**Board Meeting Reports**

**June 2, 2020**

# **Director's Report – Emily Wharton**

To say that much has happened or changed since the last Board Meeting would be quite the understatement. On March 20, IDB completed our transition to a Distance Service Delivery Model for all programs and services. VR Counselors, VR Teachers, and IL Teachers began working with clients over the phone. Center students returned to their homes and worked with center staff remotely. Our library utilized social distancing and creative problem solving to continue to send out books and educational materials to K-12 students and library patrons. Accounting staff worked out new paperless processes and found ways to get the mail and bills handled with the minimal number of people in the building. Technology staff worked very hard to get laptops to staff members who did not have laptops and teach them how to access our systems using the virtual private network. Facilities team used the opportunity of having a nearly empty building to paint and catch up on other repairs. In this time of great uncertainty and loss of human contact, our staff rose to all of the challenges put before them and figured out a way to keep serving our clients and patrons. I could not be more proud of our staff. Their resilience and creativity have helped us to find ways of doing things that we will be able to carry forward beyond the current crisis. I want to thank every member of the IDB team for their dedication and hard work through these unprecedented times.

My primary focus has been around contingency planning and communication. The legislature recessed before passing appropriations for our agency and many others. They are currently scheduled to come back into session on June 3rd. The below was shared with the Department of Management, Governor’s Office, and our legislative liaison:   
  
I know that there are so many issues before you in putting in place the 2021 budget request. I can’t even guess at how many difficult choices you all need to make and this is compounded by how much is still unknowable about the long-term impact of our current crisis. Obviously IDB would very much like to receive the appropriation listed in the Governor’s original budget. Our agency has been working extremely hard to do more with less, recruit highly talented professionals from within Iowa and across the country, and emerge strong and efficient from the years of de-appropriation. We hope that the strong position of the state prior to the crisis combined with the Governor’s measured and reasonable response will reduce the need for significant alterations to the original budget. However, if the forecast is such that we need to tighten our belts again, it is vital to our agency that we not get into a position where we are unable to make our Maintenance of Effort (MOE) requirements. It is possible to receive a waiver of the MOE requirement if the failure to meet MOE is due to some kind of economic downturn that has resulted in the entire state implementing budget cuts. The budget situation created by the Coronavirus emergency would certainly meet that requirement. However, the waiver would only be granted so long as the agencies subject to the MOE requirement were not cut more than agencies that were not subject to the MOE requirement.

For IDB to avoid a MOE penalty, we must spend as much on our vocational rehabilitation program in FFY20 as we did in FFY18. Because of this, cuts to our state appropriation tend to require us to divert state dollars from programs serving older individuals losing vision to our vocational rehabilitation program. Because services to older individuals losing vision are so dramatically underfunded on the federal level, we have needed to use state dollars to fill this gap and do our best to give older Iowans the services they deserve. We have worked hard to recruit and train energetic and passionate teachers to serve these individuals and are finally beginning to reach a staffing level that can come close to serving the state effectively. A cut to this program would be devastating to the program and those we serve. We’ve seen so clearly how crucial it is to help people to remain independent in their own homes and avoid unnecessary placements in long-term care facilities.

It would be exceedingly impactful to us that programs subject to a MOE requirement be pegged at the lowest level of the budget cut range should there not be a single or flat statewide budget cut amount. For instance, if agencies are asked to cut between 3% and 10%, the agencies subject to MOE would not be required to cut more than 3%. This way, the agencies subject to a MOE requirement would very likely be able to obtain waivers of any MOE penalty. The cognizant federal agency for IDB and IVRS is the Rehabilitation Services Administration within US DOE, and RSA is extremely strict with respect to MOE and other fiscal issues. I should add that there is discussion of granting MOE waivers in Congress, but we cannot be certain of that happening. It could also be that the MOE waiver process would only be streamlined. The waiver process is currently extremely difficult and complex.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any concerns or questions.

