Board Meeting Reports

September 12, 2025

# Director's Report – Stacy Cervenka

**Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization-** We are working with Des Moines MCO to advocate for expanded bus service, more innovative paratransit programs, and travel trainers for people who need assistance learning to ride the bus.

**Meeting with Education Secretary McKenzie Snow-** We met with Director Snow to discuss the Instructional Materials Center and our Pre-Employment Transition Services. We look forward to partnering with Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired in several of our programs.

**Learning From Others in the Field-** Our training center staff has had the opportunity to meet with administrators and staff from the Sacramento Society for the Blind, the Criss Cole Center in Texas, and the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired. All of these centers serve 30 to 85 students at a time and have a high percentage of student buy-in for using sleepshades as a recommended learning tool.

**The ARC of Iowa-** We met with the Director of the ARC of Iowa to familiarize him with our programs and services. We may use ARC as a consultant when working with some of our clients who have intellectual or developmental disabilities. We also look forward to providing consultation to them on how to best serve their clients who are blind or low vision.

**Meeting with the Director of Iowa Workforce Development Beth Townsend-** We are excited about future partnerships with IWD on job fairs for our consumers and seminars on how to best navigate and take advantage of job fairs. They will be partnering with our training center to either offer our students weekly dedicated programming or to introduce them to the resources the workforce centers currently offer. We also look forward to training their staff on how to best serve blind job-seekers.

**Paul McCartney Concert-** Paul McCartney offers 20 tickets at each of his shows to people who are blind, low vision, Deaf, or hard-of-hearing. ICB will be the beneficiary of tickets to an October concert at Casey’s Center. Fifteen OIB clients and five IDB staff will be attending the concert.

**ICUB and NFBI Listening Sessions-** Members of IDB’s leadership team held 90-minute listening sessions for the Iowa Council of the United Blind and the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa. Sessions were well attended and offered the community opportunities to ask questions and provide feedback on proposed center policies.

**ICUB Convention-** Many IDB staff participated in the ICUB convention. Director Cervenka and the leadership team offered another listening session; Director Cervenka spoke at the Saturday luncheon; the library staffed a booth on the concourse; Mark Edge served as an emcee, and several other staff spoke, volunteered, and otherwise participated actively.

**State Workforce Development Board-** Director Cervenka is now IDB’s representative to the Workforce Board, which oversees federally funded employment programs in Iowa.

**All-Staff Training-** We are preparing for our 2.5-day all-staff training. The first day will focus on strategic planning, our mission, vision, values, and culture. The second day will focus on day-to-day work, such as case notes, serving older adults with vision loss, etc. On the third day, staff will focus on serving clients with additional disabilities and learn about the American Printing House for the Blind Connect Center.

# Financial

## Budget Report:

Enclosed are the following reports:

* State Fiscal Year 2027 Budget
* State Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Summary General Fund
* State Fiscal Year 2026 Gifts and Bequests Summary

# Communication – Connie Mendenhall

## Website and Social Media

The Communication Team has been working with different areas across the agency to promote agency events and national awareness months, weeks, and days. We have put together several campaigns using social media and linking to our website. In August for Children’s Eye Health and Safety month Director Cervenka wrote an open letter to eye doctors that was shared on our website and emailed to hundreds of eye clinics across the state. The letter was then adapted for educators and was mailed to hundreds of school district superintendents across the state.

In addition to the larger promotions, we are using social media linked to our website to post promos and videos of current and future events within all our programs and services.

## Outreach Events

Summer is always a slow time for presentation and speaker requests. In addition to the events in September I am receiving requests for October and November.

June

6-10 tour with potential client

6-19 Presentation at Springdale Assisted Living in Humboldt

August

8-11 Presentation Nevada Senior Center

8-19 Tour Department of Health and Human Services tour

September

9-18 Make Your Mark IDDC Conference

9-19 Presentation Simpson College about Inclusivity, Education and Blindness

## Case Management System Update

We are continuing to work with Encourpe each quarter to assist in preparing the RSA 911 quarterly reports. Tyler is currently working on system changes and corrections on the reporting piece of the system. The current release package being tested by IDB contains corrections to the system generated RSA 911 quarterly report, Ticket Tracker, the report used to track social security reporting information, the RSA 7OB report, our Older Blind report and the quarterly Board report. We are hoping the testing and remediation work is done and the release is moved into production by mid-June. Moving the release package into Production by mid-June will allow for ample report review and accuracy testing before the next submission date in August.

