



Iowa Department
for the Blind

Kim Reynolds
Governor

Adam Gregg
Lt. Governor

Emily Wharton
Director

Young Adult Transition Program

Program Objective

To help students complete Individualized Education Program goals and gain the self-care, self-advocacy, communication, orientation and mobility, and workplace-readiness skills in order to participate in comprehensive adjustment to blindness training programs, obtain post-secondary education, and enter competitive integrated employment.

Program Features

- Centrally located in Des Moines
- Intensive individualized training utilizing deliberate practice to achieve skills mastery
- Curriculum that utilizes Structured Discovery methodology to promote problem-solving, growth, and empowerment
- Opportunity for intensive daily braille, assistive technology, and orientation and mobility instruction
- Opportunity for students to learn to travel independently in urban, suburban, and college environments with easy access to public transportation
- Access to a diverse range of employers in the Des Moines area for career exploration and work experiences
- Presence of positive blind role models including blind instructors who utilize the skills being taught on a daily basis
- Convenient access to Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to help arrange additional services and supports, and provide guidance and counseling
- Regular practice in personal management skills including shopping for groceries and preparing meals
- Opportunity to provide intensive skills training to youth who have lost vision in middle or high school and need to develop skills to rejoin their class

Why This Program Is Needed

In an ideal world, every person graduating from high school would have all the skills needed to continue their education, begin an apprenticeship, or enter the workforce. This is rarely the reality for blind or low-vision youth. IDB's Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors have found that blind and low-vision youth lack the ability to get from place to place efficiently and independently, cook their meals, manage their money, access printed information, write down and read back notes, and other basic skills that serve as the foundation for adult life and career success. In addition, the majority of blind and low vision youth coming to our agency lack the self-advocacy skills and self-confidence necessary to stay motivated, interview well, and obtain the right accommodations in a given situation.

524 4th Street Des Moines, IA 50309-2364 – Tel: 515-281-1333 – 1-800-362-2587 – Fax: 515-281-1263 –
<https://blind.iowa.gov>



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What Success Looks Like

Students will have successfully completed this program when they have met their IEP goals and have the skills and self-confidence they need to take the next step into adulthood. This might mean participating in the IDB Adult Orientation & Adjustment Center, beginning an apprenticeship, attending a 2- or 4-year college, or working with their vocational rehabilitation counselor and Iowa Works partners to embark on a career pathway.

What We Want To Prevent

- **Youth who are blind or have low vision living in overly restricted environments and the significant costs of services that this would generate.** Helping a young person to learn to live as independently as possible saves money and improves quality of life. Students who need ongoing support to live in the community after program completion will work on connecting with and utilizing those supports in a manner that promotes self-determination and autonomy to the greatest extent possible.
- **Youth being funneled into segregated work environments (particularly those where workers are paid less than the federal minimum wage) without understanding that they can work in the community and earn a competitive wage.** IDB staff will work with students who need ongoing supports to establish systems for continued success.

Financial Program Overview

Since the enactment of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in 2014, all vocational rehabilitation agencies have been required to spend 15% of their federal VR dollars to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities. This was a significant change for most agencies, and from this a number of challenges have arisen. At IDB, we have taken these challenges as opportunities to provide the services that blind youth need to be successful in employment.

As part of our SFY21 request, we are seeking to add 8 positions to staff the proposed 4+ program. This includes 4 instructors classed as Senior Services Specialists for the Blind 1 with a starting salary of \$51,495.74 and 4 Youth Services Workers with a base pay of \$35,997.44. These positions would be funded using 21.7% state dollars and 78.7% federal match dollars. In addition, nearly all of the federal dollars spent on this program will be Pre-ETS and therefore would count toward our 15% requirement.

If we receive the funding for SFY21, we plan to serve 4-6 students during the 2020-2021 school year and then expand the program to serve additional students the following year once the program becomes fully staffed. Because hiring and training state employees is a time-consuming process, we anticipate the need to shift duties for some existing staff temporarily until all new hires are fully trained. We currently have a licensed Iowa Teacher of the Visually Impaired with a master's degree in teaching blind students who is able to shift into this program. We should not need additional funding to expand the program in the coming years; we only ask that the same level of funding continue in SFY22.