

Iowa Department for the Blind

Education Appropriation Sub-Committee Report February 16, 2021

Presenters: Director Emily Wharton, Helen Stevens, Education & Training Director

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What does the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) do?

- We help blind Iowans gain the skills, self-confidence, and positive attitude they need to gain employment and advance in their careers.
- We help employers find the highly qualified and motivated employees they are looking for and help them to break down their misconceptions about hiring blind people.
- We provide tools and training to older individuals who are losing their vision to allow them to continue to live independently in their homes and communities.
- We provide braille, audio, and large print educational materials to K–12 students across the state and library books and magazines to Iowans of all ages.

Our Core Functions:

Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling & Guidance

- Providing counseling and guidance to help clients work through fears and frustrations regarding their vision loss.
- Helping clients find blind people who work in the fields they are interested in working in.
- Encouraging the development of peer supports.
- Arranging for the provision of disability related skills training.
- Assisting with labor market research, researching post-secondary education, work-based learning, and other career exploration activities.
- Facilitating job shadows, mock interviews, resume reviews and other job readiness and job search activities.

Comprehensive Blindness Skills Training Center

- Comprehensive adjustment to blindness training.
- Intensive, deliberate practice in non-visual skills using structured discovery methodology.
- Building self-confidence and a positive attitude toward blindness.
- Classes include: braille, assistive technology, cane travel, home management, life skills, careers, industrial arts.

Vocational Rehabilitation Teaching & Access Technology

- Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers (VRTs) work with clients in their communities, schools, homes, and worksites teaching braille, assistive technology, home and personal management, and cane travel.
- Rehabilitation Technology Specialists (RTSs) teach more advanced access technology, work with clients to find the best access technology to meet their needs, and work with employers to make their computer and information systems accessible for blind employees.

Independent Living Services

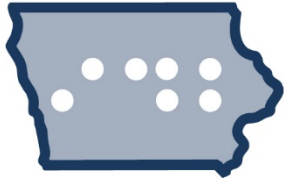
- Independent Living Rehabilitation Teachers (ILRTs) travel the state to serve individuals who have experienced severe vision loss and are not interested in returning to work.
- IDB provides IL services to individuals in their homes and through small group trainings at IDB and throughout the state.
- Teachers work with clients on marking appliances, cooking, cleaning, cane travel, braille, self-advocacy, obtaining peer supports, using cell phones and basic computer usage, signing up for library and reading services.
- IDB provides non-visual assistive devices including talking and braille watches, talking clocks, bump dots, letter and check writing guides, long white canes, braille textbooks and writing materials, and other sustainable equipment to clients as part of their training.

Library Services

- Circulates books and magazines, braille, large print, and other alternative formats to those who cannot read standard print.
- Provides access to local and national newspapers and magazines through NFB Newsline and Iowa Reading Information Services.
- Provides educational materials in alternative formats to blind and low vision pre-K12 and college students.
- Encourages literacy and STEM engagement through Youth Library activities.

Business Enterprise Program

- The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) offers the opportunity for blind individuals to own and operate their own vending business.
- The BEP has priority under the Randolph Sheppard Act to set up locations in state, federal, county, and city office buildings and rest areas. IDB provides the locations and equipment. The operators sell food and beverages and provide customer service.



Iowa Department for the Blind

Empowering Blind Iowans to be Gainfully Employed and Live Independently Overview of SFY22 Appropriation Request

Ask in a Nutshell

IDB greatly appreciates the Governor's support for our appropriation request. We are seeking:

- * A SFY22 state appropriation of \$2,780,274
- * Allowance of 89 FTEs

We have three purposes for this request:

- * Add one teacher to our Independent Living Team to provide training and hope to older individuals losing vision so they can remain independent in their home and communities (\$77,845)
- * Provide the 21.3% state match to fund our Young Adult Transition Program to allow blind youth with additional barriers to gain the blindness skills they need to move on to higher education and employment (\$200,993)
- * Provide state match sufficient to cover contract mandated cost of living increases, rising Department of Administrative Services (DAS) and Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) charges (\$249,885)

