staff have been trained and are confident in using the new accounting system. Currently waiting to hear about additional features that will be forthcoming. It was announced that DAS SAE will no longer mail out warrant lists and notices for EFT’d (Electronic Fund Transfer) payments. I am investigating how to obtain this information as we use it to ensure that IDB’s EFT’d payments are correctly credited to our accounts by the vendors.

## State Fiscal Year End:

State Fiscal Year End has been successfully completed and the GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles) package submitted. The CFDAs (Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance) on each grant and the SEFA (Schedule of Expenditures of Federal Awards) in total still need completing and it is best to do so as soon as possible after completing the GAAP package. The auditor has already requested the GAAP package and is starting on the audit.

## Other:

Matthew F. Perry is the new Accounting Technician 3. Matt comes to us from the State Auditor’s Office. He will complete Center training on 11/22/2024. We are looking forward to working with Matt.

# Communication – Connie Mendenhall

2024 has been a busy year for our Information Technology and Rehabilitation Technology Specialist staff.

## Rehabilitation Technology Specialist (RTS):

Two new RTS staff members were hired one in December 2023, a Work Placed focused RTS and a Training Focus RTS, in addition to our existing Training focus RTS. Both new RTS staff members successfully completed Center Training and position specific training.

Currently our Workplace Focus RTS member continues to support our IT staff filling a vacant position. He is assisting with staff Help request tickets for password locate and various equipment issues. Our Training Focus RTS staff have received 37 client referrals to work with clients on assessments, equipment requests, and technology training.

The RTS staff have developed a curriculum for in house Tech Crunch sessions to be held on a monthly basis at the agency in Des Moines. They are also working on a Community Based Training curriculum to work with small client groups in their own communities. We are hoping to launch the Community Based Training sessions in January 2025.

I.T. staff continue to be instrumental in working on the new Case Management System that went live in April 2024. We are continuing to work with the vendor on system implementation items such as, reporting requirements, workflow issues, database queries, and searches.

## Communication and Outreach

During the last quarter requests for speaking engagements and tours have decreased, this is normal for this time of year. I have received requests from Rotary Clubs for December and have several events scheduled for the first quarter of 2025.

The Information Specialist position has been posted and a tentative offer has been made pending a background check. Our new Information Specialist should be through Center training by January 2025. I am currently reviewing our website and social media platforms in preparation for the new staff member. In addition to our website and social media platforms we will be putting together a history compilation that will be added to our YouTube channel and be shifting into high gear for Centennial Celebration in April of 2025.

With the addition of an Information Specialist, we will be able to increase our focus on outreach. My goal for our Centennial year is to be sure Iowa Department for the Blind becomes a well-known and visible resource in every county of Iowa.

# Education and Training – Ambrose Ball-Harney

The ET Team had another successful and educational weekend retreat in October which had 10 students participate. We have also continued our partnership with Des Moines Art Center, which has allowed students in YATP and weekend retreats to not only explore new hobbies and crafts, but also to network and have positive interactions with peers who share similar interests. We have also begun planning our winter weekend retreat and hope to increase the number of student participants as well with the increased communication to possible participants that has been taking place. YATP is also starting to wrap up the Fall Semester of 2024. The two students within the 4 PLUS program have shown a significant amount of growth in a variety of areas and we are all looking forward to our Spring Semester. Initial planning has also started for LEAP 2025, which will look to continue to build upon the summer program’s past efforts.

# Independent Living Program - Kimberley Walford

## **MULTISECTOR PLAN ON AGING (MPA)**

The assignment to attend the Iowa Solutions on Aging with Independence and Longevity (MPA) group has been an experience. The MPA is a long-term plan for Iowa to help people age well in their communities. The Steering Committee wants input from community partners, professionals, and the public to create a more organized system. This system aims to support healthy aging, independent living, and social engagement, while also dealing with issues like healthcare, housing, transportation, and other factors affecting health.

Sellers Dorsey, a contractor, with Health and Human Services (HHS) and Disability Services (ADS), formerly the Iowa Department of Aging, submits this report to HHS and ADS to support its initiative to develop a comprehensive, long-term, Multisector Plan on Aging issues to plan for and address aging, including those aging with disability across the lifespan.

Since 2023, Sellers Dorsey supported ADS to solicit input from the community via five approaches, compile and analyze the input, and make recommendations on priorities for inclusion in the MPA. The five approaches to community engagement included launching a community survey, establishing a steering committee, and hosting town hall meetings, focus groups, and targeted interviews.

