Board Meeting Reports

September 10, 2019

# Director's Report – Emily Wharton

Kathy Roat began work as our BEP & Facilities Program Administrator on August 19th and is currently completing her center training. She comes to us with experience in retail, job placement, small business management, and human resources. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Iowa State in Industrial Administration with an emphasis in management. We are very excited to have her joining our management team. The furniture in the Director’s Conference Room is very heavy and difficult to move in a way that allows us to use the room for different types of meetings or trainings. We are working on creating a dedicated Zoom meeting setup. We’d like business class to be able to break out in small groups, be able to have more space for Board meetings and smaller setups for interviews, etc. We want to replace the furniture with something lighter and more flexible. Because of state rules, we will need to list the old furniture for sale on <https://www.govdeals.com>. We will announce when the listings are made to ensure that anyone who is interested can bid on this furniture. IDB is in the end stages of our transition to an all cell phone office. We will be forwarding our current main number, library number, and other frequently called numbers. The 800 number and main number will not change. They will just be answered on a mobile phone instead of a desk phone. This is going to end up saving us at least $10 per line and give us the added flexibility of allowing staff to send text messages and be hands free and mobile around the building. Because ICN is migrating our remaining services to a new platform, our phone tree will be updated. People will be able to access a dial by name directory of all our staff. Two things that will be a change and might be an adjustment for some people are these: The phone tree won’t automatically roll over to a human being. People will need to choose an option but all options lead to actual people. We don't have an option in regards to this as it is how the auto-attendant feature works in the new system ICN is deploying. The second thing is that we will not be able to transfer calls. We will be taking messages and also providing the direct number for the person they are trying to reach. Teachers and counselors will be taking this opportunity to make sure that their clients have their direct number and that everyone has a method for taking down and reading back phone numbers. We are currently transitioning people to their new phones and the full system will switch over in late September.The Library Consumer Advisory Committee (LCAC) met on 7/26. I explained that the Commission had directed Sarah and I to take the library name discussion back to them. I asked them to make a recommendation and also share the process they used to get feedback and make the recommendation with the Commission. Sarah went through our eligibility and statistics on who we serve. There was some surprise regarding how many people we serve for reasons other than blindness. The members of the LCAC are Don Wirth, Teresa Hafley, April Edrington, Gary Paterson, Cindy Ray, Susie Stageberg, and chair Michael Barber. I talked about the use of VR dollars, our initiatives to engage with education, and once again went through the process we used to come up with the name and our reasoning behind our choice. I also explained the alternative name that I proposed at the 7/16 meeting that would satisfy the objection that the name had to contain the word “blind.” Cindy Ray made a motion to support Iowa Department for the Blind Library for Accessible Services. Susie seconded. It passed on voice vote. Michael asked if anyone wanted a roll call vote and no one said anything. Once they were about to move on, Don Wirth asked for a roll call vote, one person then changed their vote from “yes” to “no” and it failed 4 to 3. April then proposed Iowa Library for the Blind and Print Disabled and Teresa seconded it. Sarah an I stated our view that while the word “blind” is great by us, we have no idea if those put into the box “print disabled” cared at all for this label. Then the advisory committee voted 7-0 to support the name Iowa Library for the Blind and Print Disabled. Despite this recommendation, Sarah and I stand behind our assertion that the name "Iowa Library for the Blind and Print Disabled" is neither inclusive nor conducive to building positive working relationships with educational agencies and other partners. We believe that the name "Iowa Department for the Blind Library for Accessible Services" should satisfy those who are insistent that the name contain the word blind while allowing us to be inclusive and better able to build relationships that allow us to improve services to all patrons. IDB would like to thank those who participated in our three Community Forums this summer. It was great to get to talk with you and get your ideas. We have compiled all of our notes and have shared them with our staff. You can view the complete list of comments on each of the topics here <https://blind.iowa.gov/idb-community-forum-discussion-results>. We will be using this important feedback as we work on our College and Adult Library Services, Career Commons, Youth Library, and Youth Advisory Committee. Stay tuned for updates on all of these initiatives. We are also hoping to host more Community Forums across the state in coming months. If you have ideas about topics you’d like us to get feedback on or places you would like us to visit, you can email these suggestions to [emily.wharton@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:emily.wharton@blind.state.ia.us).

