Slide 1: Iowa Department for the Blind (Picture of the Department building) Learning Shades Policy Update

Slide 2: The Iowa Department for the Blind has a proud legacy of innovation and high expectations in blindness rehabilitation. Our agency pioneered the use of learning shades to aid students in mastering nonvisual skills in cane travel, braille, technology, home management, and industrial arts. To stay at the forefront of innovation, best practices, and informed consumer choice, we regularly reevaluate our policies to reflect what blind and low vision Iowans need and expect from their state vocational rehabilitation agency. In accordance with these values, a task force has been formed to update the adjustment-to-blindness center handbook. As a result of our discussions, task force members recommend updating the Center’s learning shades policy in order to offer consumers greater flexibility and choice and to empower staff to apply their professional judgment and expertise. These updates will also bring the Center’s sleepshade practices into line with other IDB divisions and programs.

Slide 3: Our Legacy: Why Learning Shades Have Been Central to Our Training Model

Slide 4: 1950s-1970s Before this period, **blind children with and without residual vision were often educated and received vocational training at state and private schools for the blind.** All students learned braille and many other nonvisual techniques.

Blind and low vision students began integrating into public schools. **Many school districts lacked qualified teachers of blind students** to operate resource rooms or provide pull-out instruction in braille and cane travel.

Due to increased demand, school districts began hiring more teachers of the visually impaired (TVIs). However, these newer TVIs were often not as thoroughly trained in braille and nonvisual techniques as their predecessors.

**Many of these instructors weren’t fluent in braille and nonvisual skills; therefore, they didn’t teach them.**

Students were forced to use their limited vision, even when it was unreliable, unsafe, or inefficient.

Students often believed that their potential for independence and success was only as great as their limited vision.

Slide 5: 1950s-1970s (continued) 1953- Kenneth Jernigan and other staff and students at the California Orientation Center for the Blind begin pioneering training techniques that would later be called “structured discovery.”

1958-1978- Jernigan becomes Commissioner of the Iowa Commission for the Blind. He, other staff, and students refined these techniques. The Iowa Commission is widely regarded as the agency with the highest expectations for blind people at this time.

Slide 6: Jernigan on Sleepshades **“If the atmosphere is such that the student must be "required" to wear the sleepshades, use a cane, or employ any other technique, the value is probably lost.** At the heart of the matter are the subtle and often unrecognizable attitudes about what blindness really is and what it really means, whether the blind person can truly compete on terms of equality, whether he can actually perform as well as others and whether he can really be a full-fledged, first-class citizen with all the rights and privileges and also with all of the responsibilities.”

* -Letter to Iowa Governor Robert Ray, 1974

Slide 7: Benefits of Learning Shades

Slide 8: Benefits of Learning Shades Sleepshades help people **focus on and develop non-visual techniques.**

Sleepshades utilization teaches students that nonvisual techniques can be as safe, effective, efficient, and effortless as visual techniques.

By removing reliance on their limited vision, **students learn that their independence and success are not defined by how much vision they do or don’t have.**

Sleepshades prevent clients from gaining misleading visual feedback, such as when students have incorrect depth perception or are distracted by shadows.

Required continuous public use of sleepshades (and necessarily therefore a white cane) can help some students **overcome their shame over the stigma associated with blindness and cane use.**

**Paradoxically, developing non-visual skills can lead to more effective use of residual vision.** A person can decide when their vision really is effective and when nonvisual techniques would be safest or most useful.

Slide 9: Why We’re Evolving: Consumer Choice, RSA Guidance, and Professional Ethics

Slide 10: Consumer Choice **The Center can accommodate around 20 adult students. There are currently 4. We average between 3 to 5.**

We have six 2-bedroom apartments off-site, which is 12 bedrooms. With only 4 students, **we are paying for four unused apartments, which means eight unused bedrooms.**

When told about required learning shade use, some consumers either choose **no training at all or choose training out of state while o**thers choose in-home instruction, which is usually about **2 hours of instruction every two weeks.** This is not equitable. **(For comparison, a student receives 40 hours of training a week at the Center. At 2 hours every other week, it takes a student 40 weeks to get the same number of instructional hours as one week at the Center.)** This is particularly **inequitable for blind people with additional disabilities and physical and mental health conditions** that make learning shade use unsafe, unfeasible, or inadvisable. Our current policy has an adverse impact on multiply-disabled people.