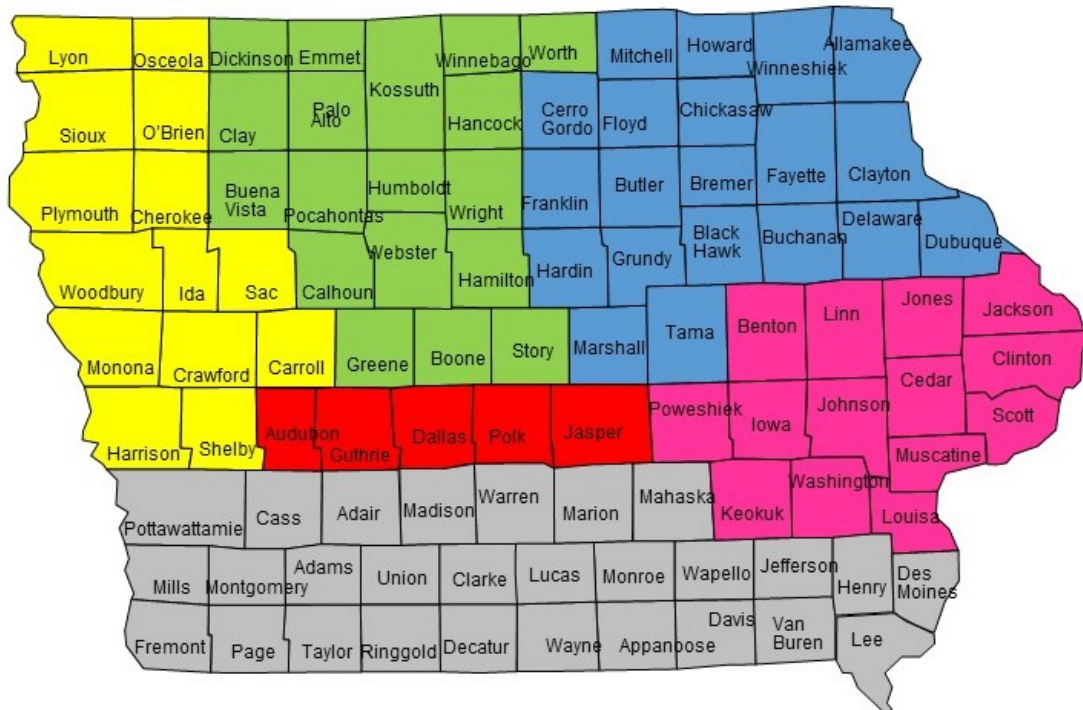
IDB is also asking for a one-time capital request of \$139,100. This would be used for:

- * Roof repair/replacements to eliminate leaks.
- * Replacement of boiler.
- * Creation of additional home management training space on the south side of the 2nd floor to accommodate small group independent living and vocational rehabilitation trainings.
- * Completion of the renovations to our first floor welcome area.

Ask Details

Additional Independent Living Teacher

IDB currently has six teachers to serve all 99 counties. Two of these teachers have to cover more than 20 counties and one of these teachers must cover more than a quarter of the state.



Adding an additional teacher would:

- * Reduce teacher territory sizes, reducing travel time and allowing clients to be seen sooner and more frequently.
- * Allow for expanded outreach to doctor's offices, nursing homes, and community service providers to increase awareness of the availability and benefit of IDB services.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living (HHS-ACL), the national average cost of care in a private room within a nursing facility is \$253 per day, \$7,698 per month, or \$92,376 per year. Alternatively, the national average cost of in-home care is \$20.50 per hour. The Iowa Department for the Blind's Independent Living training and tools help to delay or eliminate the need for older individuals who are blind or have low vision, to enter a care facility or reduce or eliminate the need for in-home care.

Our agency also works to assist eligible individuals who prematurely and voluntarily moved into a nursing home, and want to move to a less restrictive and less costly living situation. Our teachers help these individuals to transition from the facility back into a home or apartment within their community. Through the acquisition of techniques for accomplishing tasks without relying on vision, and building peer support networks, individuals can experience freedom from isolation, through increasing their daily living skills, connect with other lowans who are blind, and in general learn to live a fulfilling and productive life just like any other lowan.