Sincerely,

Emily Wharton, MFA CPM

Director, Iowa Department for the Blind

In addition, we produced four updates for our legislative liaison that contained information about programs and services and stories about clients and patrons. These reports can be found on our report page at: <https://blind.iowa.gov/reports>. Because we do not yet know our 2021 state appropriation, we, like other state agencies, have been working through a variety of scenarios and creating contingency plans to best deal with any reasonably likely change to our fiscal situation.

The leadership team has also continued its work on unifying, streamlining, and improving services to youth. We conducted a SOAR exercise, a brainstorming session open to all IDB staff, and two parent listening sessions. We know that each division in our agency has a responsibility to serve youth and we are working to make sure that all of our division and cross division programs are responsive to the needs of those we serve.

We have also been working on updates to our employee manual to remove duplication and clarify rules and procedures. In December, we received guidance from DAS regarding our handling of disciplinary action for non-merit employees and we need to get our manual in alignment with this guidance.

Another project has been the creation of guidance for how we are to safely resume in-person services. The leadership team is continuing to iterate the rules and procedures as information and situations change. We plan to have a document available to staff, clients, and patrons shortly. We have been waiting on updated guidance from the Department of Administrative Services to help us to know we are in alignment with other agencies and the Governor’s wishes. While a number of our services can be provided as well or even better from a distance, several of our key services such as field blindness skills training and center training are much more effective and impactful when delivered in person. We are working to create guidelines and rules to provide this in a way that would create the least amount of risk possible of spreading the virus while allowing for effective and efficient training. Below is the current draft overview section to the guidelines document. This outlines our approach to and thinking around the creation of the guidelines: “IDB is working to transition from an operational mode, where all staff are working from home unless there is an important task that can only be done in the building, to a new operational mode where staff will be working in the building when doing so is the most productive and efficient way of accomplishing one’s assigned duties. Our agency is tasked with serving clients and patrons and we need to use the most effective and efficient methods to provide these services. Every position in our agency has its own unique requirements for tools, levels of contact, communication and other aspects of their work. In addition, each individual has different needs in regards to what constitutes a productive work situation. Some people can work efficiently from home and others are distracted, interrupted, or uncomfortable. Some jobs only require a computer and a phone and others require client contact, access to braille and audio books, specific spaces and tools, or other factors that make working from home less productive or effective. Some people don’t mind not seeing other people in person and others are energized by contact with their colleagues. We want to be able to work with each staff member to come up with a plan that will help them to be the most productive and effective they can be. Supervisors will be having conversations with each of their team members to discuss what combination of working from home or working from the IDB building best meets operational needs and promotes productivity and efficiency. While we want to be able to be supportive of employee preferences, the ultimate deciding factor in determining any work schedule and location arrangement will always be what is best for those we serve and it is the supervisor’s job to make this this determination.

In looking at opening up the IDB building, we want to continue to encourage clients and patrons to use the phone or electronic means to contact us or receive services as much as possible. Any service that is currently being provided via phone, Zoom, or other distance should not be replaced with face-to-face services unless doing so would significantly improve the quality of the service provided. We want to continue what is working and only add face-to-face service provision as necessary and in alignment with the below rules.

The below guidance and work rules are designed to create a working environment where the likelihood that someone will catch or transmit the COVID-19 virus is as minimized as possible while still allowing people to do their jobs effectively. The work we do is critical to those we serve and we need to get our clients and patrons the training, materials, and guidance they need to be successful in employment and independent in their communities. We are instituting these rules for the benefit of all and following these rules demonstrates kindness and concern for your clients, patrons, and colleagues. These rules and guidelines may need to be adjusted as situations change. This is an unprecedented situation that is continually evolving and this document will continue to evolve in response to the situation.

