

IOWA DEPARTMENT FOR THE BLIND

PERFORMANCE REPORT

Performance Results
Fiscal Year 2011

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Introduction

I am pleased to present the performance report for the Iowa Department for the Blind for fiscal year 2011. This report is provided in compliance with sections 8E.210 and 216B.7 of the *Code of Iowa*. It contains information about results achieved because of the services that we and our partners provided to blind, deaf-blind, and visually impaired Iowans during the past fiscal year in the areas of Vocational Rehabilitation, Independent Living, Library Services, and Resource Management.

We determine our competitive success in a number of ways. We look at the federal standards and indicators to learn our ranking in relation to the performance of other public rehabilitation agencies. We compare our library's production and circulation figures with those from previous years to determine trends. We set our own standards for success by looking at such factors as the number of successful case closures, average hourly wage at case closure, skills training provided, and compliance with regulations. Results show that the Department is working positively toward achieving its strategic goals of increasing the independence and productivity of blind Iowans and improving access to information for blind Iowans.

Some accomplishments related to our strategic goals this year are listed below:

- Through a cooperative relationship with the Des Moines University (DMU) medical students can elect to complete a two-week rotation at the Department's Orientation Center. The rotation exposes these future physicians to a new perspective on blindness. They also become familiar with the many services available to Iowans with significant vision loss. Twenty-four medical students completed a rotation.
- Three deaf-blind Iowans were placed in competitive employment. These individuals often face significant barriers to employment, including those related to communication, transportation, and employer's assumptions about their capabilities. All are moving from relying solely on public support to relying on earned wages.

Overall, we met or exceeded 10 of 16 targets included in this report. A discussion of the Department's services, customers, and organizational structure, and budget appears in the "Department Overview" that follows. Information pertaining to performance results appears in the final section of this document.

Sincerely,

Karen A. Keninger, Director
Iowa Department for the Blind

Department Overview

The Iowa Department for the Blind is the state agency charged with providing vocational rehabilitation, independent living, library, and other essential services to Iowans who are blind so that they can live independently and work competitively. The policies and procedures of the Department are grounded in state and federal law, including chapters 216B, 216C, and 216D of the *Code of Iowa*, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as Amended, and the Randolph-Sheppard Act.

Mission and Vision

The Department for the Blind is the means for persons who are blind to obtain for themselves universal accessibility and full participation as citizens in whatever roles they may choose, including roles that improve Iowa's economic growth.

The Department's philosophy of blindness is based upon the belief that, "It is okay to be blind." In fact, this concept is also our vision. The real problems of blindness do not lie in the physical loss of eyesight but in the misconceptions about blindness widely held by the general public and by many blind persons themselves. Because of these misconceptions, people who are blind are subject to discrimination that prevents them from achieving full integration into the economic and social life of their communities. Blind persons are individuals, and their ability to live independently and work competitively is contingent largely upon the effectiveness of the rehabilitation training they receive and the opportunities available to them. If dealt with properly, the effect of blindness on an individual's life can be reduced to the level of a mere characteristic with nuisance value.

Guiding Principles

The Department's values and principles, which stem from its positive philosophy

of blindness, are the driving force of our agency.

We affirm that:

- The Department must operate on the demonstrated truth that blindness need not be a barrier to leading a full life as a first-class citizen in society;
- Blind persons have the same rights and responsibilities as all other citizens to self-determination, including the right to enjoy full integration into all aspects of society;
- Blind persons must overcome the misconceptions and the discrimination that result from their status as a minority group;
- Agencies and programs serving blind persons must help blind individuals and organizations succeed in fulfilling their aspiration;
- Persons who are blind, both as individuals and as organized groups, must take the lead in determining the kinds of services they may need to empower themselves fully;
- All Department staff must be qualified individuals trained in the delivery of services based on the agency's philosophy;

- The Department must provide the widest possible range of pre-vocational, vocational rehabilitation, and independent living training, as well as library and other ancillary services, so that all consumers have as much opportunity as possible to make informed plans and choices concerning life goals; and
- The Department in its staffing policy must be cognizant of the importance of hiring qualified persons who may be blind.