**All Iowans who lose their sight should be able to attend their tax-funded training center without feeling forced or coerced to do something they don’t want to do.**

Slide 11: RSA Requirements and Guidance The purpose of vocational rehabilitation (VR) is to empower our clients to achieve meaningful employment and greater independence. By offering personalized support and resources, VR helps clients identify their strengths, develop essential skills, and navigate potential barriers to employment.

The Act affirms the individual’s right to exercise informed choice throughout the vocational rehabilitation (VR) process.

IDB must ensure that informed choice is implemented in a way that aligns with its responsibility to administer the VR program effectively.

The client-counselor relationship is foundational and should reflect the counselor's role as a facilitator in the plan development process.

Informed choice should be integrated throughout the individual's participation in VR services, grounded in trust and collaboration.

IDB must also implement policies and procedures that:

Maximize opportunities for individuals to exercise informed choice

Support VR counselors in guiding and empowering individuals

Allow for the development of diverse, individualized employment and service options

Policies and procedures must avoid pre-selecting employment outcomes, services, or providers, ensuring that choices remain with the individual.

Slide 12: CRCC Ethics **Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification Ethics To Which IDB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors Are Bound:**

Autonomy- To respect the rights of clients to be self-governing (Consumers have the right to make choices about all aspects of their rehabilitation.)

Beneficence- To do good to others, to promote the well-being of others (This policy would allow more consumers to receive intensive training, leading to better employment outcomes and better quality of life.)

Justice- To be fair in the treatment of all clients; to provide appropriate services to all (Required sleep shade use makes Center training inaccessible to clients with other disabilities, health conditions, and mental health concerns.)

Nonmaleficence- To do no harm to others (VR counselors are gate-keepers of training and therefore employment. It is unethical to use the unequal power dynamic between a rehabilitation professional and a client to coerce a client into doing something they are uncomfortable doing.)

Slide 13: Partnering With Students Around Learning Shade Use

Slide 14: Techniques Used By Structured Discovery Professionals At Centers Where Learning Shades Are Not Required **Ramp Up-** Begin using sleepshades in only one class or for a period of time at the end of each class. Work toward greater use.

**Start Easy-** Have a hesitant student sit down at a table wearing sleepshades. Ask them to identify objects you hand them by touch. Ask them to identify sounds they hear around them. “See! This isn’t so hard! You already know so much of what is going on around you!”

**Challenge Zones-** Students who are reluctant to wear shades pick a different class to be their “challenge zone” to which they wear shades each week. Suggest starting out with braille and then technology to build comfort.

Slide 15: Techniques (Continued) **Learning Moment-** Students puts on shades only when a specific skill is actively being taught

Example 1: OK, what if you keep your shades off while you gather all the ingredients for the recipe on the counter. But when you’re going to actually pour the milk or cut the tomato, let me show you how to do it non-visually.

Example 2: OK, you don’t need to wear your shades while we’re walking down the sidewalk. But how about, when we get to the corner, let’s put them on and just listen to traffic and find out what we can tell about that street just by listening.

Example 3: OK, why don’t you keep your shades off while you gather your block of wood, the square, and your scratch awl. But when it’s actually time to cut, how about if I show you how to do it non-visually?

Slide 16: Techniques (Continued) **Specific Day-** Students choose to challenge themselves to wear learning shades on a specific day. Student may choose to increase the number of days they wear learning shades.

**Try Them And Then Decide-** Students agree to wear shades for one month and then decide whether they are finding them to be a beneficial tool. After that month, students may choose to continue wearing them full-time, during certain classes or days, or not at all.

**Last Three Months-** Students agree to wear shades for the first six months (or two thirds) of their training. For the last three months (or one-third), they receive all instruction with shades off and learn how to incorporate the non-visual skills they’ve been learning with their vision.

**Skill Proficiency Unlock-** Students agree to wear shades until they reach a certain level of non-visual proficiency. Then they learn how to continue using their non-visual skills along with their vision.