We know that everyone is stressed and dealing with the many ramifications of the crisis in their family and personal lives. We know that these rules are new and it may take a little time and effort to get used to these changes. We ask everyone to be kind and clear in helping each other to remember to wash hands thoroughly, wear masks in accordance with the rules below, and other new but important practices. It will take time to build these new habits and we need to have compassion for ourselves and others if we don’t get it right immediately or accidentally forget. We encourage staff to remember to take their breaks and not work through breaks or lunch. Please ask for time off when needed to deal with family and personal issues. Please make an extra effort to assume everyone you are working with is doing the best that they can and choose the best possible explanation for things that they do or say. Supervisors will continue to allow as much flexibility in scheduling as possible. Please do remember that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offers many free resources to help you to deal with the stress, uncertainty, and other issues we are all facing. There is no shame in asking for help. For more information about EAP services Call: 800.833.3031 or visit http://www.eaphelplink.com/ and use the employer code IOWA.

Each supervisor will be meeting with each of their team members to go over how these rules apply to their specific position and situation. If you have questions regarding your specific work area or duties, please speak with your supervisor. If you need to request an accommodation that involves a need for alternatives to the below measures, please share this with your supervisor.

**CFO – Cheri Myers**

## Federal Grant Update:

* The federal grant for Older Blind FY19’s 425 was corrected and resubmitted. This allowed IDB to spend the remainder of the grant, which has been done. Also, the Older Blind FY20 grant was spent as of the end of April.
* Prior approval has been submitted for the purchase and replacement of vending machines on both the FY19 and FY20 grant. The majority of these items are available on a statewide master agreement and thus do not require that the purchase be put out to bid. Purchase orders are being prepared.
* Prior approvals have been submitted for a new server and we have received approval from RSA for the purchase of the server. Currently, specifications are being prepared to submit the server purchase for bid.
* Prior approvals have been received for the construction expenses needed for the Youth Library expansion and the majority of the work is now completed.
* The chimney repair is being planned and DAS has agreed to pay for the repairs. This repair has gone out to bid. The winning bid is $140,000. IDB is considering paying for two items: repurposing the bricks and installation of safety holds on the roof. These items are estimated at $4,000.

## Budget Report:

I have enclosed a budget report on State FY20 through 04/30/2020. In reviewing the budget summary nearly all line items appear right at or below the percentage I would expect at this point of the fiscal year.  Office Supplies are over at 165%, this is due to the purchase of the RFID tags for the Library. Rentals are over at 116%, the state-wide change to using Enterprise Car Rental for longer trips. Some expense categories are below budget this is a result of the closing for the Orientation Center due to the Coronavirus. This has caused a slight overage in other categories to enable staff to telework and to provide for client’s technology needs during this time. IDB is still planning on changing and upgrading the case management system and is budgeting accordingly.

## Gifts and Bequests

As of April 30, 2020 for FY2020

Total revenue for FY2020 to date is $1,453,868.85

Total expenditures for the fiscal year are $24,124

As of 10/31/19 the current balance is $4,096,650

## Other:

* The National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute training that I was scheduled to attend March 15 - 20, 2020 has been rescheduled for later this year. In the meantime, there are periodic NRLI zoom meetings and I am working on a group project.
* Jennifer Kern, the new Accounting Technician 2, has completed the Orientation Center training.
* Due to the adjournment of the State Legislature, the State FY21 Budget and Ask have not been approved. The Governor will be reassessing the budget due to changes in expected revenues from the coronavirus.

