

# Iowa Department for the Blind

## Mission Statement

Empower blind Iowans to be gainfully employed and live independently.

## Vision Statement

To be the world's leader in blind rehabilitation services.

## **Appropriation Requested: \$2,247,499**

Requested Increase from SFY19: \$79,877

## **Purpose of Increase**

We are looking to add a 6th Independent Living Teacher (classification Service Specialist for the Blind 2). The approximate cost of this position including benefits and travel costs is \$79,877.

## **Why is the Position Necessary?**

Our traditional Independent Living service model was to send out teachers to individual's homes. The gaps between these visits would generally be no more than 4 weeks. While the training was very effective, it was also very time and travel intensive and therefore very expensive to provide. As our state appropriation declined, our number of teachers decreased from 9 in 2012 to 4 in 2017. This increased the time between visits to 6 weeks or more. This greatly slowed client progress toward their goals. Clients were not retaining information covered between visits.

In the spring of 2017, IDB began working with the Older Individuals Who Are Blind Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC) to identify ways that we could leverage existing resources to better serve older Iowans experiencing significant vision loss. Our goal was to find a way to reduce travel time and increase client contact.

In working with the OIB-TAC, we created a cluster model for training. In this model, teachers created clusters of students in a specific area. The teachers then meet with all of the clients in that cluster once a week for 4 weeks. The teachers would then move on to another cluster.

We have been rolling out this service model over the past year and are seeing very positive results. Students are receiving more services, completing objectives more quickly, and better retaining skills between visits. Teachers also report less frustration and a better ability to see more rapid progress.

We currently have five teachers in the field to cover the entire state of Iowa. This means that teachers in less densely populated areas need to cover more than 20 counties. Larger distances make the clusters less efficient as well as causing more clusters to be created. This results in greater wait times between cluster visits and increases wait times to receive initial services. Adding a sixth teacher to the field would allow us to decrease territory size and reduce the number of clusters each teacher needs to rotate between. This would decrease wait times and

allow clients to obtain their objectives more quickly. This in turn ensures that older adults who are losing significant vision can remain independent in their own homes.

## Why is Additional State Money Needed?

We receive two federal grants to cover Independent Living costs.

Our Older Individuals Who Are Blind (OIB) grant is \$312,000.

Our Independent Living Grant from the Administration on Community Living totals \$66,000.

Our total expenditures have been as follows:

- FY2018: \$588,378
- FY2017: \$719,613
- FY2016: \$1,052,189
- FY2015: \$946,068

Our match requirement is 11% and we are consistently spending more than 5 times the required state dollars because the services are extremely important to those we serve. Spending more state dollars without a corresponding increase in state appropriation, would jeopardize our ability to provide match for our primary Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) basic support grant.

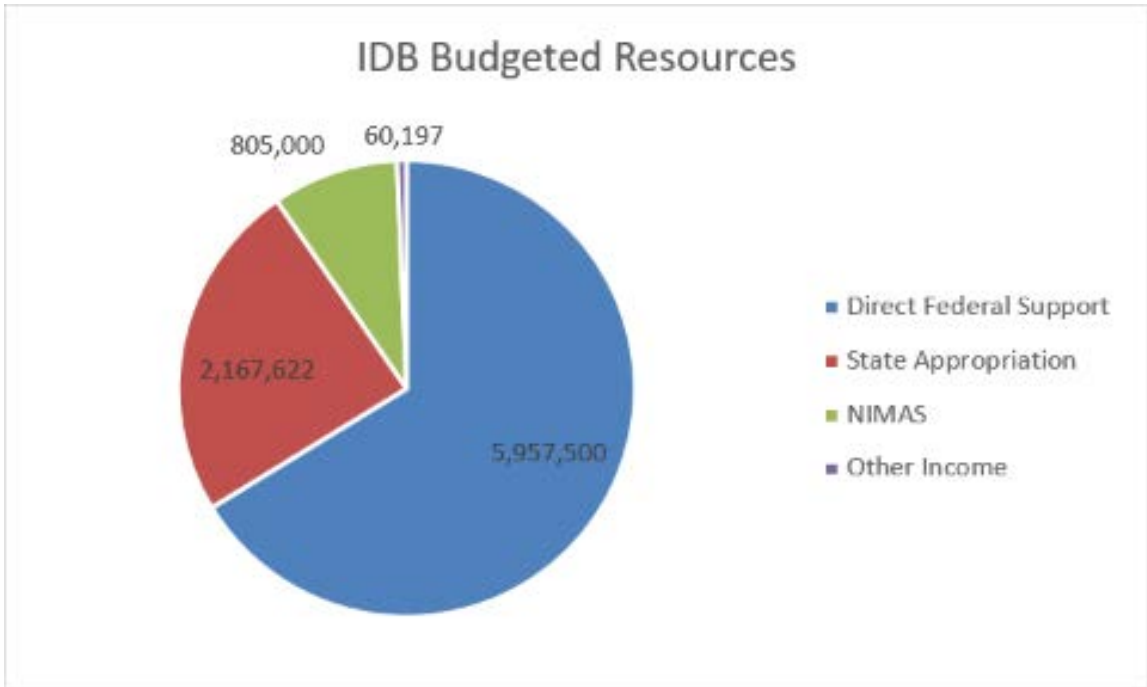
We do continue to seek funding from other sources, however, in order to add a position, we need to be sure that our funding is stable. Previous staff reductions have resulted in significant service delays, client dissatisfaction and negative public reactions. We need to know that the position will be supported for at least two years.