As presented previously, the framework comprised we address included five domains. The structure included: community engagement materials, discussions, and analyzing results. Domains include Aging in Place, Aging with Economic Security, Living Better Longer, Supporting Caregivers, and Social Engagement.

Content recommendations are the subtopics that raised the most interest and input in the five engagement approaches. These are access to home and community-based services, informal caregiver support, coordination of services and person-centered services, direct care professionals, health equity, paying for services, and transportation. The group identified 20 unique community partners under Community Engagement Approaches and Findings. Several Agencies were listed including the Iowa Department for the Blind.

Process recommendations are geared toward the ADS team and the steering committee as they continue to develop, publish and implement the MPA. When everything is ready for public review, you will be kept informed.

## AGENCY ENHANCEMENTS

On behalf of the entire agency, it's a pleasure to announce that we are bringing our Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher (VRT) and the Independent Living Teacher (ILRT) teams together to serve our agency and 99 Iowa counties. I strongly believe these rehabilitation teachers will help our agency remain relevant, achieve innovation by scaling up solutions to complicated situations, and use their exceptional skills and talents to communicate how we can reduce inefficiencies in the work we do.

As we move forward with the management piece of this transition on December 2, we will temporarily stay the course as we work through this change initiative. We have our “Creation,” and now together, we must continue through the “Execution.” This is literally the epitome of building the airplane while flying it, if you will. We must start the project in new and untested ways, do things differently, challenge existing thinking, approaches and systems. We are ready, we have a “path,” a path that will align ourselves and create positive opportunities as we walk the path together. We understand we are all deeply connected and interconnected with each other. We understand that our agency is the anchor, and that to remain relevant now and into our future, we must work together, work innovatively, and harmoniously to serve the people we are here to serve, for that is our mission, that is our charge.

## CONVENTION PRESENTATION FOR SENIOR’S DIVISION

We received an invitation from the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa (NFBI) during their annual convention in October to speak with their Senior Division. They were interested in our services, and any changes we have made to the program. Success stories were shared, and questions answered.

Overall, they had a very good turnout, and the conversation was robust. We appreciated the invitation and would very much like an opportunity to return in the future.

## INDEPENDENT LIVING (IL) INTEGRATION 2025 TENATIVE SESSIONS

A general reminder IL Integration is just around the corner. Teams will begin planning for this training event very soon. Below you will find the tentative 2025 schedule.

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

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

## Library Updates

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. This does mean that we will be posting less frequently than usual as we finish data migration and transition to the new site.

The Book Bundles program continues to grow each month. The program circulates to schools a bundle of 10 braille or large prints books each month to be used by students in the classroom and/or library. Schools can register for the program using an online form located on the Instructional Materials Center’s blog. We currently have 32 schools registered for the program.

The library presented and was an exhibitor at the Iowa Library Association’s annual conference in October. The presentation highlighted the different services and formats provided by the library.

The Instructional Materials Center staff developed a monthly report using our new production tracking system, Athena. This report will provide monthly statistics on the accessible educational materials that were ordered, produced and provided to students across Iowa. October’s report has been included in the packet following the library statistics.

## Library Programs and Outreach

### Youth Programming:

* Crafting Your Story Afterschool Program began September 15th. The program is held virtually every Tuesday from 4:15 – 5:00pm.
* Makerspace Monday’s for families began on October 14th. They are held on 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 podcast by library staff about upcoming library events, programs, latest books and more released twice a month.
* 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 last quarter has been busy. We have had two graduations. We have also had two new students start in the Center in September. We have a new student starting in January right after the holiday break, and two more students interested in the program and working on securing start dates.

We are fully staffed in the Center and are happy to have hired Matt Gip as our Generalist as of November 8. Tasara Hamilton resigned her position as Center Generalist in mid-October, and we wish her well in her future endeavors.

Jeff Jasper resigned his position as a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher back in September, and we also wish him well in his future endeavors. We are looking to fill this open position soon.

We had our IL Integration week from September 8-13 and our VR Self Week from October 6-12. Students from the Center and these two programs had classes together, relaxed and broke bread during dinners during both programs, mentored clients, and everyone learned a lot. It is so nice to see students mentoring and including each other naturally.

Center and YATP students have a night that they decided to put together on their own to go out to eat on Thursday nights, which seems to be a fun time for them.