The COVID–19 crisis has taught us all how vital it is to have the tools and techniques needed to live independently in one’s own home. Because IDB needed to suspend in home visits from March 13 to June 7, our case numbers have decreased and fewer clients were able to successfully close their case in SFY20. While we provided as many services as possible over the phone and virtually, there were a number of objectives that could not be met without in person instruction. When we resumed in-state travel in June, some clients were very excited to work in person with their teachers while others were not ready to do so. We continue to work virtually with those who request it and keep in touch with all clients. We know that once the crisis has passed, we will see a definite increase in applications and teacher caseloads will equal or exceed prior levels. While this will be very exciting, it will also be very challenging and being able to put another teacher in the field in the next state fiscal year would be extremely helpful in ensuring clients wait as little time as possible to get the services they need.

Young Adult Transition Program

4+ programs are designed for students who have completed the academic requirements to graduate from high school, but still have Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals to achieve. Four Plus programs already exist throughout the state of Iowa serving students with all types of disabilities. Many of these are run by school districts and community colleges. These programs have little to no experience working with blind students. Very often, this results in lowered expectations and no provision of the adjustment to blindness skills blind students need to be independent.

In the fall of 2017, IDB managers met with the IESBVI management to discuss the possibility of IDB creating a 4+ program in Des Moines similar to the program hosted on the Iowa School for the Deaf campus in Council Bluffs. It was estimated that there would be significantly more need for a 4+ program serving blind and low vision youth than could be served in the IESBVI program. IDB began work on designing such a program. In the fall of 2019, IDB asked for funding for this program and this request was supported by the Governor and included in her budget request. IDB and IESBVI gave a joint presentation to the Education Appropriation Subcommittee in January 2020. [Click here too view the presentation slides and handouts.](#)

In the budget passed by the legislature during the COVID crisis, funding for IDB’s 4+ program was not included. In order to begin the pilot year and serve the students needing our services, IDB asked for and received a one-time grant of third party match funds from the Iowa Commission for the Blind’s Gifts & Bequests Fund. During the 20–21 school year, we are serving four students. Our program staff will be working with these students to meet their goals, developing and iterating curriculum, and assisting Vocational Rehabilitation field teachers by working with other clients in the Des Moines metro area. We are very excited by the level of talent and enthusiasm in the team we are assembling for this program. We have

hired a nationally certified cane travel instructor and a licensed teacher. We have also moved a vocational rehabilitation teacher with considerable experience in youth services into this program.

We are very excited for the opportunity to fill this long standing service gap and get youth with additional barriers the blindness skills they need to achieve their fullest potential. We hope the Governor and legislature will provide the appropriation necessary to continue this program beyond its pilot year. For more information about the Young Adult Transition Program, visit the YATP page on our website (<https://blind.iowa.gov/YATP>).

Salaries and Other Rising Costs

While our employees have received contract 2.1% cost of living increases each of the past two years, we have received no additional appropriation to cover the state portion of these costs. Our bill for Department of Administrative Services increased by \$44,000 last year. These are administrative costs of which approximately 10% can be charged to our federal grant. Because we received level funding for SFY21, we eliminated out-of-state travel and merit based raises. We do not receive an increase in our state appropriation to cover these rising costs in SFY21, we will be forced to choose between cutting independent living services or failing to meet maintenance of effort requirements for our federal vocational rehabilitation basic support grant.

IDB Facts & Figures

Appropriation Request Figures At-A-Glance

Category	Amount
SFY21 Appropriation	\$2,252,001
Additional Independent Living Teacher	\$77,845
COLA and Merit Increase	\$249,885
YATP State Match	\$200,993
Total Requested Increase	\$528,723
Total Requested SFY22 General Fund Appropriation	\$2,780,724
Requested One-Time Capitol Improvement Funding	\$139,100
Requested FTE Allotment	89

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

- * For every \$21.30 that we receive in-state appropriation, we are able to pull down \$78.70 from the federal government to provide Vocational Rehabilitation services to blind lowans.
- * While IDB's case closure numbers have decreased dramatically in recent years, this is a national trend experienced after the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. However, we have been dramatically increasing the number of core services provided and the number of clients receiving these core services. Core services include: counseling and guidance, job readiness training, disability related skills training, and rehabilitation technology. Core skills also includes pre-employment transition services such as work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary enrollment opportunities, workplace readiness training, job exploration and counseling, and instruction in self-advocacy. While we know that it will take time, this increased service provision will improve quantity and quality of our employment outcomes as well as reduce the number of clients returning to re-open a case after failing to thrive in the world of work.