# **Education and Training Team – Helen Stevens**

## Employees

* All Education and Training Team members have been working remotely the majority of the time except for staff in center training.
* Hannah Nichols began employment as a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher March 16.
* Jennifer Brown began employment as a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher May 11.
* Terri Wilcox transitioned from the Orientation Center to the role of Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher May 15.
* Niah Howard resigned her position as a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher affective April 3.
* Enrique Mejia transitioned to the role of Orientation Center Technology instructor May 1.
* Marisa Hirschman resigned her position as a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher affective July 24.
* We are conducting interviews for the two Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher positions opened up by these resignations and are accepting applications for the open Rehabilitation Technology Specialist position.
* We are conducting interviews for our Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher and Youth Services Worker positions for the Young Adult Transition Program. Hiring for these positions is pending the outcome of the state budget process.
* The following temporary Youth Services Workers were hired to work the 2020 LEAP program with employment beginning May 26; April staff camp was canceled due to COVID-19: Moreblessings Chikavanga, Cassidy Frana, Daniel Grimes, Luis Gutierrez, Trinh Ha, Jessica Katzung, Danielle Montour, Kathryn Olsen, Elizabeth Rouse, Jenna Scott, Bailey VandeKamp, Brandon Young, Markita Zepeda Ritter.

## Pre-Employment Transition Services

* The April weekend retreat was canceled due to COVID-19
* Final participation statistics for the school year are thus 5 retreats, 30 unique participants, and an average of 16 participants per retreat
* Dates and themes have been set for five retreats during the 2020-2021 school year.
* The 2020 LEAP program is now scheduled for June 14-August 8, with a break July 3-11. While some students have withdrawn as a result of underlying health conditions, and program changes have been made around the cancelation of both consumer group conventions and other events, 13 students are still set to participate.
* Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers and Rehabilitation Technology Specialists are working with youth to help them participate in virtual learning through their local schools as well as continue to develop their blindness skills. Virtual learning has been a struggle for many of our students due to inaccessible materials, limited technology skills and other challenges. While instructors will continue to support and teach youth as much as possible during this time, the struggles youth are having make it crucial for instructors to work with clients in person as soon as it is safe to do so.

## Iowa Department for the Blind Young Adult Transition Program

* The legislature has not yet approved the IDB budget for the coming years.
* We are currently on track for the program to begin in August 2020 with three participants.
* Having a small program this first year will allow us to focus on staff training and curriculum development.
* The development of promotional materials has been delayed, but draft materials will still be shared with the commission board when available. The intent is to use these materials in explaining the program for families and schools for the 2021-2022 school year.
* We have continued initial curriculum planning and preparation, primarily focused on determining the areas of greatest need for students and outlining specific topics to cover with students along with what success looks like in those skill areas. Key areas of focus include:
  + Career Exploration/work-based learning experiences
  + Orientation and mobility/cane travel
  + Independent living skills
  + Literacy
* Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers will primarily work with students during the day and teach skills including cane travel, braille, access technology, career exploration and job readiness.
* Youth Services workers will work with students primarily during evenings and weekends on independent living and social skills.
* All staff will role model blindness techniques and promote a positive philosophy of blindness.

## Client Training

* Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers and Rehabilitation Technology Specialists have been providing training to clients virtually since mid-March. While some clients have been unable to meet this way, such as because they are too busy with child care, other clients have been able to commit more time to developing their skills and have made noteworthy progress. Particular areas of success have included technology and braille skills.
* Vocational Rehabilitation Teams have been conducting virtual group trainings on a range of topics such as shopping while social distancing, using electronic tools for accessing print information, blindness philosophy and more.
* Approximately 100 clients are currently receiving services from a Rehabilitation Technology Specialist.
* Approximately 130 clients are currently receiving services from a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher.
* As anticipated, the number of clients working with a Rehabilitation Technology Specialist has begun to decline as clients have begun receiving technology training from Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers. All Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers have received instruction in teaching the basics of JAWS and NVDA so that they can provide quality technology training to clients in these areas along with the use of smart phones and tablets.
* Total direct services recorded as provided to clients by VR Teachers, Rehabilitation Technology Specialists, or LEAP staff members during program year 2019, which began July 1, 2019: 2700. These services include: Disability Related Skills Training, Job Readiness Training, Rehabilitation Technology, Pre-ETS Job Exploration and Counseling, Pre-ETS Work Based Learning Experiences, Pre-ETS Counseling on PSE Enrollment Opportunities, Pre-ETS Workplace Readiness Training, Pre-ETS Instruction in Self-Advocacy
* The March Self-Week Session provided training to only three clients as a result of COVID-19. All other participants withdrew from the training. The clients who attended reported that the training was a positive experience, and they demonstrated growth in the skill areas covered. The May session was canceled.
* Applications are being accepted for the Self-Week sessions scheduled for the fall of 2020, one session, and the spring of 2021, two sessions.

