



Increasing Opportunities for Independence

Vocational Rehabilitation

520

Clients Served

Increase the family income of blind Iowans by providing the skills and services they need to work competitively in Iowa's economy.

State Average Hourly Wage: \$19.75

Average Hourly Wage for IDB Clients after Services: \$16.81

Percentage of Individuals Employed that Remain in Iowa: 95%

iOS Workshop Trainees: 250

Business Enterprises

128

BEP Sites

Increase the entrepreneurial opportunities for blind Iowans.

Average Income of Self-Employed, Blind Vendor in Business Enterprise Program: \$40,000.00

Independent Living

961

Older Iowans Served

Increase the independence of blind Iowans and thereby decrease dependence on State services.

\$'s Spent per Blind Older Iowan: \$597.00

Average Daily Cost for Nursing Home Care (Semi-private room): \$222/Day (\$81,000 Annually)

(Source: 2012 MetLife Market Survey)

IDB Library

6,048

Library Borrowers

Improve the education of blind Iowans through independent access to information.

New Developments in the Library:

- Updated Career Resource Center helps clients seek work
- New 3D printer creates tactiles for patrons and students
- Increasing programs and training opportunities for patrons

IOWA DEPARTMENT FOR THE BLIND

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Success and Independence for Blind Iowans

Khayyan Wafer

Khayyan Wafer's get-it-done attitude coupled with assistance and resources from the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) has helped her further along the track of a fulfilling new career and independence.

Born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, she was a teacher in the public schools there for 19 years. Khayyan had been visually impaired most of her adult life due to Starardt Macular Dystrophy before increased vision loss forced her to renegotiate her course midlife at age 43.

She first learned of the federal government's need for contract specialists when she got involved in an employment program run by Chicago Lighthouse, a non-profit organization that offers a variety of services to aid the blind and visually impaired. She learned she could receive training while working. Wafer applied for a position at the U.S. Army Arsenal in Rock Island, Illinois, closing Defense Department contracts for U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

While at Rock Island she made contact with the Iowa Department for the Blind and began working with vocational rehabilitation counselor Jamie Phipps. Though she had her Master's degree in hand, she found she needed an additional 24 hours of coursework to advance toward her goal. The department provided assistance to complete her schooling and helped with equipment purchases.

Khayyan speaks with glowing words for the services offered by IDB. "The Department has been fantastic helping disabled people get jobs, schooling, and the technology they need to improve their own working and living conditions. They go beyond the call of duty." She adds that the military has welcomed her with open arms and provided excellent accommodations "to the ends of the Earth," in this case New Mexico. Wafer is now at Cannon Air Force Base in Clovis, New Mexico, seven months into the 3-year Copper Cap Intern program. She currently writes contracts to purchase commodities for the Air Force and will be reassigned once she completes the internship. Wherever she is sent, she will forever be grateful for the help she received from the IDB.



Courtesy Chicago Lighthouse

Robert Eakin, Jr.

Robert Eakin, Jr. of Iowa Falls has increased his independence through services received from the IDB. In the process he has helped educate the community about Iowa's white cane laws and the rights of cane travelers on the streets of his hometown.

Robert was born 10 weeks premature with a detached retina. He is now totally blind in his right eye and has 20 over 200 vision in his left, which is considered legally blind.

Working with the Iowa Department for the Blind's Independent Living program, Eakin, one of the program's youngest clients, has achieved a number of significant goals. In 2012, he moved out of his parents' house into his own apartment nearby, in a neighborhood not far from downtown.

His rehabilitation teacher, Liz Soenen, speaks of his progress. "We are focusing on some independent living skills to be able to live independently because it was kind of new for him living here at first," said Soenen. The two have worked together to establish practical goals.

"We look at things in daily living: setting appliances, identifying pantry items, being able to cook at least three different meals, teaching him techniques so he can generalize the other things," she said.

