



Iowa Department for the Blind

PERFORMANCE REPORT

PERFORMANCE RESULTS

FISCAL YEAR 2020

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INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to present the performance report for the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) for fiscal year 2020. This report is provided in compliance with sections 7E.3, 8E.210, and 216B.7 of the Code of Iowa. It contains information about the results achieved during the past fiscal year due to the services provided by the Iowa Department for the Blind.

When the COVID-19 virus struck in March, our agency went virtual. Our staff took on this challenge with agility, problem-solving, and a can-do spirit. Our internal technology staff had already positioned us well by migrating to an all cellular phone plan last fall and moved quickly to get all staff on laptops. Our library was one of only a handful of the libraries for the blind across the nation who continued to send audio, large print, and braille books to patrons. We received many calls thanking us for keeping this service going to help people deal with the isolation. The library created a program where volunteer narrators read books over the phone to patrons. Instructional Materials Center staff put together a two-week training for para-educators that covered how to order materials for students, and introduction to braille, information about assistive technology, and other topics that will help them to better serve their blind and low vision students. We were able to provide a \$200 stipend to help make taking this training easier.

Independent Living teachers and Vocational rehabilitation teachers and counselors reached out to clients via phone and Zoom to provide training. They produced webinars and group trainings over Zoom to foster peer support and reduce isolation. While our staff did exceptional work under the circumstances, there are certain services that we provide that are better provided face to face. Learning to use a long white cane, cook and clean without sight, learn braille, and other blindness skills can be mastered faster and more efficiently with the instructor in the same room. Starting in April, our leadership team went to work creating a return to in person services rules and procedures document to help us resume in person services. We had many difficult and honest conversations to come up with ways to be as safe as possible and still provide the highest quality service to our clients and patrons. We resumed limited in person services on June 8th. We continued to prefer to provide services over the phone and internet whenever doing so would not affect the quality of service provided. Our purchasing staff procured masks and cleaning supplies and put in place processes to limit the possibility of viral spread. Our facilities staff arranged spaces to allow for socially distanced meetings. We were able to resume classes in our Orientation Center on June 15th and hold our youth summer program by putting in place precautions and reducing the number of activities. I could not be more proud of the dedication and resilience of our entire staff throughout this ongoing and evolving crisis.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) mandates that we devote 15% of our federal vocational rehabilitation funding to provide pre-employment transition services to youth ages 14-21. This mandate continues to propel us to seek out new and innovative ways to serve youth more effectively. We continued to expand our summer teen program and weekend retreats prior to the COVID crisis. We extended four contracts with service providers to increase the number of pre-employment transition services we provide to students with disabilities. We took some of these activities online and are working with others to find ways to continue them as safely as possible. These trainings target improving workplace readiness, soft skills, and self-confidence as well as facilitating greater access to career exploration and work-based learning. We have continued to partner with Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (IESBVI). Staff traveled twice monthly to provide training in job seeking skills, career exploration, assistive technology training, and other blindness skill training services to students participating in their 4Plus program held on the campus of the Iowa School

for the Deaf in Council Bluffs. Vocational rehabilitation counselors and teachers participate in IEP meetings and meet with IESBVI staff to work to improve service provision to common clients. Vocational rehabilitation teachers serve youth and adult clients in their communities throughout the state providing essential blindness skills training including independent travel using the long white cane, using computers, phones, and other technology with speech, magnification, and braille, the reading and writing of braille, and home and personal management skills. We held two parent listening sessions via Zoom during the spring to seek out ways to better support youth and their families to make the transition from school to work as seamless as possible.

During the 2020 Braille Challenge held February 29th, we gave the public a sneak preview of our new youth library space located on the first floor of our building. In this space, youth and their families will be able to browse braille books and, participate in literacy and STEM activities. We also held a STEM fest in partnership with the Governor's STEM advisory Council.

Our 2020 WIOA Unified State Plan was approved by the Departments of Labor and Education on June 2nd. This was the culmination of more than a year of work with our core partners, the State Workforce Development Board, and the public. The dramatic increase in unemployment claims made IWD staff unavailable to work on further necessary WIOA policies including infrastructure funding agreements and these tasks will be taken up in SFY21. We continue to work with our WIOA partners to improve access for our clients to Iowa Works employment services. In addition to the work that our administrators are doing on the state level, our vocational rehabilitation counselors continue to be active participants in local workforce Disability Access Committees and engage with our core and required partners.