SFY	Number of Clients Receiving Core Services	Total Core Services Provided	Total VR Services Provided
SFY15	137	1931	3278
SFY16	186	2584	4210
SFY17	215	2759	4688
SFY18	275	2707	4930
SFY19	321	3816	6151
SFY20	396	6429	8240

Decreasing Federal Support for Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Losing Vision

- * No matter how much state or non-federal dollars we provide, the amount of federal support we can receive for Independent Living Services to older individuals is limited. The last increase was in FFY14. After FFY14 it decreased and remained the same from FFY15 to FFY17. It has decreased every year since FFY17. The OIB grant award by Federal Fiscal Year is as follows:

Federal Year	Grant Amount
FFY13	\$315,669
FFY14	\$325,101

FFY15	\$315,736
FFY16	\$315,736
FFY17	\$315,736
FFY18	\$312,867
FFY19	\$306,242
FFY20	\$304,614

Independent Living Service Model Innovations

- * Due to the implementation of the cluster model developed with Mississippi State University and putting an additional teacher in the field, our ability to provide better services in a timelier manner increased dramatically. Between SFY17 and SFY20, the number of service units provided increased by 37.2%. The average days between seeking services and receiving a service dropped by 39.22% and the average days to successful completion of the training dropped by 45.34%.

	SFY17	SFY18	SFY19	SFY20
Clients Served	443	397	426	413
Service Units Provided	7685	7200	10123	10544
Services Per Client	17.35	18.14	23.76	25.53
Average days to Service	51	59	31	31
Average days to Completion	408	377	297	223

For More Information

To learn more about IDB programs and services visit our website: <https://blind.iowa.gov>

Follow us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IowaBlind>

Visit our YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/IDBOnline>

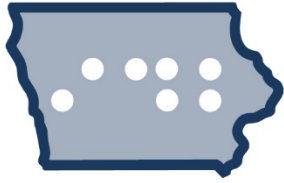
To apply for vocational rehabilitation or independent living services: [Complete our referral form](#) or call (515) 901-8621

To apply for library services, call (515) 281-1323

For more information about library services, visit these links:

Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped Blog: <https://iowalibrary.blog/>

Instructional Materials Center Blog: <https://idbimclibrary.blog/>



Iowa Department for the Blind

Services for Youth and Families

Below is an overview of the services we have available. If you don't know what your child might need, give us a call or send us an email and we would be happy to talk with you about how we can help!

Services for PreK–12 Students from the Library

- Braille Babies provides children ages 0–4 and their parents a multi-sensory approach to reading readiness and includes free books and activities.
- Books for Kids provides kids daily access to books throughout the year.
- Educational materials in braille, electronic text, large print, or audio: Under a grant from the Iowa Department of Education, our library produces textbooks, tactile graphics, and educational materials for PreK–12 students across the state.

Fun for the Whole Family from the Library

- [Hooked on Books](#): For ages 4 – 18 years. This program brings STEM and STORIES directly to your home free of charge. Sign up to receive a monthly box that will contain: activities, recipes, book suggestions and more.
- [Makerspace Mondays](#): This virtual program is designed to get your creative juices flowing while inviting the whole family to participate. All ages are welcomed! Our first night we created an Air Dry Clay Leaf Bowl! This program is set up to meet the second Monday of each month at 6:30pm. Activity Kit provided. Sign up is required.
- [STEM & Stories Saturdays](#): This virtual story time lets you meet with guests from all over while creating a little treasure or token to keep along the way. This virtual program is offered on the third Saturday of each month at 10:00 a.m. Sign up is required.
- Check out or download braille, large print and print/braille books for all ages from the library's large collection.