Core Functions

The Department's three major service areas are Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Independent Living (IL), and the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

1. Vocational Rehabilitation. The VR program assists Iowans who are blind in preparing for, obtaining, and retaining employment. Applicants are made eligible based upon their visual disability, their need for VR services, legal status, and their intent to work. The VR counselor and the eligible individual jointly identify a vocational goal and the services needed to achieve it.

KEY SERVICES AND PRODUCTS: Services may include:

- Training to help individuals achieve the vocational goals they have selected such as vocational training or post-secondary education.
- Job placement services. VR counselors help job seekers develop job-search plans, write résumés,

practice interviewing, and locate job and placement resources.

- Rehabilitation technology services. Through such services as job site assessment, procurement of assistive technology, and training in the use of adaptive equipment, blind employees can perform their jobs competitively and efficiently.
- Post-employment follow-up. After individuals have achieved their employment goals, VR counselors can continue to serve as a resource to both employees and employers.

VR staff members also participate in outreach activities, such as:

- Participation in job fairs, technology expos, and speakers' bureaus.
- Provision of information on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); job site assessments and accommodations information, and referral to appropriate vendors.
- Partnership with other employment programs to facilitate the recruitment of qualified blind employees.
- Advice on assistive technology to public agencies and employers so that technology available to the general public is also accessible to blind persons.

DELIVERY MECHANISMS FOR PROVIDING SERVICES: The VR counselors travel statewide to provide guidance and counseling to blind Iowans to ensure they get the training and services they need to reach their employment goals.

The Adult Orientation Center is a residential training program for clients of the VR program. Located in Des Moines, the Center provides in-depth blindness skills training to students so that they can return to their home communities to live independently and work competitively. Students receive training in four areas: 1) development of self-confidence; 2) blindness skills including cane travel, home and personal management, industrial arts, Braille, and computer; 3) job readiness; and 4) public education.

The Department's Business Enterprises Program (BEP) provides opportunities for legally blind clients of the VR program to manage their own vending and cafeteria businesses. Cafeteria and vending sites are located throughout Iowa in public and private buildings and at rest areas along interstate highways.

Finally, VR staff work with a variety of suppliers of goods and services. We purchase direct services for our clients from educational and training institutions, community rehabilitation programs (CRP's), medical service providers, and others. We also work with assistive technology developers and vendors who produce equipment many of our clients require to achieve their goals.

2. Independent Living (IL). The IL program provides services to older blind or multiply-disabled blind Iowans to help them live more independently in their homes and to function within their communities.

KEY SERVICES AND PRODUCTS: To prevent the premature institutionalization of older blind Iowans, the IL program

coordinates community services and provides information, referral services, and training in adaptive equipment and the skills of blindness.

DELIVERY MECHANISMS FOR PROVIDING SERVICES: To ensure that older and multiply-disabled Iowans with significant vision loss have the skills and confidence they need to remain independent, IL staff members travel throughout the state to provide community-based and individualized home training in blindness skills needed to complete activities of daily living such as travel with the long white cane; communication techniques; and home management skills like cooking and cleaning. Staff members encourage peer interaction through involvement with peer support groups and group training in blindness skills. Additionally, IL staff members provide in-service training to other service providers to meet the unique needs of blind Iowans.

3. Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. The Library provides reading materials free of charge to Iowans who cannot use standard print because of blindness, physical disability, or reading disability.

KEY SERVICES AND PRODUCTS: The Library circulates books and magazines on cassette tape and digital media, in Braille, and in large print to eligible borrowers throughout the state. The Library maintains a collection of over 88,000 book titles and makes available to its borrowers over 100 different magazines. Because the Library is a cooperating member of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) of the Library of Congress, its borrowers have access to all NLS services.