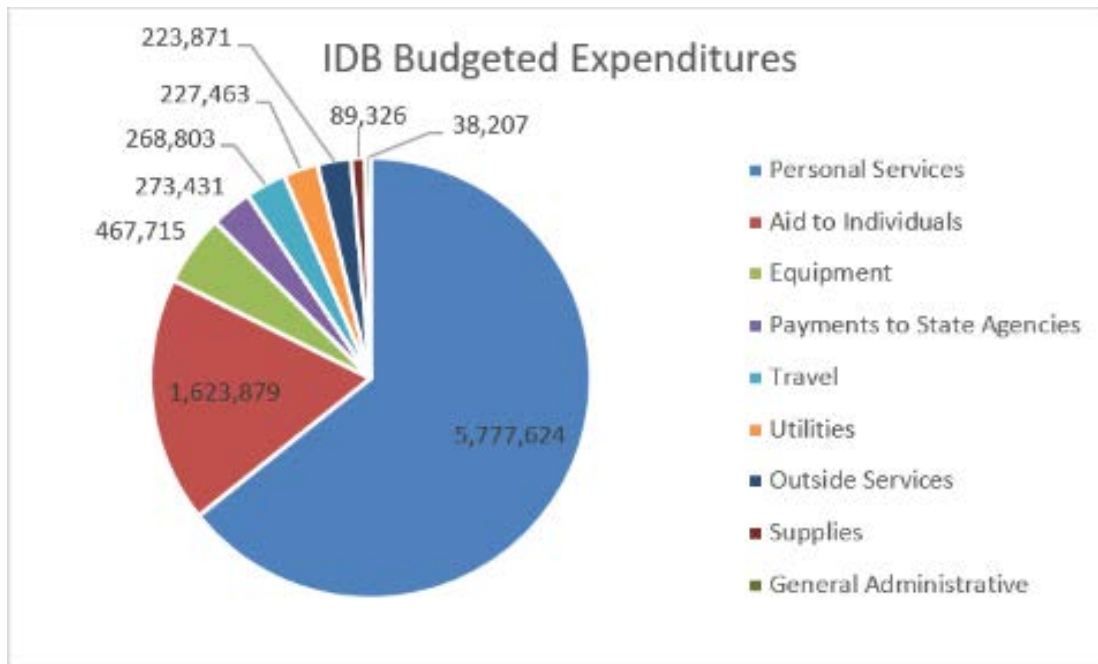
## Operating Budget Overview

Funding Sources	
Direct Federal Support	5,957,500
State Appropriation	2,167,622
NIMAS Grant	805,000
Other Income	60,197
Total Resources	8,990,319

Disposition of Resources	
Personal Services	5,777,624
Aid to Individuals	1,623,879
Equipment	467,715

Payments to State Agencies	273,431
Travel	268,803
Utilities	227,463
Outside Services	223,871
Supplies	89,326
General Administrative	38,207
Total Expenditures	8,990,319





## Organizational Chart

### Iowa Commission for the Blind

- Sandra Ryan, Chair (since 5/17, reappointed 5/18)
- Joe Van Lent, Commissioner (since 5/16, reappointment pending)
- Ryan Brems, Commissioner (since 5/17)

#### Key Responsibilities:

- Approve agency policies
- Hire and evaluate director
- Receive and share stakeholder feedback

### Emily Wharton, Director

Time in Current Position: since 10/16

#### Key Responsibilities:

- Lead agency to fulfillment of mission and achievement of vision
- Allocate resources in alignment with agency goals and values
- Provide clear communication and promote collaboration with and among staff, partners, and consumers.