We have created an application for members to join our Youth Advisory Committee. Please help us spread the word to anyone who might be interested. The application can be found at: <https://iowadeptblind.wufoo.com/forms/zt155s711ndfuk/>.

Below are two excerpts from letters sent to the Presidents of the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa and the Iowa Council for the United Blind on August 2nd. I met with the Presidents on August 12th. We discussed IDB's intention to create a 4+ program and our intention to obtain apartments for our adult orientation center students. These initiatives were further discussed at the August Director's Forum. It was suggested that we gather data regarding the benefits and drawbacks of both dorm-style housing and apartment style housing for center students. We have created a survey to gather this data. The survey can be found at <https://iowadeptblind.wufoo.com/forms/zawbr6i0oxpa> This survey will be open until September 30th. As it was suggested that consumer organizations may wish to offer outreach to those needing to learn about the many sources for aids and devices or perhaps choose to operate their own aids and devices store, I wanted to make sure that I shared with you, additional details surrounding the store closing. I discussed the store closing reasons and timing with each of the Commissioners prior to the June meeting. The Commissioners were in agreement and no one brought up the issue of board approval. After the June meeting, members of the public and yourselves contacted Commissioners and wanted the issue discussed and voted on by the Commission Board. Commissioner Van Lent asked for a special meeting. There was a lack of clarity surrounding whether or not the Director or Commission Board should be making the decision regarding both the store closing and library name change. I wrote our Assistant Attorney General (AAG) and asked for her opinion as well as an explanation of when and how special meetings should be scheduled. As I previously explained, the AAG stated that the Board would need to vote on the library name as it would need to be changed in our admin rule. She agreed that the store change was an administrative decision, but also shared that there is actually no authority for IDB to operate a store in current Iowa Code. She shared that if we were challenged, likely by someone selling the same items as our store through a private enterprise, we would almost certainly lose in court. It was her advice not to share this information with the public until the store was closed to avoid this risk. I did share this information with the Commissioners and leadership team upon receiving it. I know that there are those who were very angry that there was no vote taken on the store closing, but I am required to prevent an action that I know to be contrary to Iowa Code and therefore had to make sure the action item was not on the agenda. I know I was probably perceived by some to be an autocratic tyrant in my handling of the situation and I would have preferred to be more transparent if I could have been, but I handled the situation the way it needed to be handled. I know there are those in both organizations talking about going to the Governor's office and legislature to demand that the store be re-opened. Doing so would require a change to Iowa Code. It would likely be very challenging to get a bill through the legislature that would establish a state owned business that would compete with private enterprise. If affiliates, other non-profits, or for profit companies wish to open a store in Des Moines or anywhere else in the state, we would be happy to provide any information or assistance we legally can to that undertaking. I'm a huge believer in the adage "you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. You teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime." There are so many things that our agency has done. A number of these things other organizations also do like helping people write resumes or selling blindness and low vision aids. But one thing we at the Iowa Department for the Blind do that no one else in our state does or can do is help blind people develop the skills and self-confidence they need to live full lives. This means access to information, non-visual skills training, and counseling and guidance. If we can give our clients what they need to be competent and confident blind people, other than for library services, they won't need us anymore. If we do our jobs right, clients will find careers, maintain their homes, and be engaged in their communities. We know, and research shows, that a key part of being engaged in one's community is consumer group membership. This is why we as an agency have been working to encourage staff and client interaction with both consumer groups. Societal misconceptions and discrimination can beat a blind person down and having the peer support and opportunity to make positive change does so much to help us endure and overcome those challenges. I tell our staff that we are ambassadors of hope to those we serve. We need consumer groups to keep that hope alive when our clients become self-sufficient and move on with their lives. While times and tools have changed, I believe this to be the same core philosophy that Kenneth Jernigan used to build this agency.CFO – Cheri Myers

**Federal Grant Update:**

The Indirect Cost Agreement with the Federal Department of Education has been submitted and approved. The IDC rate was approved for one year. On the Vocational Rehabilitation Services grant and the Independent Living grant the IDC rate is 12.5% and on the Supported Employment Services grant the IDC rate is 2.5%. As the base on which IDB can charge the IDC rate is larger than in FY18, even with the lower IDC rate we will net larger actual dollar amounts reimbursed for IDC.