DELIVERY MECHANISMS FOR PROVIDING SERVICES: The Library:

- Transcribes print materials into Braille and recorded formats. Employment-related, educational, and leisure materials not already available in alternative media are transcribed for the collection and upon request.
- Maintains a Career Resource Center which houses career related books and employment guides in a variety of formats. The Center also has a computer equipped with adaptive technology that allows clients to research and apply for jobs on-line.
- Provides independent access to the Library's collection through the web-based On-Line Public Access Catalog (OPAC). The OPAC allows borrowers to search the collection and select and reserve books.
- Circulates descriptive videos enhanced with audio descriptions. These videos range in subject from popular movies to documentaries and are for audiences of all ages.
- Maintains playback cassette machines and digital devices for borrowers to listen to recorded media.

Customers and Stakeholders

The Department's primary customers are blind and severely visually impaired Iowans who have very specialized needs that cannot be met elsewhere. Referrals of persons who need our services come in many forms and from many sources, including from individuals

themselves, relatives and friends, our library, doctors and other health and community service providers, schools, institutions, and other agencies.

In developing our programs and policies, we actively seek input from advisory councils, consumer organizations of the blind, individual blind persons, and blind staff who also make up part of our customer base. The three members of our policy-making Commission for the Blind are blind. Knowledgeable and politically active, our customers are highly interested in the policies, procedures, and practices of our agency. They support our culture and participate in our strategic planning.

Our library also serves individuals and institutions like the physically and reading disabled, blind residents of nursing homes, campus offices for disabled students, restaurants, and others who need materials in alternative media. Through our VR program, we serve such customers as area education agencies and employers, and through our IL program, we provide in-service training to group homes, senior centers, and other community organizations.

Organizational Structure

The Department is part of the executive branch of state government. It operates under the Iowa Commission for the Blind consisting of board members appointed by the governor. The commission is 100% consumer controlled. Per chapter 216B of the *Code of Iowa*, the commission has authority to set policy and review all major components of the program.

The commission hires the department director. The director reports directly to the governor and the commission.

Reporting Relationships

The RSA, NLS, and state legislature--as representatives of the taxpayer--require reports on our results. We require reports from CRP's, training institutions, physicians, and others from whom we purchase services for our clients.

Our most important partnership, however, is the one we have with blind individuals and organizations, since we must have their constant input to provide the highest quality of services.

Interagency Collaboration

The 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA) requires agencies like ours to partner with other training and employment programs, such as community colleges and Workforce Development. We meet this requirement through the implementation of memoros of understanding (MOU's) with the 16 regional workforce investment boards. The Rehabilitation Act also requires organizational alliances between vocational agencies and educational institutions. The Department has signed memorandums of agreement with all 16 community colleges and the three major universities.

The Department has maintained working relationships with other state agencies providing employment services to lowans with disabilities through its participation in the Governance Group. This group includes administrative personnel from the Developmental Disability Council, the Office of Persons with Disabilities, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services,

Department of Human Services, Workforce Development, Department of Education and the Department for the Blind. We also have important relationships with the Department of Corrections, the Lions of Iowa, Friends of the Library, and others who supply the volunteers we need to maintain and expand our quality services.

Locations

The Department's central office is located in a six-story building in downtown Des Moines. The Department maintains a field office in Cedar Rapids. The Des Moines and Cedar Rapids offices are accessible to people with disabilities.

Number of Staff

On June 30, 2011, the Department had 85 permanent, full-time employees, two of whom worked from the district office in Cedar Rapids, and ten of whom were domiciled at various other locations. Our employees work in the areas of administration, service provision, and support. Most of them are non-contract workers. Contract workers are covered by the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) agreement.

To meet the increasing demand for services, particularly from Iowa's growing elderly population, we sometimes employ temporary and contract workers in addition to our full-time permanent employees. We also rely heavily on volunteers to satisfy this need.

Budget

Operations of the Department are financed primarily through general fund appropriations from the Iowa General

Assembly and formula grants from the U.S. Department of Education. Our

budget relies heavily on federal matching funds.

AGENCY PERFORMANCE PLAN RESULTS

CORE FUNCTION: Vocational Rehabilitation & Independent Living Services

Description: The Department provides vocational rehabilitation services to assist lowans who are blind in preparing for, obtaining, and retaining employment. The Independent Living program provides services to older blind or multiply-disabled blind lowans to help them live more independently in their homes and to function within their communities.