Like most other VR agencies across the country, the additional reporting requirements and redistribution of resources necessitated by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) has resulted in a decline in the number of clients exiting in employment. While the changes that WIOA brought about needed to happen and will eventually create more sustainable and higher quality outcomes, this will take time to come to fruition. The disruption caused by COVID-19 did also decrease case closures for SFY20 (federal program year 19.) In response to the labor market and service delivery changes brought on by the pandemic, SFY21 goals were refocused on assisting clients to exit earning at least \$14.00 and-increasing client engagement. We want fewer clients exiting our program without achieving an employment outcome and fewer clients exiting because we are unable to contact them. VR Teachers, technology specialists, counselors, and center instructors will work together to help clients to continuously move forward toward their vocational goals. They will help clients get excited about work and their earning potential as well as find ways around barriers to education and employment.

In SFY20, IDB sought additional state appropriation to cover required cost of living increases to staff salaries and create a 4+ program in Des Moines for blind youth. This request was supported by the Governor in her budget. In February, we presented with Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (IESBVI) to the Education Appropriation Subcommittee about the need for this program. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, we received a flat appropriation for SFY21. In order to avoid several possible negative outcomes of including laying off an Independent Living teacher or failing to make federal maintenance of effort requirements for our Vocational Rehabilitation program, we asked for and received a grant from the Iowa Commission for the Blind's Gifts & Bequests Fund. We were granted sufficient funding to begin our 4+ program. In order to properly build the program, it was decided early on that we would try to serve no more than five students the first year. Much planning and preparation went into the creation of this Young Adult Transition Program. A licensed teacher and a

nationally certified cane travel instructor have been hired. We are excited to welcome the five students at the end of August.

In August 2019, we hired a new Program Administrator for our Business Enterprise Program. This program had been without a dedicated program administrator since 2016. We were excited to bring on board an administrator with experience in small business management and human resources to work on expanding the program. She has secured two new locations, implemented collection of set aside to improve the long-term financial stability of the program, and provided business skills training to the vendors. In the coming years, we will be working on shifting the focus of this program from providing life-long employment to providing a stepping stone to independent business ownership outside of the program. We want to help program participants gain the skills they need to compete successfully in the free market as truly independent business owners.

In December, the Iowa Commission for the Blind passed a business engagement policy. This came from work done with the Job Driven Technical Assistance Center. We received training and technical assistance at no cost to help us better engage and meet the needs of business.

Our Independent Living Program has now used the cluster based service delivery model that we developed with assistance from the Older Individuals Who Are Blind Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC) for two full years. Anecdotal evidence and preliminary data gathered suggest that this model has improved client objective achievement and skills retention. Due to COVID19, our collaboration with Mississippi State University to perform quantitative analysis on this data has been delayed, but should be completed in SFY21. The COVID crisis made even more clear the necessity of providing tools and training to clients to allow them to remain independent in their homes. No one should ever enter a nursing home or restrictive congregate living situation just because they are losing vision.

In SFY20, we began a pilot project to provide braille training and adjustment to blindness discussion groups in different parts of the state. Weekly classes were set up in Sioux City, Council Bluffs, Iowa City, and Marshalltown. As these groups were based on a very successful older blind program in Colorado, we presumed only independent living clients would attend. However, vocational rehabilitation clients also found this helpful. This program was very well received and every time the pilot was going to be ended and the teacher returned to her standard duties, I received calls and letters from participants asking me to extend the program and make it permanent. We received \$2,000 from the Siouxland chapter of the National Federation of the Blind to support this work. The position was made permanent in May. Groups went to meeting via phone in March and provided much needed support and encouragement throughout the crisis. Some groups have decided to begin meeting in person again in August. Additional virtual groups are also in the works focused on youth, employed persons who need to meet during evening times, and those who live outside the current cities served. We will look to expand to additional areas of the state as well if it is reasonably safe to do so and space to hold these meetings is available. This position will also assist VR and IL teachers to create and host small group trainings throughout the state in the future.

The IDB's Orientation Center continues to prepare students to participate in vocational training programs and pursue gainful employment by offering comprehensive blindness training to vocational rehabilitation clients. The Orientation Center is continuing to partner with Independent Living staff to host week-long trainings for IL clients. This partnership allows teachers to stay in the field and serve other clients and gives students in the Center the opportunity to gain confidence by sharing their knowledge. We are hoping to be able to provide three sessions in SFY21.