## Technology

* The move away from the department having any landline phones last year made the transition to remote working significantly easier across the agency.
* Employees who did not have laptops but could work remotely if they had one were provided laptops in March. Employees were provided initial training to use the laptops, and support has been available on an on-going basis.
* Technology staff continue to work in the building when necessary to resolve technical issues, set up new devices, and mail loaner technology to clients.

# **Independent Living Program - Kimberley Barber**

1. Request Commissioners approve the Independent Living Advisory Committee (ILAC) with the appointment of Cathy Kownacki and reappointment of Rebecca Barrionuevo, Jon Springer, and Carol Flickinger. Their appointments would be effective from 7/1/2020 to 6/30/22.
   1. Cathy attended many ILAC meetings over the course of this past year. She is committed to fulfilling the role of becoming an active advisory member. Please see resume enclosed.
   2. Ms. Janet Anderson-Hsieh respectfully reported she is stepping down from her role as an ILAC member effective May 12, 2020. Ms. Anderson-Hsieh is prioritizing several personal matters including the recent passing of her husband. She may consider volunteering for the Department or the IL program in the future. We appreciate her service.
2. Iowa Centers for Independent Living (CILs), Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS), the State Independent Living Council (SILC), and Iowa Department for the Blind’s Independent Living (IL) program resubmitted our FY19 Annual Performance Report (i.e. Section 704) to the Administration for Community Living (ACL) with necessary changes. ACL responded, approving our collective report. No further action is needed.
3. The Iowa Department for the Blind’s Independent Living program received a $1,000.00 grant from the Iowa DD Council for a new project effective May 1, 2020. Our commitment is to engage clients by providing support and training through an agency developed support group model. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are facilitating support groups through telecommunication; ICN or other electronic communication methods. The goal is to reduce isolation and fears, increase available information, provide referrals, offer guidance and counseling, and allow for disability skills training. We also anticipate a natural occurrence of peer connections, and building community, not to mention to increase their right to have support to live independently. The grant concludes September 20, 2020.
4. A job offer was made to a candidate to fill the sixth IL teacher vacancy. We are pleased to announce that Kassandra "Kay" Cardenas has accepted the position with our Independent Living Program as an ILR Teacher.
5. During the period of restricted travel during this COVID-19 crisis, IL teachers continued to deliver essential IL services by way of accepting program applications, eligibility determination, providing guidance and counseling, providing information and making referrals, delivering training telephonically or via other electronic communications that best fit the client’s needs. In addition, teachers engaged in various free online training through Mississippi State University and other sources.
6. During this quarter, I’ve attended several meetings including but not limited to the following:
   1. Older Individuals who are Blind-Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC)
   2. LifeLongLinks (LLL) Advisory Board
   3. Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) – Governor Appointed
   4. Olmstead Consumer Task Force (OCTF) – Governor Mandated
   5. Iowa Independent Living (IL) Network
   6. Centers for Independent Living Easter Seals Iowa, DD Council, Disability Rights Iowa, and University of Iowa Center for Disability and Development – Collaboration

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

## Library Updates and Programs

This year’s Iowa Regional Braille Challenge was held on Saturday, February 29th. In addition to the Braille Challenge this year, the Library partnered with the South Central Iowa STEM Hub to host a STEM Fest from 2-4 pm. 17 exhibits for organizations and businesses provide hands on activities designed for participants to explore, create, and learn in the areas of STEM. The Library collaborated with exhibitors to ensure activities were accessible and used Universal Design principles.

