Board Meeting Reports

March 11, 2025

# Interim Director's Report – Sarah Willeford

The IDB state budget continues to move through the approval process. The IDB full budget request has been recommended by the Governor and is now with the Legislature.

The request included additional appropriations in the amount of $120,019 as well as a capital appropriations request of $559,000.00. 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.

The 2025 Iowa Regional Braille Challenge was held on Saturday, February 22nd. We ended the day by celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Braille Challenge and IDB's upcoming Centennial. Thank you to our participants, families, staff and volunteers for their work in making it a great day.

Plans for the IDB Centennial Celebration are being finalized. We look forward to our celebration on April 2, 2025, from 3:00 pm – 6:00 pm and throughout 2025.

# CFO – Cheri Myers

## Federal Grant Update:

Enclosed is the Grant Report as of 1/31/2025. Only partial Federal Grant Award Notices have been received for FFY25. It is possible that when the Federal Budget is finalized, we will receive the final Grant Award Notices.

## Budget Report:

Also enclosed is a budget report on State FY25 through 1/31/2025. The report compares year to date with the annual budget based on the 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:

There is now a report that we can print that replaces warrant lists and notices for EFT’d payments. There are ongoing changes that are periodically being released, and the accounting team is remaining flexible and collaborative in solving any concerns with each release.

## Audit:

The Accounting team is currently reviewing the IDB internal accounting manual and updating all our internal procedures to include the new case management system and the changes to the State Accounting System.

The Single Audit Act audit is near completion, and we are still responding to the auditor on different inquiries. Later this year, there will be a financial audit as well.

## Other:

Matthew F. Perry has completed Center training and is now on the job and training in all his accounting duties.

# Communication – Connie Mendenhall

## Rehabilitation Technology Specialist (RTS):

2025 is off to a great start for the Rehabilitation Technology staff. Referrals are continuing to come in, we have received 14 referrals since the December Board meeting. The Tech Crunches are planned and have been announced to the VR staff through the month of May. The focus of the Tech Crunches will be on Microsoft Office basics for March and April with a Microsoft Office Review scheduled for May.

The RTS staff will also be working with the Rehabilitation Teachers at their in-house CBT’s. CBT’s and Tech Crunches provide an opportunity for clients to work with an RTS to determine where their individual training needs lie.

The RTS staff have begun working with the VR Counselors to identify clients and topics for Tech CBT’s to be held in different areas around the state. They are hoping to kick the “Traveling” CBT’s off in April.

## Communication and Outreach

I am happy to announce Mary Horton has joined us as our Information Specialist. Mary completed her Center training at the end of February, and we are focusing on the IDB Centennial Celebration in April and planning events for the Centennial year.

The goal of the event list is to make sure IDB attends at least one event in all 99 counties.

In preparation for our Centennial Celebration IDB has 3 signs in the skywalk, they are located by the YMCA, the Kirkwood hotel and as you approach the Ruan building. In addition to our skywalk signs our street level banners will be going up on the light poles on Grand Avenue from 2nd avenue heading west to 6th Avenue.

Our Open House is scheduled for April 2, 2025, from 3:00 pm - 6:00 pm. There will be demonstrations, building tours, and many opportunities to talk with staff members about our programs and services.

I.T. continues to work with our Case Management Vendor on system testing, issue reporting and fixes.

Our internal Help Desk ticket system is working to help streamline I.T. help requests and as a tool to identify possible system issues and training opportunities.

# Education and Training – Ambrose Ball-Harney

The ET Team is currently well into the Spring Semester of its’ Young Adult Transition Program (YATP). Currently there are still two students enrolled in the program, and they continue to demonstrate growth and commitment both within their daily classes as well as community-based outings. There will be a News for the Youth webinar being held on 3/13 at 6:00 pm which will aim to provide new students and referrals some introductory information regarding some of the youth and Pre-ETS programming provided by IDB. The ET Team will conclude its weekend retreats for the Spring Semester with the final two happening on April 4th and 25th. Weekend retreats focus on students working on their non-visual skills in a variety of environments while also engaging with their community as well as vocational resources. The ET Team was able to increase the amount of weekend retreats held at IDB which led to an increase in student participation throughout both semesters. The ET team is excited to continue the IDB Summer program LEAP (Leadership Education and Advocacy Program) for 2025, which will be starting on June 9th. LEAP provides students opportunities to connect with friends, learn non-visual skills, build confidence, and prepare for their transition to higher education or to enter the workplace with confidence. Students may attend all or part of the summer as their own personal and family schedules allow.

# Independent Living Program - Kimberley Walford

## **Multisector Plan on Aging (MPA)**

The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (Iowa HHS) invited several public and private entities and individuals to participate in their MPA planning as well as held multiple forums across Iowa. The Iowa Department for the Blind also participated for the state fiscal year July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025.