The Center provided intensive training to new staff to ensure that they have a positive view of blindness and the capabilities of the blind people with whom they will be working to ten new staff members in SFY20.

The library's SOAR Saturday program provided opportunities for youth and their families to participate in literacy enriching fun activities and check out library books. The library hired two AmeriCorps Vista volunteers who worked to provide summer reading programming virtually across the state via Zoom. The Governor's STEM Council awarded our Instructional Materials Center a teacher extern to work on making math and science materials accessible to blind students. The library also received two Scale Up grants from the Governor's STEM Council to make these STEM resources accessible and available to blind and low vision students throughout the state.

While we are excited by the progress we made this year and proud of the creativity and flexibility of our staff in dealing with the unprecedented crisis, we must continuously reevaluate all aspects of our performance to ensure that we provide outstanding service to all blind Iowans. As we move forward, the IDB will continue to respond to changing technology, new opportunities, and the needs expressed by blind Iowans and we will strive to develop innovative programs to empower them to secure gainful employment and live independently.

Emily Wharton, Director, Iowa Department for the Blind

Department Overview

The Iowa Department for the Blind is the state agency charged with providing vocational rehabilitation, independent living, library, and other essential services to Iowans who are blind so that they can live independently and work competitively. The policies and procedures of the Department are based on state and federal law, including chapters 216B, 216C, and 216D of the Code of Iowa, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Randolph-Sheppard Act.

MISSION, VISION, VALUES AND CULTURE OF THE 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.

Value Statements

We value blind Iowans therefore:

- *We believe in each individual's ability to be independent*
- *We act with a sense of urgency and responsiveness in serving every individual*
- *We support each individual's right to informed choices*
- *We value engagement and independence for individuals of all ages*
- *We promote a positive attitude toward blindness*
- *We expect blind persons to achieve their full potential*
- *We provide opportunities for blind persons to be fully contributing members of their communities*

All staff are valued and expected to demonstrate:

- *Passion for what we do every day*
- *Commitment to make positive differences in the lives of blind Iowans*
- *Respect for the contributions of each staff member*
- *Ethical behavior, honesty, integrity and trustworthiness*

- *Innovative and proactive approaches in serving each client.*
- *Progressive and professional leadership*
- *Collaboration and teamwork that benefits each individual we serve*
- *Collaboration with community, local, state, and federal partners*

OUR CULTURE

We use a client-centric approach to empower clients to achieve successful outcomes.

CORE FUNCTIONS

The Department's three major service areas are vocational rehabilitation (VR), independent living (IL), and the library for the blind and physically handicapped.

1. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

The VR program assists lowans 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 their intent to work. The VR counselor and the eligible individual jointly identify an employment goal and the services needed to achieve it.

KEY SERVICES AND PRODUCTS: Services may include:

- Training to help individuals achieve the vocational goals they have selected such as vocational training or post-secondary education.
- Job placement services. VR counselors help job seekers develop job-search plans, write résumés, practice interviewing, and locate job and placement resources.
- Rehabilitation technology services. Through such services as job site assessment, procurement of assistive technology, and training in the use of adaptive equipment, blind employees can perform their jobs competitively and efficiently.
- Post-employment follow-up. After individuals have achieved their employment goals, VR counselors can continue to serve as a resource to both employees and employers.

VR staff members also participate in outreach activities, such as:

- Participation in job fairs, technology expos, and speakers' bureaus.
- Provision of information on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); job site assessments and accommodations information, and referral to appropriate vendors.

- Partnership with other employment programs to facilitate the recruitment of qualified blind employees.
- Advice on assistive technology to public agencies and employers so that technology available to the general public is also accessible to blind persons.

DELIVERY MECHANISMS FOR PROVIDING SERVICES:

The VR counselors travel statewide to provide guidance and counseling to blind Iowans to ensure they get the training and services they need to reach their employment goals.

The adult orientation center is a residential training program for clients of the VR program. Located in Des Moines, the center provides in-depth blindness skills training to students so that they can return to their home communities to live independently and work competitively. Students receive training in four areas: 1) development of self-confidence; 2) blindness skills, including cane travel, home and personal management, industrial arts, Braille, and computer; 3) job readiness; and 4) public education.