There is no change to this since it was last reported. We are meeting with Tyler to discuss the next production release hopefully next week.

## Policy, Procedure and Document Management System

The Leadership Team has begun training sessions with our new Policy, Procedure and Document vendor. The vendor has worked with our I.T. Specialist to install and set-up the product.

The Power DMS platform is designed to track documents from implementation to termination in a secure and compliant platform. The system offers a platform where we can track each step of a document The system allows users to be assigned for review and revision; version tracking and storage and we can assign and track staff attestations to entire manuals or specific documents. The system also has a platform for training materials including audio and video material.

# Education and Training – Ambrose Ball-Harney

The ET Team is very excited to be launching a series of statewide weeklong skills retreats available to IDB VR and IL clients. These retreats will offer quality instruction and programming to clients around the state with instructors that will scale lessons to where individuals are at. These skills retreats will offer lodging wherever they take place to facilitate participants being able to fully participate in the scheduled 40 hours of training. These skills retreats will be capped by briefing and debriefing by the ET team on Sunday and Saturday respectively and then will dive in on Monday for a week of programming that will encompass structured skill building classes, confidence building outings, and meaningful seminar discussions. IDB provides door-to-door transportation for these skills retreats and they are no cost to IDB clients. Our first upcoming retreat will be taking place in Council Bluffs on October 12th and run through October 18th. We have sent email blasts out as well as flyers to VRC’s and RT’s but if you have any further questions regarding our Week long Skills Retreats please reach out to Ambrose Ball-Harney, at 515-829-7411 or email [ambrose.ballharney@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:ambrose.ballharney@blind.state.ia.us).

The ET team is also excited to continue offering educational and engaging youth weekend retreats statewide as well. Our Youth Weekend Retreats offer effective skill-building activities and lessons as well as varied confidence-building activities and workshops featuring various career speakers and information for students ages 14-21. These weekend retreats present critical opportunities for students to take those first steps towards empowerment and practice self-advocacy in realistic and supportive environments. Our first weekend retreat this fall will be taking place in Dubuque and start on September 19th. Again, door to door transportation is provided for students and the event is no cost to IDB clients, any further questions please reach out to Ambrose Ball-Harney at 515-829-7411 or email [ambrose.ballharney@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:ambrose.ballharney@blind.state.ia.us).

# Independent Living Program - Kimberley Walford

## Super Community-Based Training

The Iowa Department for the Blind’s Rehabilitation Teaching Team hosted a Super Community-Based Training (CBT) in Des Moines, August 12 - 16, 2025, with eight attendees who made up of Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living clients.

Super-CBT offers various classes such as Home-Management, Technology, Travel, and Braille for clients to gain disability related skills to help them meet their employment and independent living goal. Participants are offered a “student choice” to select a class at the end of each day that was of interest to them. Business Class is yet another anchor class where students gathered daily to hold a discussion about the misconceptions of blindness and society’s misunderstanding about blindness while at the same time learning from one another on how to best advocate for their rights and interests.

Another piece of the training includes an opportunity for participants to meet with the Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center Director in-person. The intent is to provide the participants with more information about the Center if they are giving thoughts to potentially enroll in Center training.

As we finalize our training program on Saturday, participants may invite their family members to attend. They have prepared brunch, typically during Home Management class on Friday that is readied Saturday morning. Former Center students who participated in a previous Center training are invited to talk about their experience and how they continued to implement what they learned after attending Center training. They encourage participants to consider enrolling in Center training if this is a goal for them. Certificates of completion for attending our Super-CBT are also presented to all participants.