One of her main focuses with Robert is blind travel with the white cane. He loves to visit the Barlow Library, but must cross busy River Street to get there. As he gets more experience navigating around town he also works on a concurrent goal. Last year Robert, his family, and Soenen participated in the publication of an article in the Iowa Falls Times Citizen that served to increase awareness of the meaning of the white cane and the laws that grant the right of way to its user.

Robert's future is bright and he continues to work toward his goals. He loves technology and tinkering with computers. An iOS device, such as an iPad, with its built-in accessibility, may be in his near future. IDB has offered a training program around Iowa in the past year to introduce blind consumers to iOS. Soenen thinks it may enable Robert to communicate with other blind people and eventually to have a job of his own.



Courtesy Times Citizen Communications

Janae Burgmeier

If there is one word that characterizes Janae Burgmeier, it is involvement; involvement in her own progress aided by the wide selection of services available to blind Iowans, involvement with others in the blindness community, and involvement with the world at large.

This bright, young woman first became involved with the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) when she was a student at Washington High School in Cedar Rapids. Benefiting from the guidance and a multitude of experiences available to teens through IDB's Youth Transition Services, she progressed to attending the department's Orientation Center to hone her blindness skills.



Her college career was spent in Des Moines at Grand View University and she graduated in 2011. During this time IDB provided training to help her function at college, as well as the assistive technology needed to complete her schoolwork.

After college, Janae became involved in community service work. A stint with AmeriCorps placed her in many new situations and she really grew from this experience. She was assigned to FEMA and spent time working with people in New Jersey after Hurricane Sandy, informing victims about services available to them. Back in Des Moines, Burgmeier worked with United Way, reaching out to Central Iowa residents in need of assistance.

Since late summer 2014, Janae has been employed full time as a Retail Services Associate at Wells Fargo in Des Moines. She survived the company's busy Christmas season, working 50 hours per week and enjoying her job tracking fraudulent credit card applications. She enjoys her coworkers and says going to work every day is easy. The company is working with her to provide the accommodations she needs to perform her job, such as Zoom-Text to help her read a computer monitor. After settling in, Janae did not feel the need for any further services from IDB and her case was closed this year.

Always determined, one who goes after what she wants, and a natural leader, Janae is never afraid to speak her mind. She's eager to share her thoughts with others and remain involved. She even applied to be a mentor for other blind persons. She has taken to heart what many feel after receiving services from IDB--the desire to give back.

Marjorie Collins

Marjorie Collins is a Mason City resident that has benefited from services offered by the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) more than once during her life. Her latest contact highlights the success possible when an elderly Iowan partners with one of IDB's skilled Independent Living teachers.

Totally blind for many years, Collins received training in blindness skills in her younger days while attending the Iowa Braille School and IDB's Orientation Center.

A number of circumstances led to Marge's renewed contact with IDB and its Independent Living program. She began having balance problems and her husband was less able to help her get around. Significant hearing loss was another factor. Now retired, she also wished to explore new recreational possibilities and was interested in volunteer work. Her physical therapist referred her to the Department to ensure she was using her white cane properly and to explore using a support cane. A specialized assessment led to re-opening a case for Marge and she began working with Rehabilitation Teacher Liz Soenen to address a number of needs.

Besides honing her mobility skills, Marge also began to learn about advances in assistive technology for the deaf-blind. Soenen partnered with iCanConnect, the Iowa Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (IA-DBEDP) program, to introduce Marge to using a computer with Guide, a software suite with built-in large print and speech access. Collins eventually got her own computer through the program as well as additional training. Though she found it challenging due to her hearing loss, Collins worked hard, learned quickly, and soon enjoyed the new speech recognition technology that aids her independence.

Collins' training included visiting local stores, communicating her needs to store employees, and practicing using her ATM card. She has brushed up on her Braille skills, as well as trying out and acquiring a digital recorder, a device that helped her master a new hobby. Marge learned to crochet and has produced a number of colorful Afghans, donating some to local residents.