Services for Parents and Family from the Library

- [Braille Bits](#) is an online program that is designed to teach braille to sighted people who have connections with braille readers.

Services for youth age 14 and older from Vocational Rehabilitation

At age 14, blind and low vision Iowans become eligible for vocational rehabilitation services through the Iowa Department for the Blind. This helps youth get the skills, self-confidence, and knowledge they need to make the transition to life after high school as seamless as possible. These services may include, but are not limited to:

- LEAP Summer Skills Training Program: A residential program where students develop social, independent living, orientation and mobility, workplace readiness, technology and braille skills while also having fun with their peers and getting the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities.
- Extended IEP and transition services through our Young Adult Transition Program (4+). For this school-year based program, students live in dorms and receive significant support from staff as they complete IEP and transition goals in areas such as, self-advocacy, orientation and mobility, access technology, literacy, independent living and personal care, money management, social skills, career exploration and other areas related to workplace readiness, to help students increase their independence, self-efficacy, and self-autonomy.
- Comprehensive adjustment to blindness skills training in our adult training center (for those aged 17+). Students live in apartments and receive intensive instruction in braille, cane travel, access technology, home management and industrial arts, as well as participate in jobs class and confidence-building activities to prepare for attending college and/or entering the workforce.
- Small group online and in person retreats and events held throughout the school year on a wide range of topics and skill areas.
- Individualized Skills Training in the home or community provided by Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers and Rehabilitation Technology Specialists.
- Access Technology. Hardware, software and training are provided based on each student's individual needs and career goal.
- Individualized Counseling on post-secondary enrollment options and career exploration.
- Individualized vocational guidance and counseling.
- Work experience and job search assistance.
- Assistance in paying for post-secondary education.

- Benefits counseling.

For More Information

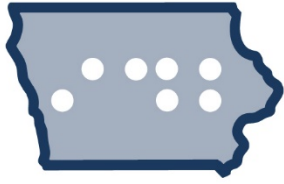
To apply for vocational rehabilitation, complete our referral form: <https://blind.iowa.gov/refer> or call 515–901–8621.

To apply for library services, call 515–281–1323.

For more information, visit our blog at: <https://iowalibrary.blog/> or our Instructional Materials Center Blog: <https://idbimclibrary.blog/>

To learn more about IDB programs and services visit our website: <https://blind.iowa.gov>

Follow us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IowaBlind> or visit our YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/IDBOnline>



Iowa Department for the Blind

How Independent Living Services from the Iowa Department for the Blind Change Lives

Dan's Story

While Independent Living services are life altering on some level to those receiving them, there are times when they are most definitely life-saving. So often, older adults losing vision have very strong feelings of loss and fear and sometimes those feelings are very intense. The below story describes one of these situations as narrated by the IL teacher:

He was my last client of the day when we first met. I had scheduled a two-hour meeting to gather and share information and form an Independent Living plan; however, it went longer than that. He let me introduce myself and told a little about himself but was not very willing to list things he wanted to learn more about or even that he struggled with anything like setting the microwave or oven. At one point, I asked him why I was there. "Dan" was polite and listened and worked somewhat with me as we discussed the blindness and the need to learn non-visual skills and about tools that might help with that. He listed some things he was willing to learn more about but then he sat straight up in his chair and said, "Liz, I'm gonna be straight with you."

He shared how he had fought vision loss his whole life having lost the vision in one eye as a young child and lived with about 20/70 in the other eye for years. He had quit high school before graduating, worked hard, met the love of his life, made good with his career and drove and owned his own business; however, he did all this while working harder than fully sighted people and also keeping his vision loss secret from anyone but his wife. He would go back to a job sight after the other men had left and work harder to get the information he needed to make bids due to his vision loss. This also helped him prove to himself that he could see. He lived like this for years, along with his wife. They had no children and he had been widowed a little more than a year when this visit took place. He said he could have faced this blindness if he still had his lifelong love by his side but now that she was gone, he didn't want to live blind and if he lost all his vision, he didn't want to live. He said, "I've got a gun in this house and I know how to use it. I've also got two vehicles out there in the garage."