As we remain future-focused to serve Iowans who are blind and with vision loss, we are working with Program Administrator, Ambrose Ball-Harney to strategically merge our Super CBTs and Regional CBT with Skills Retreats that will be offered around the state, open to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Independent Living (IL) and Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) clients. These retreats will offer a dynamic and engaging week filled with opportunities for clients to learn new skills and connect with blind Iowans. Our Independent Living team is excited about this opportunity as it brings training opportunities closer to the client’s home and community.

Finally, here are a few testimonials because of the August Super-CBT training:

* “I feel like the whole experience was super positive and good overall. I expected it to be overwhelmingly frustrating and challenging, and it wasn't. I want to come back!”
* “I feel like I'm accomplishing something each time and how comfortable I am becoming each time I participate in a CBT”
* “I’m so glad I came. I’m doing this to prepare for my future. I want to come back.”

## Social Media Blitz

The Iowa Department for the Blind’s social media platforms along with Director Cervenka’s various communications forums and Ms. Horton’s assistance has helped the Independent Living program share information on Facebook among friends, family and new acquaintances across Iowa. In turn, this has resulted in an uptick in our online referrals as well as email and voice message calls inquiring about program services. We will continue to use these methods to promote our programs and services as we are seeing tremendous results.

## Independent Living Forum

Our upcoming Independent Living Forum will be held Tuesday, September 9th at 1:00 PM to approximately 2 PM. This is a time where Independent Living staff share out activities that have been taking place over the past quarter. We encourage the public to join us that day. The is opportunity for public comments and time for Q&A.

## Olmstead Consumer Taskforce

In 2003, Governor Tom Vilsack issued Executive Order 27 calling on Iowa’s state agencies to identify barriers posed by their policies and programs and develop plans to remove them. When this Order was created, the current Olmstead Taskforce advised the Governor’s Office on strategies to promote community integration, including changes policies or programs. They continue in advising to provide valuable feedback in developing, implementing and monitoring Iowa’s Olmstead Plan.

Moving forward to 2025, Health and Human Services (H.H.S.) is now charged with identifying and developing strategic priorities as well as staff for updates to the Iowa Olmstead Plan. Currently. The five-year plan is intended to be dynamic, which allows for emergent response time while moving operations of H.H.S. new agency forward.

The purpose and goal of this plan is to establish clear focus and direction of disability integration for the next five years.

This plan will serve as the framework to deliver on the mission and vision of the Olmstead Decision in the State of Iowa:

• Set Priorities for New Initiatives related to Olmstead

• Connect Olmstead to Strategic Priorities

• Reflect and Embed Strategic Priorities in Communications to stakeholders and the disability community.

• Guide Day to Day Collaboration and Culture

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

## Library Updates

The new National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) digital audio player is available to all patrons. Our library participated in the pilot program for the new players. The DA2 boasts significant upgrades, including built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connectivity, along with a substantial 28 GB of internal storage. This means users can now directly connect to BARD (NLS Braille and Audio Reading Download) to easily download audiobooks and magazines, store them on the device, and enjoy listening through Bluetooth-enabled speakers or headphones, offering an even more convenient and seamless reading experience.

The Instructional Materials Center staff developed a monthly report using our production tracking system, Athena. This report provides monthly statistics on the accessible educational materials that were ordered, produced and provided to students across Iowa. The report for the 2024-2025 school year has been included in this Commission Report for review. Check out the real-time IMC production statistics on our Athena ordering portal page <https://www.athena-ia.com/#/>

The library and Instructional Materials Center (IMC) continue to offer training, information and resources to Iowa educators. This summer the library/IMC provided two sessions of a two-week online, self-paced course for seventeen educators. Topics included how to order accessible educational materials for students and the role of the Instructional Materials Center. Each participant also completed Lessons 1-10 of the Library’s Braille Bits course. Braille Bits is an introductory course to braille designed to familiarize participants with the braille system.

This summer youth patrons went on an adventure with the *Power Up: Game on for Summer Reading*program. It was an 8-week virtual Summer Reading program that took participants on a thrilling journey across the United States, exploring different regions through exciting games, hands-on crafts, and special guest appearances. Thirty-seven registered to participate in twenty-two programs throughout June and July. The library also hosted an 8-week Career Exploration experience for teens in collaboration with IDB’s LEAP Summer Program. Each Thursday afternoon special guest speakers joined participants introducing different careers and STEM activities.