The Department's business enterprises program (BEP) provides opportunities for legally blind clients of the VR program to manage their own vending and snack bar businesses located throughout Iowa in public and private buildings and at rest areas along interstate highways.

Finally, VR staff work with a variety of suppliers of goods and services. The Department purchases direct services for our clients from educational and training institutions, community rehabilitation programs (CRPs), medical service providers, and others. The Department also works with assistive technology developers and vendors who produce equipment many of the Department's clients require to achieve their goals.

2. INDEPENDENT LIVING (IL)

The IL program provides services to Iowans who are blind or have significant vision loss and are 55 or older or who are blind or have significant vision loss under the age of 55 years with multiple disabilities to help them live more independently in their homes and live productively within their communities in all 99 counties of Iowa. Eligibility criteria must be met to qualify for program services. When an individual is eligible for program service and it is found that due to significant needs in an area of IL, and where the individual chooses not to participate in Vocational Rehabilitation, and where there is a reasonable expectation the individuals will benefit from IL program services, the individual may be served under this program.

KEY SERVICES AND PRODUCTS: To prevent the premature institutionalization of blind Iowans, the IL program staff may refer individuals accordingly to other program services that will optimize IL training outcomes or will directly provide the following service or products: adjustment to blindness counseling and guidance, mobility and orientation skills training, communications skills training, assistive technology skills training, daily living skills training, leisure skills training,

public transportation options training, self-care training, self-direction training, interpersonal skills training, information and referral, and group training such as Community-Based training, and IL Senior Orientation-Integration. In addition, individuals served will be referred to blind Iowa consumer and support groups where they can receive peer advocacy and support as needed or desired.

DELIVERY MECHANISMS FOR PROVIDING SERVICES: There are three basic service models to provide IL services.

Regional Cluster Service Training (RCST) Model: This model provides individualized or group skills training over a period of three to four consecutive weeks within each identified service area/region or regional cluster. Sessions within the region may be repeated if needed with the next service delivery cycle or cycles to ensure the individual(s) served are able to:

1. Retain the information between training or service visits;
2. Increased achievement in their training objectives in a shorter period of time; and
3. Increased satisfaction by use of this service delivery model.

This past year, our new regional cluster model assisted individuals with achieving 1,056 training objectives. Last performance period, we delivered 571 training objectives under this model. The percentage increase for training objectives met for this performance period over last period is 85% (i.e. Training objectives met last year 571 minus training objectives met this year 1056 = the difference or increase of 485 then take the difference of 485 divided it by last year's training objectives of 571 = percent of change .8494). Individuals served this period were able to successfully complete certain disability-related skills training objectives set within their Independent Living plan. We continue to work with Mississippi State University's (MSU) Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center (OIB-TAC) to determine if this RCST model is making effective contribution or if we need to consider making further changes to this model to improve in areas that will help those we serve. MSU-OIB TAC still plans to publish their findings and share out the data and information with other Independent Living Older Blind programs across the country after their study has been validated.

Community-Based Training (CBT): A CBT is generally a six-hour group training (i.e. one day or split into two-three hour sessions) that provides Iowans experiencing vision loss or who are blind an opportunity to learn basic non-visual IL disability-related skills. The hands-on training is geared to boost individual self-confidence and often inspires participants to learn more. A CBT scheduled for less than six hours of training requires program administration approval.

Finally, the CBT provides participants with an opportunity to meet with other Iowans who are blind or who are losing their vision; gives them the opportunity to exchange information with each other as well as share experiences, and provides opportunity for participants to learn from one another.

Independent Living (IL) Senior Integration: IL Senior Integration is a group training model sponsored by the Iowa Department for the Blind's Adult Adjustment & Orientation Center (OC) and in partnership with the IL program. While somewhat similar to the Senior Orientation (SO)

model, there are subtle differences. Some of the differences and benefits are summed up as follows:

1. Where available, each IL program client is assigned to an OC student who has demonstrated they are a positive role model and are willing to share their positive attitude about blindness with others;
2. A mentor is selected and invited to participate in a lead role for all new IL program participants. The mentor was a former participant in this training program and successfully completed this training;
3. Through the week long OC training exposure, IL clients have an opportunity to consider the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Orientation Center (OC) program training and services; and
4. Additional opportunities exist for IL clients to network with other blind students; those who use OC services as well as to attend an integrated training session of the Business of Blindness class. This opportunity helps to broaden each participating IL client's prospective related to skills and attitudes of blindness.