Why we are doing this: To increase the productivity and independence of blind lowans.

What we're doing to achieve results: VR and IL staff provided assessments, training, guidance and counseling, referrals, employer assistance, job placement, rehabilitation technology services, post-employment follow-up, and coordination of community services.

Key Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Ratio of average VR wage to average state wage as a percentage.	100%	81%
Competitive employment outcomes as a percentage of all employment outcomes.	80%	91%
Percentage of individuals who meet their defined functional goals (daily living, mobility, communication, leisure, and community involvement).	80%	89%

What Happened: The Department sets an aggressive target for the ratio of average VR wage to state wage measure, as we believe in assisting blind lowans in obtaining employment that is on par with their sighted peers. The wage ratio was short of our 2011 target of 100%; However, our wage ratio of 81% far exceeded the federally negotiated performance standard for this measure, which is 68%.

Due to its belief in the capabilities of blind lowans, the Department exceeded the target set for the percentage of VR cases closing in competitive employment. For some clients, attaining an outcome of Homemaker after receiving skills training is appropriate. However, the Department strives to achieve employment outcomes where the VR client is working for minimum wage or more. This objective is reflected in our results.

lowans who experience significant vision loss need training in order to learn new ways of performing daily tasks so that they can maintain or regain their independence. Skillful IL teaching ensured that 89% of our IL clients met the functional goals they set for

themselves. This ensures that these blind and visually impaired Iowans are able to live more independently in their homes and community.

Data sources: Data for targets was taken from the Department's electronic client data system (eFORCE). This is a reliable source.

Resources: Total spending for the Vocational Rehabilitation program was \$5,702,304 and for the Independent Living program was \$555,268.

Services / Products / Activities of Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living Services Core Function

Product: VR Services

Description: The Department seeks to achieve a quantity and quality of employment outcomes for blind Iowans consistent with the standards set by the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration. We achieve this through our Vocational Rehabilitation services for blind and visually impaired adults and transition age youth.

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Percentage of closures with an employment outcome after receiving services.	85%	76%
Percentage of transition students indicating they have a more positive attitude about their blindness and their abilities after training.	70%	95%

What Happened: The percentage of VR case closures that result in an employment outcome depends on job availability and client skills and experience. A review of unsuccessful case closures from 2011 shows that cases closed unsuccessfully due to failing health, lost contact, death, moved out of state, or loss of interest in pursuing employment. The Department continues to work on job development methods. We continually seek new techniques to improve employment outcomes, particularly for those clients who have experienced difficulty obtaining employment due to a weak work history, lack of skills, or secondary disabilities. Our aim is that through skillful counseling and motivation, fewer clients will lose interest in working.

The Department's transition program provides targeted services to blind and visually impaired youth ages 14 to 21 or until high school graduation. Services include opportunities for peer interaction, mentoring and confidence building activities, independent living skills training, and employment experiences. In 2011, the Department hosted 53 participants in three weekend retreats and four summer mini camps. These programs focused on such topics as advocacy, alternative techniques of blindness, career exploration, goal-setting, team building, emergency preparedness, volunteering, science and math, problem solving and recreation. Fourteen teens also acquired work and volunteer experiences in their home communities doing activities like delivering newspapers, making meals for the homeless, cleaning school offices, providing daycare to children, and working in food service. Surveys conducted following these transition activities showed that 95% of participants had a significant improvement in their attitudes about themselves and their skills and abilities. This positive attitude plays a significant role in ensuring these youth lead successful, independent lives as blind adults.

Activity: Adult Orientation and Adjustment Training

Description: The Orientation Center is a residential blindness training program available to Vocational Rehabilitation clients of the Iowa Department for the Blind. It provides in-depth, individualized blindness training to those with significant vision loss aged 17 and older so they can return to their home communities imbued with confidence and equipped to work competitively and live independently.