I was shocked but I warmly thanked "Dan" for opening up his inner thoughts to me. I provided feedback to let him know he had been heard and to verify the information and feelings. He said that was right and repeated that he would NOT live in total blindness. I asked "Dan" if I could be straight and honest right back with him, to which he agreed. I said slowly and boldly, "I would not even be here if you had not had agreed to meet with me. You invited the

Department for the Blind here or we would have never met. You know I can't do anything about the vision loss. That is your eye doctor's job. Something inside of you must want to learn how to live with this vision loss. That's why you called. He would agree to give me a chance, we would make a plan to begin to learn how to live with vision loss. He agreed he would give IDB a chance.

"Dan" lives in a nearby community so initially, I was able to get there more often to begin to build a relationship and expand his skills. He agreed to a couple cane lessons early on, learned to use writing guides, and eventually agreed to try audiobooks and we got an Alexa going. He didn't have a smart phone but there was a computer that his wife had used and unbeknownst to him, he was still paying for internet.

I have now known and worked with "Dan" for almost a year and just recently worked together with him to review his original objectives and see if there were any more needs. I had thought he would be ready to close his case. He enjoyed reviewing: attended two Community Based Trainings, one of which he hosted in his home with other blind people and his niece all wearing sleep shades. He was happy to meet other blind people and made a couple of connections with mentors. He attended a support group. He uses library services and the Alexa device for connections to history, music, the stock market and the world. We marked his new microwave and stove so he could easily use them. We decided it would be helpful to extend his case to work on some travel in his neighborhood, and community and also to visit the nearest support group, using the cane.

When COVID hit, my first call went to "Dan". He had been weighing heavy on my mind. "Dan" had always taken pride in his stock market holdings and checked them regularly by calling his investment company, listening to the news and checking with Alexa. He welcomed the call and shared with me about the state of the world, and how this was affecting his life. It was encouraging for me to hear him pulling from his strengths and his own history as he confidently shared what he was doing to understand and to cope each day. His own life's journey had prepared him for such a time as this. He has lived through downturns before, all kinds of them, including the stock market and business. "Liz, I'm doing fine."

Connie's Story

The word "grateful" seems so inadequate to express Connie's feelings about the impact the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) has made on her life.

Connie moved from Florida to a small Iowa college town less than a decade ago. Life was not easy for her in Florida. Connie was diagnosed with myopic degeneration and her vision progressively worsened to the point where she could no longer do her job. She battled with sobriety and depression. When her niece in Iowa offered her the opportunity to rent a small, two-bedroom home blocks from her own house, Connie made a move that would change her life in more ways than her zip code.

Connie settled into her new home. She cutely decorated her cottage-style house, started a garden, adopted a homeless cat, and enjoyed spoiling her one-year-old great-niece. It was nice having the support of family nearby. But eventually, the reality that loomed in Florida followed her to Iowa. Connie was blind.

Connie found herself becoming more and more dependent on her niece and her niece's husband. Day by day, Connie stopped doing for herself. She couldn't run her errands or go shopping alone. She couldn't cook her meals. She couldn't read a book or a newspaper. She couldn't even read her watch to tell the time of day! The more she couldn't do for herself, the more hopeless she felt. At just 50-something-years-old, this was no way to live.

Then came hope. Connie's niece got on the internet and researched "services for the blind" and came up with the Iowa Department for the Blind. A referral was made to the Independent Living Program and an Independent Living Rehabilitation Teacher (ILRT) with the agency was sent out to interview Connie.

Connie shared with the teacher all that she struggled with, and the teacher informed Connie on how she could overcome each and every one of those struggles. Connie opened an Independent Living case that day and together they developed a training plan that would allow Connie the opportunity to regain her independence.

First, Connie learned that she can read again! She signed up for library service through IDB and began receiving talking books through the mail. She absolutely loves her library service and spends hours being educated and entertained. Then she learned that she can read "The Des Moines Register" by becoming an Iowa Radio Reading Information Service (IRIS) listener. Every morning she tunes in to keep informed on what's happening locally as well as nationally.