**Budget Report:**

I have enclosed a budget report on FY19 through 8/28/19. The state holding period for FY19 ends on 9/4/19 and final numbers will be available at that time.

**Gifts and Bequests**

As of June 30, 2019 for FY2019

Total revenue for FY2019 to date is $118,848

Total expenditures for the fiscal year are $44050.24

As of 08/25/2019 the current balance is $2,670,787

**Other:**

The RFP to get RFID for our Library has been awarded and received.

# Education and Training Team – Helen Stevens

## Employees

* We currently have six VR Teachers in the field serving clients, Andrew Joines, Leland Smith, Marissa Hirschman, Matt Nemmers, Niah Howard and Sarah Baebler.
* We will be posting positions for two additional VR teachers in September.
* We still have one vacant RTS position that we are working to fill to get us back to 4 rehabilitation technology specialists.
* We did not fill the additional technology analyst position we posted as we did not find the right candidate, so we are using this vacancy for one of the VR teacher positions.

## Pre-Employment Transition Services Programs

* Twenty-one students participated in the LEAP summer program from across Iowa ranging in age from 14-21. Students lived in apartments at Grand View University, and traveled by bus to IDB for classes. Students visited a range of sites around the Des Moines area including Adventureland and Living History Farms. Ten students attended the National Federation of the Blind Convention in Las Vegas. We thank both ICUB and NFBI for hosting activities for the students during the summer.
* Dates have been set for six youth weekend retreats for the 2019-2020 school year. They are designed for youth ages 14-21. Flyers and registration forms are out, and we have begun receiving registrations.
* The application for the 2020 LEAP program is out. We have begun receiving applications, and the deadline is March 15.

## Client Training

* Approximately 120 clients receiving services from a Rehabilitation Technology Specialist.
* Approximately 110 clients receiving services from a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher.
* Now that we have more VR teachers in the field, we have begun transitioning to having VR teachers provide introductory technology training, such as typing and smart phone usage, instead of RTSs. Most of these clients are already working with a VRT. This should provide more timely and frequent training for clients while also cutting RTS caseloads and travel time, which will allow them to better cover worksite needs for employed clients as well as more advanced technology training needs. It is thus expected that the number of clients working with an RTS will decline slightly.
* The first VR Self Week training is October 6-12. There are 12 clients currently registered. Clients will receive 5 days of instruction in cane travel, braille, access technology and home management.
* Two Self Week trainings scheduled for the spring, March 15-21 and May 3-9. Up to 16 clients can participate in each session.
* Vocational rehabilitation teams continue to plan and conduct community based trainings throughout Iowa. Each team is expected to conduct at least two trainings during the program/state fiscal year, for a total of at least 8 CBTs.

## Technology

* All IDB employees have now been issues a cell phone. Desk phones should stop working around September 30. Our web site has been updated with the new phone numbers, and old desk phone numbers will forward to cell phones. This should make it easier for staff to access and utilize their phones as well as save money. The only noticeable downside should be the loss of the ability to transfer phone calls, but staff will be communicating information about calls received via phone and email to ensure that callers do not get lost.

# Independent Living Program - Kimberley Barber

The Iowa SPIL was extended through September 30, 2020. In partnership with Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services Director David Mitchell, and the Center for Independent Living Director’s; Iowa Department for the Blind Executive Director Emily Wharton signed the Iowa SPIL extension. The SPIL extension document has been submitted to the Administration for Community Living (ACL). Of possible interest, Center for Independent Living Directors were asked several months ago by the Executive Director for the State Independent Living Council (SILC), Dawn E. Francis, to prepare a survey that can be disseminated statewide for Independent Living consumer feedback. The information from the survey is to be used for evaluation purposes in conjunction with preparing the new Iowa SPIL which will be due to ACL in 2020.

Two new Independent Living Rehabilitation Teachers were hired for our program. Thomas Topping started on Tuesday, August 20th. He comes to the Department with an array of customer service experience from the private retail and management industry. He is also a former Orientation Center student. He previously worked as one of our Summer Youth program counselors and substitute Independent Living teachers. The final Independent Living Teacher Kelsi Hansen started Monday, August 26th. Kelsi comes to the Department with experience working for the Department under our Summer Youth program as a counselor. She previously attended Blind, Inc. through their adult orientation center in Minneapolis, MN. She also attended the School for the Deaf and Blind in Arizona during high school. Each will be completing the Department’s Orientation Center training and other necessary requirements before moving to field work. We are excited to have both of these professionals onboard.