Iowa HHS Strategic Plan in Action (i.e. The Plan in Action) outlines the pathways for how Iowa HHS intends to achieve its strategic priorities and how progress will be measured along the way. The Plan in Action includes strategies, tactics, milestones with target dates and measures of success. Each of the nine divisions within HHS will have a Division Operational Plan that nests within the Plan in Action, and each operational plan will have specific strategies, tactics, milestones with target dates, and measures of success. Division Operational Plan was completed July 1, 2024.

Iowa HHS Strategic Planning illustrates the framework where Iowa HHS uses for strategic development and deployment. Iowa HHS’s document outlines the timeline for the three-year periods starting January 2024 and ending December 2026. It shows the timing of the intersecting layers of the Strategic Plan in Action with the Division Operational Plans and use of performance measures.

Iowa HHS Services/Products/Activities (SPAs), Goals, Metrics and Measures for each of the nine divisions of Iowa HHS is included in their operational report. Anyone from the public interested in learning more about goals, activities, metrics and measures from the Multisector Planning on Aging is encouraged to follow HHS at [HHS Report Template 1](https://dom.iowa.gov/media/577/download?inline)

## Rehabilitation Teacher Team: Fueling Client Dreams, Igniting their Success!

On December 2, 2024, we implemented a new change initiative creating opportunities to merge field Rehabilitation Teachers from the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Independent Living (IL) teams, serving our agency clients statewide. All Rehabilitation Teachers diligently went to work immediately to cross-train. I am happy to announce the team is now cross trained and serving VR and IL clients across Iowa.

In addition, Rehabilitation Teachers immediately looked at how we could best serve VR and IL clients through a group training model. A re-design for both the VR Self-Week and the Independent Living Integration programs were discussed at length. It was decided that we use the current statewide Community-Based training (CBT) group model. That model was adopted as our new initiative to trial.

The CBT model historically has been structured as a one-day, six-hour training session, located in the client’s regional or local service area. These training sessions will continue to be scheduled across Iowa serving VR, and any IL clients interested in group training. Super-CBTs will also be offered as planned by Rehabilitation Teachers. In addition, Super-CBT training sessions will be more intense training sessions and can be held for more than one day, as well as scheduled for more than six hours each day. The core curriculum will continue to be generally the same as traditionally offered; however, based on individual training and skill needs and as assessed by each client’s respective Rehabilitation Teacher, there could potentially be some adaptations to the core curriculum to ensure each client who attends the CBT receives the best possible training outcome.

As a group, we also intend to reach out to the appropriate local Consumer Group President sending an invitation requesting a representative to join a Lunch and Learn in-person and/or a request to teach a business class or discussion group either in-person or virtually. We believe clients will benefit by connecting with the Blind Community so we shall continue this most important partnership and these program activities. Collaborations will begin with the Iowa Department for the Blind’s Rehabilitation Technology Specialist, working closely with Connie Mendenhall, Chief Information Officer, to partner in teaching technology during scheduled CBTs across Iowa. Her team is ready, willing, and able to assist our team during scheduled CBTs as we request assistance in advance with our CBT sessions.

Doug Pavey, Rehabilitation Teacher, who started with the Department in mid-January is progressing well with his Center training. We anticipate he should wrap up training sometime in April. Irene Vega completed her basic Center training in December; however, she unfortunately determined to change her professional employment focus, so she accepted another position outside of state government on February 26.

Since December 6, 2024, collectively, our Rehabilitation Teachers have worked together seamlessly, accomplishing so much since our onset. They have worked diligently to service clients fostering a “can-do” attitude, attended numerous meetings monthly, and completed cross-training assignments within our case management system and are serving both IL and VR clients in their respective programs. Direct training staff are working at full speed ahead, as would be expected from true professionals.

Having shared all of this, “while we know the road to success is still under construction (Steve Maraboli),” because of our division staff member’s dedicated, consciences actions and positive attitude, “the road before us is now shorter than the road behind us (Lucy Stone).” Thank you must go out to our Rehabilitation Teachers for pulling together as team to serve VR-IL clients, completing their cross-training, and delivering positive outcomes to best serve our clients, division and agency.

## Braille Challenge: High Expectations in the Home

On Saturday, February 22, 2025, Interim Director, Sarah Willeford, invited the IL program administrator to select two program staff to represent a panel for the High Expectations in the Home panel for parents of children who are blind.

There were two different interactive sessions, one mid-morning and one mid-afternoon. Discussions included but were not limited to when a parent of a blind child, having high expectations at home that crucially fosters their independence, confidence, and ability to navigate the world around them, encouraging them to learn and achieve just like any sighted child, by providing the necessary adaptations and support to reach their full potential; essentially, setting the bar high while understanding their unique needs and providing appropriate accommodations as well as how to self-advocate when in the home or community (including at school). Parents had an opportunity to have conversations and share between themselves as well and after the session ended.

Thank you, Lori Berglund (Rehabilitation Teacher) and Kelsi Hansen (Rehabilitation Teacher), Matthew Gipp (IBIEC Generalist), and Ambrose Ball-Harney (Education & Training Program Administrator) for giving of your time to represent the panel.