Library staff also participated in the Downtown Des Moines Farmer’s Market, STEAM on the Ridge and presented at various conferences and conventions to share about the library and IMC.

## Upcoming Events, Programming and Outreach

The library’s fall programs kick-off in September as we celebrate Library Card Sign-Up Month and National Literacy Month.

* We invite you to take part in the September Reading Challenge, where the goal is simple: spend time, each day reading and track your minutes. Whether you enjoy novels, nonfiction, or magazines, every minute counts!
* We are excited to share a new way to connect with our library staff. With *Ask a Librarian*, you can get quick, reliable answers to your questions—whether you need help finding the right book, learning how to use library resources, or have questions about BARD. Our librarians are here to guide you, share expertise, and make your library experience easier and more enjoyable.  Every Tuesday from 9-10 am and every Thursday from 3-4 pm for the month of September, connect with library staff via Zoom.
* Join us for a new kind of book club. Do you want to talk about what you are reading and hear about what others are reading? This book club is for you! Introducing the *No Book, Book Club*. You choose what you want to read, bring whatever title you’re reading and share it with the group. The No Book, Book Club will have its first meeting on Wednesday, September 17, 2025, from 2:00 – 3:00 pm and will meet bi-monthly after that. The club will meet via Zoom.
* Beyond the Book: Teen Book Club exciting activities, awesome reading all in a club that goes *Beyond the Books*. Each month features a unique theme, a highlighted book title (with accessible formats available), and an optional activity to inspire discussion and connection. Open to teens who love stories and good vibes! Program will begin on September 25th and run through March 26th, Thursday 5:00-6:00 PM
* Beginning on Thursday, September 18th, join us for Braille Babies Storytime from 10:00 -10:30 am every Thursday!  You can join in person at the Iowa Department for the Blind or virtually via Zoom. Designed for children aged 0-4, this program will teach children the importance of touch, textures, and tactiles while exploring beginning braille skills.

These programs will join our regularly scheduled programs that start each fall. Including Makerspace Mondays, Youth After School Program, Tuesday and Thursday Book Discussion Groups and the IMC Office Hours.

The library will be hosting the Midlands/Southern Regional (NLS) Libraries conference on September 15th and 16th at the Iowa Department for the Blind. Librarians from midland and southern states will join staff from the NLS for two days of collaboration, resource sharing and learning. We look forward to highlighting our library’s processes, services and programs, as well as sharing about the Department.

## Online and Social Media

Library Blogs

*Turning the Pages* Library and IMC Blog. Find information on library services, programs and resources. <http://iowalibrary.blog>

Podcasts

Library News. A podcast by library staff about upcoming library events, programs, latest books and more released twice a month.

# Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center Report – Karly Prinds

The Center has five students and one staff in training. We have five new students starting Center training through the first week in October. There are also two more students that start dates will more than likely be set this week, and meetings have been scheduled for other potential students to start in the Center as well. We have two graduations in September and are very proud of these students as they have concrete plans moving forward in their success.

We had a few students who chose to attend the National Federation of the Blind National Convention in July. Students learned a lot, networked with lots of individuals, and made lasting connections.

The Center continues to work with our students to achieve their goals and help them be successful in their training. We strive to welcome new students with various training needs and help them achieve their dreams so that they can be successful and self-sufficient.

# Vocational Rehabilitation – Keri Osterhaus

## Position Vacancies and Changes

To improve service delivery, IDB has integrated Rehabilitation Technology Specialists (RTS) into the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) team. This change streamlines workflows, enhances efficiency, and allows for quicker response times to meet client needs. RTSs assess client technology skills, including computers, phones, and assistive devices, and provide demonstrations, recommendations, worksite assessments, and training.

Recently, our RTSs simplified the referral process, making it easier for VR clients to be referred for services and have taken on additional roles to assist in the purchases of necessary devices for clients with the goal of decreasing the time it takes for a client to receive the equipment they need to be successful in education or employment.