**First Without, Then With-** Students learn how to do tasks they are afraid of such as boil something in hot water, use a grill, cross a busy street, or operate a power tool first without shades so that they understand exactly what the task involves and what you are asking them to do. (The task is still taught in a way that does not require vision.) Then, you say, “You got it! Now, I want to teach you the non-visual way to grill a hamburger.”

Slide 17: Recommended Changes

Slide 18: Bulletpoint #1 **Current Language**

The Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center is a non-visual training program. Therefore, all Center students who have residual vision, even light perception, are required to wear learning shades during the training day, which runs from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

**Recommended Language**

The **Orientation Center for the Blind** is a non-visual training program. Therefore, all Center students who have residual vision, even light perception, are **encouraged** to wear learning shades during the training day, which runs from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. **We find that wearing learning shades significantly speeds up the development of non-visual skills by reducing a student’s reliance on their limited vision.**

Slide 19: Bulletpoint #2 **Current Language**

Students may remove their learning shades during the lunch period if they so choose. However, when attending a student meal, learning shades need to be worn. When completing a task, such as a travel route or a cooking assignment, students must keep their learning shades on until the task is finished, even if the lunch hour or the end of the training day has arrived.

**Recommended Language**

Struck. Under a model where shades are recommended, students may remove their shades at any time, so this bulletpoint wasn’t needed.

Slide 20: Bulletpoint #3 **Current Language**

Learning shades are to be worn tightly enough that visual information cannot be obtained. Removing, lifting, shifting, and peeking under the shades is prohibited.

**Recommended Language**

While we highly recommend using learning shades in all classes to maximize skill development, we recognize that every student has unique goals, learning styles, circumstances, and preferences. Therefore, each student will decide whether using learning shades is appropriate for their goals in each individual class.

Slide 21: Bulletpoint #4 **Current Language**

Any questions about the Center’s learning shade procedures should be directed to the Center’s Director.

**Recommended Language**

Students are encouraged to discuss learning shade use with each instructor. Together, they will explore whether and how shades might support progress toward a student’s individual goals.

Slide 22: Alignment With Other IDB Divisions

Slide 23: Independent Living RSA cites that adults with vision loss have the right to choose the services that will best meet their goals. This should include a choice between non-visual or visual training (or a combination of both).

As rehabilitation professionals, we are certified and bound by the same RSA ethics as vocational rehabilitation counselors. That means, we must respect clients' autonomy and informed choice.

In recent years, the needs of OIB clients have shifted significantly, with more individuals referred to us who have head injuries, balance issues, dementia, PTSD, and other conditions that may make learning shade use unsafe or create challenges for learning. For example, it creates fear and anxiety that leads them to walk away from training altogether.

Clients and guardians have explicitly stated that they would not enroll in skills training if learning shades was mandatory.

Rehabilitation teachers address these concerns by providing adjustment-to-blindness counseling to increase trust, gradually introducing learning shades only when the client is ready, which has proven more effective than requiring them outright

Slide 24: Pre-Employment Transition Services Any youth program should focus on meeting students where they're at as individuals.

The Education and Training Team already employs the approach of making learning shades "highly recommended" for students.

A common theme among students with IEPs is a deficit in self-advocacy and essential skills.

More individuals in their lives have done 'for' them, not 'with' them.

Presenting learning shades as an option for students allows for:

Students start making meaningful choices that directly impact their present and future, sometimes for the first time in their lives.

Critical self-advocacy and empowerment opportunities for students

Offers rapport-building moments for both staff and students

Slide 25: Vocational Rehabilitation **As a VR Counselors, we must:**

Ensure Informed Choice.

Empower clients to build confidence and independence.

Maintain high expectations.

**Client Readiness:**

Some clients are ready to begin training; others may feel hesitant or scared to use learning shades or learn nonvisual skills.

Clients have made the choice not to participate in our trainings because they do not want to use learning shades.

We must be able to provide ongoing opportunities for skill development and long-term vocational success.

**Expanded Learning Models and Training Options will allow for:**

Continued commitment to Learning Shades as an essential training tool while recognizing the need to meet clients where they are in their journey to independence and employment.

Meeting diverse client needs through flexible training options.

Addressing Barriers and overcome challenges like fear, discomfort, and lack of interest.

Slide 26: Questions and Ongoing Support