We held the Center and YATP Thanksgiving meal on Friday November 22, where students traditionally cook for Center and YATP staff. In December, we reverse this, so the Center staff will cook lunch for our Center students.

We went apple picking at the Center Grove apple orchard in September and will go holiday tree cutting on Monday November 24. This will be a fun activity before the Thanksgiving holiday break. The day after tree cutting students will learn how to decorate and string lights on a tree. There may even be some homemade hot cocoa involved by our students.

We can’t forget the student fundraiser that will be happening at the Friends of the Library holiday concert this Friday, November 22. Students will be selling homemade cookies, hot cocoa and coffee to concert goers, so it is sure to be a great time!

# Vocational Rehabilitation – Keri Osterhaus

## Position Vacancies and Changes

* Carol Manning was hired as the new DeafBlind Specialist. Carol began in the position on August 20th and has been completing training in the Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center. In December, Carol will be training in the field with our VR team.
* Jeremiah (JR) Beamer resigned his position at the Department for the Blind to accept a position with the DOT in Ottumwa. JR’s last day with us was on October 10, 2024. We are currently reviewing program needs and will provide an update on the position once completed.

## Program Updates

IDB’s VR team is continuing training on the Tyler Technologies (Tyler) case management system, the Iowa Department for the Blind Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living Case Management (CMS). IDB currently has 444 clients accessing vocational rehabilitation services. This program year began on July 1, and we have taken 46 new applications for services and 34 individuals have been determined eligible for services and 33 plans for employment have been developed.

During the current program year, 9 individuals have closed in employment in the following positions – Computer Network Support Specialist, Customer Service Representative, Information Clerk, Janitor, Business Analyst, Graphic Designer, Lawyer, Cook and a Teacher. The average wage for these individuals is $25.22 per hour and the median wage was $18.00/hour. The average number of hours worked per week was 31.11 hours and the median was 40 hours worked per week. Several clients have taken positions this fall in a number of fields such as law, teaching, customer service, personal care attendants, administrative assistance, para education, and dietary aide. Counselors are working with these individuals to ensure that they have the accommodations and assistive technology needed for successful employment.

Through IDB’s partnership with the Technical Assistance Center on Quality Employment, some of our IDB staff and community rehabilitation partners participated in an ACRE Course. Through the course, participants learned through webinars and interactive training modules on customer profiling, assessments, resume building, disclosure, job development, long-term supports, employer development and best practices in an online forum with integrated discussions. There were many opportunities throughout the training to learn about the history of supported employment and employment first.

Two of our counselors are participating in a Customized Employment to learn ways to help incorporate a Discovery model for each individual client that the employment specialist works with and to engage in Customized Discovery to help with intentional employer engagement.  The fidelity scale training videos have been very valuable to VR Counselors.

Counselors have been working with our IowaWorks offices around the state to increase networking and interviewing opportunities for clients. In October, several counselors participated in National Disability Employment Awareness Month activities that happened in the local areas across the state.

This fall, many of our counselors and teams have been working to ensure that our high school students receive pre-employment transition services, including work experience opportunities. We have students who are participating in work experiences in businesses such as McDonald’s, Target, a day care, and a coffee shop. Counselors have also been partnering with our IowaWorks offices to work with our high school students on exploring apprenticeships, skilled trades, and job search activities as they work to identify a career path.

Generation Next, a program through Dale Carnegie, recently completed a four series program focused on teaching students’ interpersonal skills and self-advocacy skills that they can use while in high school and as they move on to post-secondary settings. This winter IDB will be partnering with Sky’s the Limit again to host a College Prep Training in addition to a series of training sessions focused on Self-Advocacy and Career Exploration.

Out of conversations with entities around Des Moines, BEP is looking to add food trucks as a service! Currently, Matt Nemmers, BEP Executive Officer, and Lonnie Harmon, owner of Iowa Vending Café, are working to create a pool of food trucks that will service the Neal Smith Federal Building in Downtown Des Moines.  This pool will then be open to vendors throughout BEP would be able to source from for their locations.  This could ultimately benefit multiple locations each week.  Individual vendors would be responsible for coordinating appearances at their locations and ensuring food trucks adhere to all expectations of the program. Additionally, the food truck program could support other endeavors such as a food truck food court environment.  Nemmers has already met with a representative of Des Moines Performing Arts who have expressed significant interest in a collaboration.