### Sarah Willeford, Library Director

Time in Current Position: since 2/14

#### Key Responsibilities:

- Ensure the provision of high quality, timely instructional materials to blind youth
- Ensure the provision of books, newspapers, and magazines in alternative formats to blind Iowans as a regional library for the National Library Service for the Blind & Physically Handicapped

- Promote braille literacy and inspire a love of reading in blind and low vision youth to promote educational and career success

### **Andrew Pulford, CFO**

Time in Current Position: since 2/17

#### *Key Responsibilities:*

- Oversee all agency financial operations and ensure compliance with all state and federal laws and regulations
- Oversee agency COOP/COG planning
- Provide agency director and Commission Board with accurate financial information and sound advice

### **Helen Stevens, CTO / Education & Training Program Administrator**

Time in Current Position: since 2/17

#### *Key Responsibilities:*

- Oversee LEAP youth summer camp and weekend retreats
- Ensure the provision of high quality and timely disability related skills training and rehabilitation technology field services to vocational rehabilitation clients throughout the state
- Serve as agency CTO/CIO and ensure that agency has secure, efficient, and accessible technology with which to do their jobs

### **Keri Osterhaus, Vocational Rehabilitation Program Administrator**

Time in Current Position: since 1/14

#### *Key Responsibilities:*

- Ensure that high quality and timely vocational rehabilitation services are provided to clients which empower them to achieve their employment goals
- Collaborate with core and required partners to ensure compliance with the Workforce Innovation & Opportunities Act (WIOA)
- Help employers' breakdown stereotypes regarding the capabilities of blind workers and take advantage of this underutilized source of talent

### **Alan Bickell, Center Director / Business Enterprises Program Administrator**

Time in Current Position: since 2/17

#### *Key Responsibilities:*

- Provide world class adjustment to blindness training to clients attending the Adult Orientation & Adjustment Program (commonly referred to as "the Orientation Center")
- Oversee Randolph Shepherd vending program
- Serve as building manager and provide supervision to maintenance staff

### **Kim Barber, Independent Living Program Administrator**

Time in Current Position: since 9/13

#### *Key Responsibilities:*

- Provide individual and small group independent living skills training to older Iowans that will allow them to remain in their homes and continue to be active in their communities
- Provide assistive devices to enable older individuals who are experiencing extensive vision loss to continue to perform essential life functions
- Provide information and training to service providers to assist them in working with older individuals who are blind

## **Core Functions**

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services assist persons who are blind in preparing for, obtaining, and retaining employment. Applicants are made eligible based upon their visual disability, their need for VR services, and they're intent-to work. The VR counselor and the eligible individual jointly identify a vocational goal and the services needed to achieve it. Services may include:

- Training -Training to help individuals achieve the vocational goals they have selected. Individuals may need training to acquire the skills of blindness and vocational training or post-secondary education.
- Rehabilitation Technology Services - IDB provides such services as job site assessment, procurement of access technology, and training in the use of adaptive equipment, blind employees can perform their jobs competitively and efficiently. Individuals can explore various types of access technology and receive an evaluation of their needs, skills, and resources so that they can make informed choices about which options are best for them. They can borrow equipment from the Department's loaner pool to help determine which items meet their training and employment needs.
- Job Placement Services - VR counselors help job seekers develop a job-search plan, write a resume, practice interviewing, and locate job-search and placement resources.
- Services to Employers - VR staff also provide services to employers and partner agencies. These include:
  - Participation in job fairs, technology expos, and speakers' bureaus.
  - Provision of information and training on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) assessment of job sites, recommendations for accessibility, and referral to appropriate vendors.
  - Through our library, assistance to employers in producing employee manuals and training materials in such alternative formats as Braille and electronic text.
  - Partnership with other training and employment programs to facilitate the recruitment of qualified blind employees.
  - Provision of guidance and training to information technology staff of public agencies and programs so that web sites available to the general public are also accessible to blind persons.