Connie learned how to be an independent traveler by using a long, white cane for mobility. She learned how to use the cane in indoor settings as well as outdoor settings. Connie can navigate sidewalks, negotiate driveways, and identify corners. She uses her hearing to safely determine the appropriate times to cross at intersections. Connie also uses an audible traffic signal to help her cross the busy highway that runs through her town. Connie has learned how to use public transportation to run her errands and pick up groceries.

Connie has learned self-advocacy skills. She has learned techniques for shopping alone by requesting a store associate to assist her in selecting items for purchase. She can not only create a shopping list, but she can cross off the list herself by doing her own shopping.

Connie has learned how to cook and bake with no vision! By wearing a blindfold during training, Connie learned how to use the hot oven and stovetop safely. She learned how to tell when her ground meat was cooked to perfection by using time, touch and smell. She learned how to identify pantry items with tactile markings and how to follow a recipe that has been converted from print into an accessible format. Connie learned how to bake cookies, spacing them evenly on the cookie sheet through touch rather than by sight. She tells their doneness with a gentle push of her finger. She enjoys baking treats for her family.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought isolation to Connie as she did her best to keep herself safe from the virus. Connie's ILRT suggested that she join a telephone blindness support group as a way to socially interact with others. After attending her first support group meeting, Connie said "It was a good, good time. It was really cool to be with people who are blind. I felt so good afterward. My soul was lifted after hearing others out there!"

Connie continues to regularly participate in these weekly telephone support group meetings. She is also learning Braille through a study group that meets following each support group meeting. Literacy through Braille further enhances Connie's level of independence.

Connie is an avid volunteer in her community. She also wants to give back to her blindness community. Connie's goal is to join the IDB Independent Living Advisory Committee (ILAC) in

2021. Connie attended her first ILAC meeting in December 2020. She wants to contribute to the Independent Living Program that has helped her so much.

Connie is more than “grateful” for the services she has received from IDB. No one word can adequately express her feelings about how the Iowa Department for the Blind has impacted her life.

Joan’s Story

Joan, an 84 yr. old retired pharmacist, contacted the department when she began to have trouble as a result of macular degeneration and cataracts. Once very independent she found herself leaning on her husband for help with every day activities. Joan had been an avid cook but could not see to read recipes or set her appliances. She had always taken care of the family finances but could no longer see to write a check or balance her checkbook.

Together Joan and her Independent Living Rehabilitation Teacher worked on alternative techniques to get back in control of those activities she used to enjoy doing. With the use of the writing guides and a talking calculator she was able to get back to the book keeping. Using bump dots we were able to make her appliances usable to her again. Her recipes were put into large print. After a demonstration of the Pen Friend Audio Labeler Joan purchased the device so she could label her many spices and canned goods. She also used this to label her medications and take notes.

Joan had also expressed an interest in magnification. A handheld magnifier was not of much help to Joan so she was interested in trying something stronger, a video magnifier. After trying a loaner portable video magnifier, she was interested in purchasing something. Her teacher was able to provide her information on various vendors and ultimately purchased a closed circuit television. This allows her to read her bills, her local small town paper, and other pertinent information.

Joan and her teacher had discussed her attending a community based training or IL Integration but once the pandemic hit these were not able to be offered. However, her teacher was able to do a virtual community based training which she attended. During this training, she was able to connect with others who are also blind. She worked on alternative techniques such as pouring and measuring, Introduction to braille, and communication skills. This enabled her to keep her learning going and further her independence.

Susan’s Story

IL SUCCESS STORY MARCH 2020
BY MARK EDGE

Susan is a 76-year-old blind Iowan whose vision loss is due to pigmentary retinal dystrophy. When she first applied for Independent Living Program services in August 2018, she was living alone in her family’s farmhouse outside of town while her husband was a patient in a nearby care facility. Soon after his death in the fall of 2018, Susan moved in with her daughter’s family in town.

When Susan and her Independent Living Rehabilitation Teacher (ILRT) first developed her training plan, Susan indicated that she was having difficulty with mobility. She was fearful of falling. Soon after, the ILRT provided Susan with a long, white cane and training on how to use

it. Susan quickly adapted to using the cane. She reported having greater confidence and independence.