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Results on skills and attitude assessments for students who have completed orientation center training.	85%	100%

What Happened: Twenty-two students began Orientation Center training in 2011. While some students had to leave the program early due to health reasons, others are pursuing secondary education, looking for a job, or entering employment. Four former students are either attending college now or plan to enter school some time in 2012. Five have returned to their home communities and are actively looking for employment. Another five former students have taken new jobs or returned to their former positions. Some are pursuing higher education in such fields as criminology, patient advocacy, and psychology. Others are looking for employment in jobs like receptionist and auto mechanic. Still others are working in such positions as machines manager, homemaker, and school food service worker. Instead of consuming tax dollars, these individuals are or will soon be paying taxes and contributing their talents to benefit Iowa.

Service: Business Enterprises Program

Description: The Business Enterprises Program (BEP) provides opportunities for legally blind Vocational Rehabilitation clients of the Iowa Department for the Blind to manage their own businesses -- operating vending machines, road side vending sites, or snack bar/catering services. These businesses can be found in federal, state, county, municipal, and private locations throughout Iowa.

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Average net income to vendors	\$40,000	\$47,522

What Happened: Several factors contributed to the average net income to blind vendors in BEP. New vendors have utilized more aggressive methods to meet the challenges of tough economic times and changing customer demands, such as increased marketing, obtaining catering jobs and promoting healthy food options. In addition, the program expanded into new state and federal locations, including a large federal call center and two new state buildings. Lastly, vendor attrition through retirement or voluntary separation also affected the average net income. A result of the rise in the average net income has been increased motivation among blind vendors to work harder to maintain their profitable status. A temporary shortage of managers has also meant that some managers have "doubled up" and are managing more than one facility. Two candidates for management will soon be licensed which will increase the number of blind persons in our program.

Product: Education and Outreach

Description: The Department engages in a variety of outreach activities around the state to promote the Department's services, generate referrals to the Department, and to educate service providers and the general public, including newly blind persons, regarding the capabilities of persons who are blind.

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of referrals	1,400	1,525
Number of in-service training sessions conducted for community service providers.	20	25

What Happened: For the first time since state fiscal year 2009, the Department has exceeded the total number of referrals received. The Department had been experiencing a decrease in referrals and has taken steps to reverse that trend, such as implementing a new marketing plan, revising brochures, holding regular outreach events and open houses, and maintaining a dynamic web site which offers an easy to use online referral form and an online catalog for the Library.

In addition to traditional outreach efforts, the Department conducted in-service training to in-home health providers, staff at community rehabilitation programs, and staff at long-term care facilities. As a result of the training delivered, service providers were better able to identify individuals they serve who have visual impairments, help them address basic needs related to vision loss, and help connect them with the resources available through the Department. In this regard, the provision of in-service training served to both increase referrals to the Department and increase the capacity of other providers to better serve individuals with vision loss.

CORE FUNCTION: Library Services

Description: The Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped acquires, manages and circulates information to eligible borrowers. Collections may include books, journals, databases, videos, state and federal documents and access to web sites.

Why we are doing this: To provide access to information to blind and visually impaired Iowans in specialized alternative media so they can obtain or retain employment, pursue educational goals, and meet all other personal needs consistent with each individual's strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.

What we're doing to achieve results: The Library produces and circulates books and magazines on cassette tape and digital media, in Braille, and in large print to eligible borrowers throughout the state.

Key Result

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of Iowans Using Services	7,500	7,197

What Happened: The number of Iowans using services in 2011 was 7,197. This number exceeded the number using services from 2010. Iowans who cannot read standard print gathered and used information from books, magazines, newsletters, educational, job-related, and personal materials to pursue education from kindergarten through advanced post-graduate degrees, acquire and maintain a wide variety of jobs, manage personal affairs (including medical and financial), participate in community activities and in the democratic process, and read for leisure and personal enrichment. They also received information on other services available to them through a variety of sources. The number of Iowans using Library services fluctuates each year and is dependent on public demand.

Data sources: All data is pulled from our automated circulation system. All patrons are served through the automated system, and all transactions are captured by the system as part of its basic functionality.