Senior Orientation- Integration is scheduled for September 16 – 20 and currently have five clients attending. Independent Living clients will start arriving on Sunday, September 15. We have a jam-packed week of training. The Iowa Council of the United Blind Des Moines Chapter will be hosting Monday evening with the clients and the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa Des Moines Chapter will be hosting Tuesday evening.

Orientation Center Teacher Terry Wilcox has been assisting the Independent Living program with a temporary field project to build support groups throughout Iowa. She has successfully established support groups in Council Bluffs, Iowa City, Marshalltown, and Sioux City. These support groups start out with a Braille instruction class followed by other topics related to blindness or speakers to facilitate attendee engagement. Attendees continue to return to their respective support group each week and want to learn more. As program administrator, I am encouraged to receive these reports; knowing that what Terry is doing with each group and each individual is effecting change.

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

## Library Updates and Programs

The library has started its RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) project. Library staff have begun the process of placing RFID tags on library materials and equipment. Approximately 2,000 patron audio cartridges have been tagged and work has started on both the digital players, Braille and large print collections. The tags are being placed on items in places where they will not be too noticeable by patrons, like the inside back cover of books. They will aid library staff in the check in and out processes and in conducting collection inventory. The tags are also being used to make the audio download process (SuperDuplication) more efficient.

The Library’s Instructional Materials Center Team completed an update to their *Handbook for Ordering Instructional Materials* to assist educators when ordering accessible educational materials for students. The handbook includes instructions, tips and information on ordering materials and available resources. The Instructional Materials Center has received 1,282 projects as of August 27, 2019 for the 2019-2020 school year. Even though this school year has already begun, this is already a 35% increase from the past 2018-2019 school year. The IMC Team also uses its blog to provide information for the educators and braille transcribers who are working with and ordering accessible materials, <http://idbimclibrary.blog>

The Library will resume S.O.A.R. Saturdays starting on Saturday, September 28, 2019. We will be expanding our youth activities to include college and career activities. The library will also be open from 10:00 am – 2:00 pm on these Saturdays to provide general library services.

The Library worked with VISTA Summer Reading Corps members to provide a Summer Reading Program this year. The “Sensing the Cosmos” youth program focused on space and astronomy for youth and allowed us to provide information to the community about the Library and Department’s services. The Library visited 21 public libraries with the program and had 452 participants.

**Library Staffing Update**

The Library is currently in the process of interviewing for the Youth 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 May 2019, June 2019 and July 2019

Library Patrons Added: 167

Library Material Circulation

Total Circulation: 71,279

Braille: 436

Print/Braille: 260

Large Print: 468

Digital Books: 68,772

Magazine Issues: 1,125

Digital Players: 218

Library Collection

Total Books Added to the Library Collection: 3,394

Braille: 285

Print/Braille: 66

Large Print: 106

Digital Books: 1,225

Bridges: 1,712

Instructional Materials Center

Orders Received: 792

BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) Usage

Total Books Downloaded from BARD: 16,334

Audio: 15,975

Braille: 359

Average Number of Patrons Using BARD: 495

Newsline Service Usage

Current Subscribers: 1,624

New Subscribers: 12

Telephone Calls: 7,664

Web Sessions: 14,521

Mobile App Sessions: 1,885

Alexa Sessions: 8

“In Your Pocket” Deliveries: 14,950

E-mail Deliveries: 6,057

Iowa Newspaper Accesses: 60,586

National Newspaper Accesses: 3,450

International Newspaper Accesses: 609

# **Orientation Center Report – Al Bickell**

11 current students (3 are staff)

3 students graduated

2 students scheduled to come in to the center plus 3 working on dates

Along with the skills and attitude component, the center continues to focus on post center planning and preparation.  Making sure that students who are ready to graduate, have either enrolled in continuing education, are actively looking for work, or have attained employment.

Adding the life skills and jobs class instructor position in to the center has enabled many skill areas to be addressed instead of falling through the cracks.