During this time, the Library continues to circulate materials to patrons through the mail and serve patrons via phone and email.  The Library also introduced the following programs using conference calls and Zoom online meetings.

* IDB Read started on March 30th. With IDB Read you can call in and listen to one of our wonderful volunteer narrators read live on the phone, followed by a short chat about the book. On Mondays and Wednesdays from 3:00-4:00pm, you can call in and listen to our narrator, Christine Mach, read a cozy mystery. On Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00am – 11:00 am, you can call in and listen to our narrator, Bob White, read a western.
* Tech Time with Tyler is every Wednesday from 8:00am-11:00am. Call Tyler Swett, Accessible Media Specialist, to get your tech questions answered.
* Braille Bits Online is every Monday and Wednesday at 2:00 pm. Participants listen to a Braille Bits podcast and have a fun and lively conversation surrounding all things Braille. It is conducted over Zoom.

The library also provided two, two-week trainings for para-educators and associates focusing on accessibility and providing accessible educational materials to students.  20 para-educators and associates have participated in the first two trainings. There is a third training scheduled for June 8 – June 19. Also, during May and June the Instructional Materials Center team offered 8 classes for educators on training topics will include accessible documents, Universal Design, braille and accessibility tools.

The Elizabeth Perowsky Volunteer Workshop and Luncheon was originally scheduled to be held Wednesday, April 22nd, but due to the current circumstances, we decided to postpone this event until this Fall. We want to thank all of the library volunteers who make our jobs easier every day. We thank all of you for your continual support, contribution, enthusiasm, dedication, and passion that help us serve our patrons and make a difference in the lives of others.

The Library continues to make plans for its Summer Reading Program. The theme is around STEM and Stories. Although we will not be doing in-person programs this summer, we have a program planned to share with over 100 public libraries focusing on accessibility and the story of braille. And the Library is very excited to offer a six-week summer program to our young patrons that will include online activities, audio and more.

## Library Staffing Update

The Library has been selected as a 2020 host site for the Summer Reading Corps by the Iowa Campus Compact. The library is in the process of selecting 3 VISTA AmeriCorps members to work with our summer reading program for 9 weeks starting June 8th.

The Library will also be a host site this summer for the Iowa STEM Teach Externship program. A teacher will join us for six weeks this summer to assist the Library in the development of training, guidelines and resources for educators around providing accessible educational materials for Iowa students, with a focus on STEM areas of study. The teacher extern will have the opportunity learn how to create accessible content and be able to bring back to their students how to apply accessibility to all aspects of STEM.

The library is currently in the process of hiring for the Librarian 1: Technical Services Librarian position.

## Library Statistics

The data shows how many of each type of material was checked out to patrons by the library and other services provided to patrons.