## Program Updates

Currently, IDB serves 463 clients accessing vocational rehabilitation services. Since July 1, 2025, the program has seen 34 new applications and developed 29 new Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs). At the close of the 2024 program year (June 30, 2025), 44 individuals successfully exited the program with employment in the following job titles:

* Buyers and Purchasing Agents, Farm Products (2)
* Budget Analyst
* Network Security Engineer
* Computer Network Support Specialist
* Level 1 Help Desk Technician
* Business Analyst
* Job Coach
* Residential Care Assistant
* Direct Support Professional
* Lawyer
* Rehabilitation/Mobility Teacher for the Visually Impaired
* Secondary School Teacher
* Braillist
* Cook (2)
* Teacher Assistant
* Graphic Designer
* Music Director
* TVI
* Physical Therapist
* Pediatric Nurse
* Direct Support
* Food Prep Worker
* Dining Room Attendant
* Janitor (2)
* Personal Trainer
* Customer Service (3)
* Information Clerk
* Inventory Specialist
* Ship, Receive Clerk
* Executive Administrative Assistant
* Secretaries and Administrative Assistants
* Data Processor
* Office Assistant
* Office Clerk
* HVAC Installer
* Laundry Worker
* Production Helper (2)
* Stock Clerks

These individuals are earning a median wage of $17.88 per hour, with an average of $22.49 per hour. They are working a median of 40 hours/week, with an average of 29.55 hours/week. Currently, 11 individuals are employed and set to close their cases within the next three months.

## Supported Employment Updates

Following Supported Employment (SE) training with Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), IDB has actively collaborated with providers across the state to enhance services. Of the 62 clients who were identified as requiring supported employment services on their Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), 52 are contracted with CRPs for SE support, across 15 active contracts statewide.

Our Supported Employment Specialist, Rebekah Traver, has visited each CRP site for on-site training, focusing on non-visual techniques and addressing misconceptions. Additionally, four new CRPs have been added in underserved areas such as Council Bluffs, Sioux City, Atlantic, and Davenport.

Rebekah continues to develop a "lunch and learn" series to address CRP challenges, particularly in rural areas. She also works with IDB counselors to ensure proper funding, authorizations, and reporting for clients. IDB counselors are also provided with internal training on job development, SE funding authorization, and rural contracting.

## Exciting Developments in BEP!

New Technology and Entrepreneurial Growth

BEP is introducing innovative technology to improve services. Recently, entrepreneur Dwain Sundine tested a new coffee machine concept at the Swisher Southbound Rest Area on I-380. This machine will offer a broader range of coffee options and help reduce common failures, potentially improving customer satisfaction across BEP locations.

Training the Next Generation of Entrepreneurs

BEP is preparing to license three new trainees, the first in several years. These trainees are completing critical tasks like ServSafe Manager Training, Sexual Harassment Prevention, and equipment management. They are also preparing to manage vending machines, micro markets, and the revival of hot food services. BEP staff and VR counselors are supporting the trainees to ensure successful transitions into entrepreneurship.

Cashless Devices for a Better Customer Experience

BEP is upgrading to the PayPlus Omni cashless payment devices, which offer a more accessible touchscreen interface and enhanced security with chip card capabilities. These devices improve signal strength, ensuring better service for both customers and operators, and feature a more user-friendly Vending Management System (VMS).

For more information about BEP opportunities, contact Matt Nemmers, BEP Executive Officer, at matthew.nemmers@blind.state.ia.us.

## Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA)

IDB is conducting a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) to evaluate the rehabilitation needs of blind Iowans. This assessment will inform future policy and decision-making, ensuring the IDB can best serve its clients. The CSNA will be completed by November 2025, allowing additional time for stakeholder interviews and data collection.

## Collaborating for Student Success

As high schools begin the new year, VR teams are preparing for IEP meetings, school visits, and planning for year-round opportunities for students. IDB is excited to partner again with Sky’s the Limit and Blind Savvy to offer virtual training sessions for students across Iowa. The training topics will include:

* Accessible Technology for Success (September)
* Good Jobs for All (October, for National Disability Employment Awareness Month)
* Advocating with Others – Including Accessible Voting (November)

These sessions will help prepare students for the challenges and opportunities they may face in higher education and the workforce.