For activities the center has been doing many of the same activities that have been common from year to year, but we have been really trying to add activities in that have not been as common in past years such as golfing and treasure hunts.  We have also found that doing events such as food for the heartland, and helping to build houses with Habitat for Humanity have been both rewarding for students, but also beneficial for society.  Habitat was very apprehensive to have the center come volunteer, at first, but after one day, they want us several times a year and we are working on a day in November.

Home management is quickly becoming a very crowded space at certain times of the year, and we are currently building 2 additional kitchens in the space to help with this.  These kitchens should be completed in the next 2 months.

We have also made another communications lab on second floor which gives us some additional space for students learning braille and technology.

## BEP

The BEP is still experiencing a decline in sales and is faced with several challenges.  The city of Des Moines has moved Pepsico in to the city hall location with a micro-market without following the proper procedure, and they are now asking for machines to be removed from the police department.  During the conversation with the police department, the comment was made that as the city remodels their facilities, they will be switching over to Pepsi.  Our AAG has been contacted about this and we will be following-up.

We have a trainee in the final stages of his training and will hopefully be placing him in a facility in the next two months. The major push right now is for micro-markets in several locations. This would include the main post office and Economic Development.

The set aside is still not in place, but on a national level they are working to more quickly work through the changes to the states administrative codes and manual changes.

# **Vocational Rehabilitation – Keri Osterhaus**

## Employees

* All Vocational Rehabilitation division positions are filled with no planned vacancies.
* We welcomed Lee Hughes on August 28, 2019 to our Field Operations support team. Lee is participating in the Senior Community Service Employment Program, which is operated by AARP Foundation, and provides qualified individuals with job skills training to assist them in obtaining employment. Lee has had experience in office settings as a receptionist, in filing, connecting with individuals by phone, and other clerical duties. We are happy to have Lee join our team as he begins his training with us!

## Vocational Rehabilitation Activities

* **Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)** – The CSNA has been well underway this summer. In the months of June and July, we completed several activities that provided valuable information to our team at San Diego State University who is completing the project. In June, we had over 100 participants attend focus groups and individual meetings with Chaz Compton, the project director for the CSNA work. In addition, we had a variety of surveys completed by clients, staff, businesses and partner agencies, including education agencies. The team at San Diego State has requested a no-cost extension for this project due to some challenges with collecting all of the necessary data. This has been agreed to and we will be working with them to get a final report by October 2019. A special thank you to everyone who participated in the activities. The input of our clients, staff, partners and employers is extremely helpful in guiding the work of our VR programs.
* **Local Workforce Development Boards:** There has been a lot of work to realign Iowa’s workforce regions. The projected date for completion is June 30, 2020. The local Workforce Development Boards across the state have been reviewing the current Memorandum’s of Understanding (MOU) as many of them are expiring this year. Under the guidance of the Iowa Workforce Development’s leadership, many of Iowa’s regions have approved One-Year Extensions to the current MOU Agreement, taking us through June 30, 2020. As the state realigns these regional boards, a new MOU will be drafted. We will keep you posted on these regional changes once they occur.
* **Unified State Plan:** IDB is currently working with other WIOA core partners on the development of the Unified State Plan for the effective delivery of workforce development services in Iowa. The vision, goals and strategic framework will continue to be developed and strengthened as the Unified State Plan moves closer to completion, which is expected in March 2020. WIOA core partners are the Iowa Department for the Blind, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Workforce Development.
* **Employment Focused Projects** – The Department’s Employment Specialists are working to develop specific content related to employment for a Facebook page, gov delivery, and other outreach programs. The goal of the project will be to provide information about employment trainings, current openings and opportunities related to employment, and to market business services to employers and partner programs and more. Employment Specialists will also be working with counselors and other IDB staff to develop success stories, which will then be, shared through these outreach methods, in addition to sharing these stories with our partner programs, employers, and clients. Our employment specialists have been working on a number of activities to increase awareness of IDB services, but also to share the abilities and successes of blind Iowans.
* **Pre-Employment Transition Services Trainings** – IDB has developed four contracts with vendors for providing pre-employment transition services. These contracts have been developed with Easter Seals of Iowa, Mosaic Haven, Dale Carnegie, and Sky’s the Limit. All of these programs are working with IDB to finalize delivery methods. We are very excited about the potential for these programs to reach not only current students we are working with, but also potentially eligible students who are not connected with the Department’s Vocational Rehabilitation Programs.