For February 2020, March 2020 and April 2020

Library Patrons Added: 151

Library Material Circulation

Total Circulation: 99,835

Braille: 940

Large Print: 389

Digital Books: 94,342

Magazine Issues: 3,980

Digital Players: 184

Library Collection

Total Books Added to the Library Collection: 2,045

Braille: 53

Print/Braille: 32

Large Print: 45

Digital Books: 1,025

Bridges: 890

Instructional Materials Center Orders Received

2019-2020 School Year: 134

2020 – 2021 School Year: 499

BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) Usage

Total Books Downloaded from BARD: 11,875

Audio: 11,519

Braille: 356

Average Number of Patrons Using BARD: 484

Newsline Service Usage

Current Subscribers: 1,667

New Subscribers: 8

Telephone Calls: 7,803

Web Sessions: 14,003

Mobile App Sessions: 2,039

Alexa Sessions: 107

“In Your Pocket” Deliveries: 17,837

E-mail Deliveries: 9,744

Iowa Newspaper Accesses: 74,300

National Newspaper Accesses: 4,360

International Newspaper Accesses: 776

Blog Usage

Library – Turning the Pages Blog

Visitors: 193

Views: 768

Instructional Materials Center Blog

Visitors: 702

Views: 3,885

Library Podcasts

Library News Monthly Podcast

Listens Online: 294

Sent Out on Cartridges: 2,631

Braille Bits Podcast

Listens Online: 1,677

# **Orientation Center Report – Al Bickell**

The Orientation Center is out due to the virus and need for social distancing.  The instructors are all working with students in different capacities.  Travel and Shop are still being taught in the building though this is restricted to new staff.  Darren has been working the rest of the time on organization and cleaning of the shop area.  Zach has also been working with students on travel through phone conversations.  Home management, jobs class, and communications are still being taught to students through zoom and phone conversations to clients of the agency with some reduced progress.  The dates of return have been pushed back several times, but the current date is June 8.  We are focused on preparing for this return date and making sure that concerns are addressed, and logistical questions are answered before this date.

In looking at numbers of student returning in June that number is still in the air.  Most students are planning on returning, and we have 4 new students scheduled to come in.

# **BEP & Facilities – Kathy Roat**

The 7% set-aside funding from vendor monthly net profits, which was initiated by Al Bickell in 2017, received federal approval by Jesse Hartle, effective for February 2020. Due to COVID-19 and drops in sales of 75-90% reported by BEP Vendors, this has been postponed until May 2020 sales for payment in June 2020. With the opening of some states, rest areas have experienced a pick-up in business. Buildings continue to have low staffing to being closed, so vendors have been offered a number of online training webinars and ideas for creatively generating business and utilizing down time effectively. One vendor, Dwain Sundine, in three days sold 50 3-piece sets of disposable masks in rest area vending, and was successful at getting a company to keep its break room because of the good hygiene practices it helped guide the company to use successfully.

Next on the list for the year is updating of the Operating Agreement, Training Program, and Administrative Rules Chapters 7 and 8, growing facilities to create opportunities, and digitizing of files for more universal access. Sara Thompson supporting BEP as secretary has already been a great help updating basic records.

Capitol Complex, Postal Service, and DOT customers have requested credit card access to increase sales and thanks to a master agreement and availability of funds due to the impact of COVID-19, most machines that are not credit card capable are being replaced with vending that can not only read credit cards, but accept newer and touchless forms of payment including Apple Pay, Pay Range, and more. The last new equipment was purchased in 2009, so this is a huge infusion into the program to allow vendors to rebound. Set-aside will enable the department to keep current going forward. Micro-markets are another trend, and funding is in place to expand from one to four, starting with the Des Moines USPS, City Hall in September, and possibly two other locations this Fall. COVID-19 will impact dates.

There have been positive communications with and a commission check from the City of Des Moines for the Pepsico services there. Discussions with the Ames USPS are near completion for a permit to service there. This week Lieutenant Governor Gregg reached out to the Administrator to ask vendors to participate in the Feed Iowa Taskforce by donating near expiring goods, and to see if BEP Vendors can assist the institutions in Iowa which are struggling to get mandated snacks through their existing vendors.

Discussions are underway with the Iowa Veterans Home and it could represent a $40,000 opportunity if it could work and continue year-round.

IDB is working to build sites through the above actions, with hopes of finding a facility for the current new licensed vendor, Sam Claassen, and to prepare facilities (routes) for two to three potential trainees. Based on the experience of the newest operating vendors with facilities, it appears more expansive work is needed in the training program, and a draft from 12/2019 has received comment and now collaboration with other departments in IDB will ensure maximum impact with the least duplication of effort.   
  
  
Facilities

During COVID-19, the lack of people in many spaces, particularly dorm rooms and the main floor, has allowed the Facilities team to paint the 5th and 6th Floor dorm rooms (about 15 rooms), deep clean showers and grout in several areas, and remove graffiti in the west drive. The building’s terrazzo was in need of stripping and refinishing, and Facilities oversaw that project, which was hired out and included a review for staff on how to maintain it best.