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

## Library Updates

The 2025 Iowa Regional Braille Challenge was held on Saturday, February 22nd at the Iowa Department for the Blind. Congratulations to all the participants. Thank you to our students, families, staff and volunteers for making the Iowa Regional Braille Challenge such a great success! Check out our Braille Challenge page ([iowalibrary.blog/braille-challenge](https://iowalibrary.blog/braille-challenge)) for more information and this year’s results.

The library has completed its blog redesign project. The project updated and brought together the library and Instructional Materials Center blogs to provide one location to find information on all the services provided through the library. It also includes the online learning management system which is currently being used for the Braille Transcriber Course for Educators. Other highlights include a page for library podcast episodes, a calendar of events, a way to highlight different areas of the collection and library and IMC blog posts. The new blog can be found at [iowalibrary.blog.](https://iowalibrary.blog/)

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. January’s report has been included in the following library statistics.

Sidney Matzdorff and Abigail Whitford joined the library team as library resources technicians. We are excited to have them join the library team.

## Upcoming Events, Programming, and Outreach

Des Moines Book Festive on Saturday, March 22nd – the library with have a booth and activity at the event.

The Elizabeth Perowsky Workshop and Luncheon will be held on Friday, April 25th – an event to say thank you to our volunteers and celebrate the work they have done in 2024.

### Youth Programming:

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

## Online and Social Media

### Library Blogs

* *Turning the Pages* Library and IMC Blog. Find information on library services, programs and resources. <http://iowalibrary.blog>

### Podcasts

* Library News. A podcast by library staff about upcoming library events, programs, latest books and more released twice a month.

# Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center Report – Karly Prinds

We have five students in the Center and three staff in training for a total of eight. We also have three potential students who are interested in attending the Center and we are working on logistics and potential start dates. We had a client tour on February 24, and another attended our monthly tour day on February 28.

If clients would like to attend our Center tour day, it is the fourth Friday of each month. A Center student will give them a tour, they will have a Q&A session with Center students and staff, and finally a homemade lunch cooked by our students.

The students had a Valentines Day fundraiser selling oreo balls, coffee and hot chocolate. It was a big hit, and they are looking ahead to their next fundraiser.

We have started a new series on our Center Facebook page called “Fun Fact Fridays”

This series gives you non-visual tips/techniques on a variety of topics. We posted our first tip on February 21, and for now we will post these non-visual tips on the first and third Friday of each month.

On February 12, we hosted a RentWise seminar for YATP and Center students as well as other IDB clients across the state via virtual platform. Everyone asked a lot of good questions, and all were able to complete their certificate at the end of class. This certificate will be very helpful and beneficial to their future ability to rent for the next five years.

Our Center Technology position has closed, so we hope to be interviewing for this position soon.

We have signed a contract with DMU, working with their Occupational Therapy students during the current spring semester. They observed in the Center mid-February and will be with us again in March and May, so we are looking forward to partnering with DMU and their students this spring.

We had our annual holiday meal in December where the Center staff cooked for Center students. We made a homemade taco bar, and everyone seemed to enjoy the lunch.

# 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 recently completed her training. She is now in the field and working to build relationships with our clients who are DeafBlind/have combined hearing and vision loss. Carol is also working to establish partnerships with programs what serve individuals who are DeafBlind.

## Program Updates

IDB currently has 455 clients accessing vocational rehabilitation services. This program year began on July 1, and we have taken 97 new applications for services, 88 individuals have been determined eligible for services and 62 plans for employment have been developed. During the current program year, 21 individuals have closed successfully in employment.

Through IDB’s partnership with the Technical Assistance Center on Quality Employment, IDB counselors will be participating in a training regarding Supported Employment and Customized Employment. This training, held in April, will be spread over two days, with community rehabilitation providers being invited to the second day of the training. The topics covered will be IDB policies and practices around supported employment and customized employment, partnering with IDB staff and clients, assistive technology supports in the workplace and more!

The Iowa Department for the Blind’s VR program has partnered with Sky’s the Limit to provide IDB’s transition aged youth with monthly training, held on zoom the first 3 Thursdays of each month (January-May 2025 and September-December 2025). The topics covered vary from Self-Advocacy, Resiliency, Access Technology, Attitudes surrounding adjustment to blindness, with the overall goal of removing barriers, promoting independence, and expanding opportunity.

Recently, BEP Executive Officer, Matt Nemmers, had an opportunity to travel to and present at Sagebrush, a national training conference provided by the Randolph Sheppard Vendors of America. Nemmers shared information regarding Iowa’s BEP work to enhance and update training expectations, increase recruitment efforts and update language regarding the program.

Also of note, BEP has officially established a Mobile Food Services Program. This program creates a list of mobile food providers, such as food trucks and trailers, that BEP entrepreneurs can coordinate with to increase service options at their locations. This program benefits BEP entrepreneurs by creating a list of resources for new and unique food offerings to BEP locations that they would not normally have access to. It also benefits the providers by allowing them to coordinate access to locations they would not have access to as there is a lawful priority for BEP entrepreneurs to serve these locations. This mutual benefit ultimately serves customers by creating more comprehensive offerings and opportunities.