Resources: Total spending for the Library was \$2,272,334.

Services / Products / Activities of Library Services Core Function

Service: Circulation of library materials.

Description: The Library maintains a collection of over 88,000 book titles and makes available to its borrowers over 100 different magazines. Because the Library is a cooperating member of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), its borrowers have access to all NLS services.

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Numbers of books circulated	250,000	246,534

What Happened: The Library nearly achieved its circulation target, and exceeded the previous year's number by over 20,000 books.

Iowa's patrons continued borrowing more magazines and more digital books than the previous year. The transition from cassette books to digital books continues to negatively impact circulation statistics as patrons prefer borrowing the digital materials over the cassettes. Not as many books are available in the digital format, so a decline in circulation may, in part, be due to patron preference for the new technology. Locally produced materials (magazines, books, and "personal patron digital cartridges") continue to show increases in circulation.

Service: Production of materials in alternative media.

Description: Employment-related, educational, and leisure materials not already available in alternative media are transcribed for the collection and for patrons upon request.

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of items produced in alternative media.	1,500	1,252

What Happened: Necessary documents were transcribed and produced in alternative formats and used by students from pre-school through postgraduate to continue their education; employed lowans were able to read work-related materials (e.g. handbooks, product brochures, memos, etc.) and thus remain competitively employed; reading-disabled lowans were able to manage personal, medical, and financial affairs independently.

The number of items produced in alternative media for 2011 was 1,252. This number can fluctuate from year to year as it is dependent upon patrons' needs.

Service: Instructional Materials Center (IMC)

Description: The IMC locates textbooks and other educational materials for Iowa's K-12 and college students who cannot use standard print, and it locates job-related materials for employed Iowans who cannot use print.

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of educational and vocational requests filled by Instructional Materials Center.	2,200	1,948

What was achieved: The number of requests for educational and vocational materials filled was 1,948. As a result, students and workers received the textbooks and work-related materials they needed in a format they can use, which allowed them to continue their education and maintain employment. The number of items produced by the IMC is dependent upon patrons' needs and requests.

CORE FUNCTION: Resource Management

Description: Provides all vital infrastructure needs necessary to administer and support agency operations.

Why we are doing this: To ensure effective administration of the Department for the Blind.

What we're doing to achieve results: In addition to exercising stewardship over resources and other administrative functions, the Department is maintaining staffing, improving services to those with secondary disabilities, and piloting a youth employment program. The Department has recently implemented an outreach plan, upgraded its web site, and is planning for the replacement of three aging air handlers in the building in 2012.

Key Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of reportable comments in the annual audit.	0	0

What Happened: The state's single audit report was released by the auditor on March 31, 2011.

Data Source: Annual audit report issued by Iowa's Auditor of State.

Resources: \$1,099,217

Services / Products / Activities of Resource Management Core Function

Service: Department administrative services

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of compliance issues raised by federal agency during monitoring visit.	0	0
Percent of compliance with Accountable Government Act.	100%	100%

What Happened: The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) did not conduct a monitoring and technical assistance review in 2011. No instances of non-compliance with reporting requirements were noted by RSA.

Resource Reallocation

In recent years, the Department has applied for, and received, additional resources during its respective fiscal years pursuant to the annual re-allotment process for federal appropriations enacted under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, administered by the U.S. Rehabilitation Services Administration. Amounts received are as follows:

2006 - \$498,830

2007 - \$778,663

2008 - \$805,937

2009 - \$896,609

2010 - \$879,057

2011 - \$0

2012 - \$0

Due to reduced general fund operating appropriations, the Department was in violation of the federal statutory maintenance of effort requirement codified in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (section 111(a)(2)(B)), and as referenced at 34 CFR 361.62, for the respective years ended September 30, 2010 and September 30, 2011. This is also expected to be the case for the current year ending September 30, 2012.

Agency Contacts

This report is available at www.IDBOnline.org. Copies of the report can also be obtained by contacting Bruce K. Snethen at 515-281-1293.