Work in the Watson Powell foyer and welcome area is scheduled to be complete by June 1 and will have tones of green and blue that are shown to elicit emotions consistent with the Department mission. This is getting back to work that was begun a couple of years ago that had been left unfinished because of other programing priorities. Facilities should also be completing minor shifts next week that will allow two of the Library staff to have offices in what used to be Aids and Devices.

The 16’ chimney near Watson Powell has been shedding pieces of brick, so DAS has agreed to take on the $144,000 project of redoing the chimney. They have checked with the National Registry of Historic Places to verify the changes will not affect that status for IDB, and Facilities and the CFO are involved.

The Facilities Engineer and Administrator are working on revising the agreement with the system controls of the building, which should yield several thousand dollars of savings.

As a new administrator in the building, Kathy Roat is continuing to review systems and practices around safety and building maintenance. There have been some mandates resulting in asbestos training which will be annual for maintenance and custodial staff, asbestos identification (non-friable and safe if undisturbed), the development (in progress) of evacuation maps, and due to its size and services, IDB will soon have a third-party automatic signal sent to dispatch the fire department.

Santo Gonzalez resigned effective Friday, May 15, so hiring for a replacement will begin.

# **Vocational Rehabilitation – Keri Osterhaus**

## VR Position Vacancies and Changes

* We will be doing interviews for our two vocational rehabilitation counselor positions. Our goal is to complete interviews for both positions in May. Following the successful hire and completion of training for these positons, we will be making changes to our counselor service territories to meet the needs of clients and other stakeholders.

## Vocational Rehabilitation Activities

* Due to the impact of COVID-19, we suspended in-person client meetings during this quarter; exceptions were available if needed. Staff are working from home and are serving clients remotely, meeting with clients by phone or other conferencing options. We are developing knowledge and skills for using remote methods of communication and incorporating these tools to be able to continue providing services to clients and other stakeholders.
* Some clients have shared difficulties in using phone and online options for training and requested that we put a hold on some training services until in-person trainings are available. We continue to connect with these clients to provide guidance, information, referral and other services to meet client needs.
* We worked within our VR teams to find new ways to provide services to clients throughout Iowa. Several group meetings and trainings occurred during the quarter and covered a number of topics including self-advocacy, motivation, developing a positive philosophy of blindness, exploring accessible phone apps, using and hiring readers, home management and introduction to keyboarding skills.
* We participated in a number of IEP team meetings for students throughout Iowa’s school districts using platforms such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, and conference calls. Our VR teams provided guidance and worked with teams to assist students in accessing the technology and accommodations they need for continuous learning/distance education. VR teams continue to meet with students to provide pre-employment transition services through zoom and telephone meetings.
* We are contracting with two vendors to deliver pre-employment transition programs remotely to students this summer. These programs focus on education and training options, workplace readiness, and self-advocacy. Our team continues to explore additional resources and curriculums to provide options for students to access the pre-employment transition services.
* Our Business Engagement Specialist developed a series of trainings focused on topics surrounding job search topics including self-care, benefits planning, and a variety of job search strategies. Guest speakers including employers and former clients are included into this series. Employer-focused trainings are being developed and will be delivered via zoom to businesses across the state.
* Through our most recent comprehensive statewide needs assessment, our various stakeholders, including clients, staff, and providers identified transportation as a barrier for individuals who are blind to access employment. In response, we developed a workgroup to focus on the development of a transportation training series to assist blind Iowans in developing the confidence, skills and resources they need to overcome barriers related to transportation. Some of the topics to be addressed will include training to travel confidently, understanding options for transportation within individual communities, identifying best practices related to the use of volunteers and paid drivers, in addition to other topics identified by the group.