Susan's household includes two family dogs. Part of Susan's daily routine is to take the dogs for a walk. She depends on her long, white cane to detect cracks, potholes, and heaved pieces of concrete that pose as tripping hazards in the sidewalks of her older, established neighborhood. Susan uses her cane to identify curbs and ramps at the end of each block she walks. She likes the fact that her cane gets the attention of passing motorists as she and the dogs wait patiently for just the right time to cross the street.

Susan recently shared with her ILRT a day in her life. She and some friends like to get together occasionally for breakfast at the local café. On one particular day, after the breakfast meeting, Susan also had an afternoon eye appointment with her doctor. Susan accepted a ride from a friend to the café. After enjoying breakfast with her friends, she dismissed her driver not telling the driver about her afternoon eye appointment. Susan explained that the driver would feel the need to "take care of her" and "direct" her from the time they left the café to the time she walked into the doctor's office.

Susan further explained that she can get around just fine on her own using her long, white cane, so she didn't need anyone to escort her. On that day, Susan left the café and went browsing at various shops around the town's square in order to pass the time until her eye appointment. She also did a few errands. As her appointment time grew closer, Susan walked to her eye doctor's office.

When Susan's eye doctor greeted her, he let her know that he had observed Susan from his window as she walked towards his office. He complimented her on her cane skills. This made Susan feel good to be recognized by a medical eye professional for her blindness skills and abilities.



Iowa's Olmstead Consumer Task Force

December 18, 2020

The Honorable Kim Reynolds
Governor of Iowa
1007 E Grand Ave
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Dear Governor Reynolds:

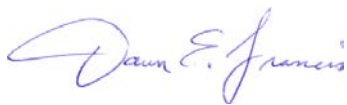
The Iowa Olmstead Consumer Task Force (OCTF) advocates for Iowans with disabilities and long-term care needs and promotes integrated community living, employment, and participation in community life for everyone. Both the Iowa Department for the Blind's funding request to continue its Young Adult Transition Program beyond its pilot year and its request to obtain an increase in appropriation to obtain an additional independent living teacher align with this mission.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made abundantly clear how crucial giving older individuals the skills and confidence they need to remain independent in their homes truly is. IDB currently has six teachers to serve all 99 counties. Two of these teachers have to cover more than 20 counties and one of these teachers has to cover more than a quarter of the state. Adding an additional teacher would reduce teacher territory sizes, reducing travel time and allowing clients to be seen sooner and more frequently. It would also allow for expanded outreach to doctor's offices, nursing homes, and community service providers to increase awareness of the availability and benefit of IDB services. IDB shares our commitment to making sure that everyone should be able to remain in their own homes to the greatest extent possible and having an additional teacher would allow a greater number of individuals to receive more timely and extensive services which will bring us closer to that goal.

The Young Adult Transition Program (YATP) at the Iowa Department for the Blind aligns with this mission by providing youth who are blind and have additional barriers the training they need to live as independently as possible and obtain competitive integrated employment. This program fills the gaps in independent living, self-care, and financial management skills these youth need to live in the community. Most programs serving transition age youth with disabilities do not know how to teach crucial adjustment to blindness skills such as braille, using phones and computers with speech and braille, alternative techniques for meal preparation and home management or independent mobility using a long white cane. Without these core skills, youth who are blind can't fully participate in these programs and cannot achieve independence as others in the program would. The YATP meets both the youths' individualized goals as listed on their IEP while learning core blindness skills and developing a positive attitude toward blindness and all disabilities. YATP students also develop self-advocacy and problem-solving skills that will allow them to speak for themselves regarding their living situation and employment conditions. This program gives youth the tools they need to avoid overly restrictive congregate living situations and sheltered employment so they may live as independently as possible and be as engaged in their communities as they choose to become.

We are very much in support of this endeavor to fill this long standing service gap and get youth with additional barriers the blindness skills they need to achieve their fullest potential. We ask the Governor and legislature to provide the appropriation necessary to continue this program beyond its pilot year as well as provide the appropriation necessary to put an additional independent living teacher in the field to help older Iowans who are losing vision to remain independent in their homes and communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dawn E. Francis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Dawn E. Francis

Iowa OCTF Chair

dawn@iowasilc.org

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