### **Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped**

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

The library circulates books and magazines on digital cartridge, in Braille, and in large print to eligible borrowers throughout the state. The library maintains a collection of over 200,000 items and makes available to its borrowers over 120 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. The library provides independent access to the library's collection through the on-line public access catalog (OPAC) and Braille and audio

reading download (BARD). Linked to the Department's web site, OPAC allows borrowers to search the library's collection, select books, and put them on reserve.

The library administers the NFB Newslines program in the State of Iowa. This gives Iowans with print disabilities access to local and national newspapers and magazines via the telephone or internet.

The library transcribes print materials into Braille and recorded formats. Employment-related, educational, and leisure materials not already available in alternative media are transcribed upon request. The library also transcribes other magazines and books appropriate for its collection and acquires instructional and employment materials for students and workers.

The library's instructional materials center (IMC) locates textbooks and other educational materials for Iowa's K-12 and college students who cannot use standard print. The IMC also locates job-related materials for employed Iowans for whom standard print is not an option.

## **Independent Living Rehabilitation Services**

Through the Independent Living (IL) Rehabilitation Program, elderly learn the skills they need to live independently and participate actively in family and community life. By learning the alternative techniques of blindness, they can choose the privacy and independence of living in their own homes over moving into expensive care centers. IL teachers travel throughout the state to provide a variety of services including:

- Instruction in the alternative skills of blindness in homes and local communities
- Individual and group training in travel with the long white cane, Braille, keyboarding, cooking, cleaning, shopping, and leisure activities
- Provision of in-service training, IL staff members give instruction in blindness techniques to community service providers so that they, in turn, can provide this training to the blind individuals they serve.

## **Business Enterprise Program (BEP)**

IDB serves as the state licensing agency for the federal Randolph-Shepherd Program. This program gives priority to blind managers to operate vending facilities in state and federal buildings and interstate rest areas. We currently have 17 operators across the state. This program is funded through our vocational rehabilitation basic support grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration and required state matching dollars.

## **A Few of Our Vocational Rehabilitation Success Stories**

### *Assisting in Retaining Employment*

Sophia was diagnosed with Stargardt's Disease at the age of 17. Upon this diagnosis, she was provided services from the Department for the Blind in New Jersey. She earned a Master's of Safety Engineering and relocated to Seattle for her husband's residency. While in Seattle, Sophia obtained a position with Amazon as a Program Manager in the Safety Considerations Department. Sophia moved to Iowa in early 2017. She reached out to the Iowa Department for the Blind to obtain services in mobility, optician referral, and transportation training.

IDB helped Sophia learn to navigate the three different bus providers in Iowa City. She learned how to use a White Cane to travel in her community and airports as she travels frequently for her job.

Sophia's vision has declined in the past few years. She asked for assistance in how to manage her home. IDB trained Sophia in how to mark her appliances. Sophia learned techniques to work with customer service at a local grocery store. Sophia is now able to ask for personal assistance while shopping with ease at any store that she visits.

During her training, Sophia discussed applying for a new position as a Quality Control Manager at Amazon with her vocational rehabilitation counselor. They discussed the job duties and her concerns about the position. The biggest concerns that Sophia had was the 50% travel requirement and diagnosing safety concerns within the distribution centers. Her counselor encouraged Sophia and reminded her that she now had the travel skills to be able to successfully meet this requirement. Sophia was offered the position with a \$20,000 raise. She discovered that she needed some accommodations with her work technology and her new position. Sophia and her counselor contacted her Work Accommodations Coordinator at Amazon. Amazon was more than accommodating. They immediately obtained the equipment that Sophia needed.

Before receiving services from IDB, Sophia did not know many people in the Coralville area. While learning how to navigate public transportation, Sophia met another individual that is also blind. This individual helped Sophia learn some local tricks to the buses and introduced Sophia to other people in the community. This has increased her ties to the community and feels like she has more options than just her apartment building.

Sophia has repeatedly thanked the Iowa Department for the Blind for giving her confidence in her daily living skills and the encouragement to apply for a different position.

#### *Finding Employment after an Employer Closes*

Troy is a deaf/blind individual that had previously been employed in a small town grocery store. After three years, the store closed its doors. Troy referred himself to IDB to request assistance in finding another job. IDB staff assisted with the job search and were able to meet with the store manager at Fareway. In initial conversations with Troy, it was determined that a natural support could provide assistance with communication as sign language interpreting was a need. After an initial meeting and an interview, the store hired Troy to bag groceries and stock shelves.

Transportation was also needed as the client lived 15 miles from his new employment. IDB staff met with Franklin County, as they oversee the bus service that drives from Hampton, to Mason City with a stop in Troy's hometown every day, Monday through Friday. IDB staff assisted Troy in requesting a work schedule that would allow him to work during hours where he can catch the bus to and from work. Natural supports provided job coaching, while Troy learned the job. Troy is now doing the job independently. He takes a lot of pride in his work and makes work his priority. He hopes to continue to grow his responsibilities at Fareway.



### *Turning Challenges into Opportunities*

In addition to her blindness, Joanne was dealing with brain cancer and mental illness that put her in the hospital several times over the course of her open case. IDB assisted with technology training, supporting her college enrollment, and provided guidance and counseling to help Joanne find the right career path for her. Despite the challenges she faced, Joanne finished her BA degree and started volunteering with the local mental health hospital. Through this, Joanne was offered a position as a peer support specialist. She also works as a leader for group counseling and works on the suicide hotline. Joanne has successfully closed her case with IDB now that she is gainfully employed.

### *Transition Services Making a Difference*

IDB started meeting with Taylor while he was in high school. Taylor successfully completed college at ISU with the support of IDB. After graduating from ISU, Taylor was able to secure employment as a quality control drafter, earning \$20/hour. Taylor was able to move out of his parent's home and live independently.

IDB provided pre-employment transition services to Brett starting when he was a freshman in high school. With the focus on students securing work experiences prior to graduating, IDB helped Brett find a work site assessment to determine his skills and abilities. After one week of the worksite assessment, the employer offered Brett a paid job. Brett is the lobby attendant at a fast food chain and has been working there successfully over a year.

## **A Few Independent Living Success Stories**

### *Staying Independent*

Mary is 90 years old and has age-related macular degeneration and glaucoma. She has other medical conditions including hearing loss.

She lives in a senior townhome which she owns and she doesn't want others to do anything that she is capable of learning and doing for herself.

Mary contacted Iowa Department for the Blind because she was having challenges in living independently given her vision loss. She met with a teacher and together, they assessed what non-visual skills training was needed. She then set her independent living goal and they worked together to set objectives developed.

Mary took the training seriously and practiced what she learned between teacher visits. She worked on non-visual blindness skills in areas of daily living, communications, integration, and leisure. Mary was diligent, asked questions, studied, practiced, completed all of her homework and gained confidence every day. Mary successfully completed her Independent Living training program in 13 months. She is able to stay in her own home and maintain her freedom and autonomy.

### *Never Too Late to Learn*

Donna lived alone in rural Southwest Iowa. Although she had had vision loss since she was a child, she had never received services from the Department for the Blind. Her parents did not feel she needed services. When she married, her husband also did not feel she needed services

from the Department and when she ran into something she had trouble reading her husband would simply read it for her.

This client had reached out to the department when she started having trouble seeing her telephone numbers and the time. She had set an Independent Living goal to stay in her home as long as should could. To reach this goal, she set daily living objectives to identify canned goods, identify clothes, manage her money, and to learn how to communicate or stay in touch with friends and family. This client had severe numbness in her fingers due to a shoulder injury and failed carpal tunnel surgery. She received a Pen Friend (a label recorder) and learned to label her canned goods and other items around her house. She also learned to identify her clothing by using safety pens. She received an iBill reader to identify her money as well as how to feel the coins and fold the currency.

We were able to work with her local phone company to get her directory assistance exemption. She is now able to stay in touch with her family and her friends. This Individual did not think that she would like the digital talking books from our Library; however, once she gave them a try she became an avid library borrower.

Another focus was self-advocacy. Her teacher worked with her on advocating for herself with her family when she has issues that would arise related to blindness. From childhood, Donna was never given an opportunity to advocate for herself. Her parents felt a lot of denial and shame and Donna internalized these feelings for herself. This continued with her husband. Now it was her time - her time and she was going to learn to deal with blindness and not allow it to control her life decisions. Now blindness does not define who she is. She is able to overcome and move beyond any obstacle.