We once again noted over this past program year, partnering with the OC and managing this program in this fashion frees up IL program human resources allowing most IL division staff to remain working in the field serving clients while program services are delivered primarily by OC staff.

In the event that IL Senior Integration (SI) is not available, Senior Orientation (SO) will be made available to program clients. This program, while similar to SI, has the availability to host one week of training for program clients at the Department in Des Moines. It is designed primarily for individuals age 55+. Clients are given the opportunity to meet others who are going through similar experiences as a result of vision loss or blindness. Clients travel to Des Moines and spend a week which is devoted to learning and building non-visual skills that will help them adjust to their vision loss/blindness and build their confidence. IL division staff plan, coordinate, and deliver these program services related to this training model.

3. LIBRARY FOR THE BLIND AND PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED

The library provides reading materials free of charge to Iowans who cannot use standard print because of blindness, physical disability, or reading disability.

KEY SERVICES AND PRODUCTS: The library circulates books and magazines in digital media, in Braille, and in large print to eligible borrowers throughout Iowa. The library maintains a collection of over 150,000 book titles and makes available to its borrowers over 150 different magazines. Because the library is a cooperating member of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) of the Library of Congress, its borrowers have access to all NLS services.

DELIVERY MECHANISMS FOR PROVIDING SERVICES: The library:

- Transcribes print materials into Braille and audio formats. Employment-related, educational, and leisure materials not already available in alternative media are transcribed for the collection and upon request.
- Assists Iowa students with their textbook, research, and career needs through the library's Instructional Material Center.
- Provides independent access to the library's collection through the web-based on-line public access catalog (OPAC). The OPAC allows borrowers to search the collection and select and reserve books.
- Maintains digital playback machines and digital devices for borrowers to listen to recorded media.
- Provides programs and trainings for all ages to promote literacy, college and career exploration and continuing education.

CUSTOMERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

The Department's primary customers are blind and severely visually impaired Iowans who have very specialized needs that cannot be met elsewhere. Referrals of persons who need the Department's services come in many forms and from many sources, including from individuals themselves, relatives and friends, the library, doctors and other health and community service providers, schools, institutions, and other agencies.

In developing the Department's programs and policies, we actively seek input from advisory councils, consumer organizations of the blind, individual blind persons, and blind staff who also make up part of the customer base. Two of the three members of the policy-making Commission for the Blind are blind. Knowledgeable and politically active, the Department's customers are highly interested in the agency's policies, procedures, and practices. They support the Department's culture and participate in strategic planning.

The library also serves individuals and institutions such as the physically disabled and reading disabled, blind residents of nursing homes, campus offices for disabled students, restaurants, and others who need materials in alternative media. Through the VR program, the Department serves such customers as area education agencies and employers, and through the IL program, the Department provides in-service training to group homes, senior centers, and other community organizations.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Department is part of the executive branch of state government. It operates under the Iowa Commission for the Blind consisting of members appointed by the Governor. The Commission is 100% consumer controlled. Pursuant to chapter 216B of the *Code of Iowa*, the Commission has authority to set policy and review all major components of the Department's programs. The Commission hires the department director. The Director reports directly to the Commission and the Governor.

LOCATION

The Department is located in a six-story building at 524 4th Street in Des Moines. The building is accessible to people with disabilities.

NUMBER OF STAFF

On June 30, 2020, the Department had 75, permanent, full-time employees and 14 employees in temporary employment status to support our summer youth programming. Twelve of the permanent full-time staff are domiciled at various other locations. Employees work in the areas of administration, service provision, and support. Contract workers were covered by the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) collective bargaining agreement through June 30, 2020. The Department also relies heavily on volunteers to satisfy staffing needs.

BUDGET

Operations of the Department are financed primarily through general fund appropriations from the Iowa General Assembly and formula grants from the U.S. Department of Education. The budget relies heavily on federal matching funds.

AGENCY PERFORMANCE PLAN RESULTS

CORE FUNCTION: VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION & INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES

Description: The Department provides vocational rehabilitation services to assist Iowans who are blind in preparing for, obtaining, and retaining employment. The desired outcome for all vocational rehabilitation clients is that they will achieve competitive integrated employment that aligns with their individual strengths, interests, priorities and needs. Our team works to remove barriers that prevent a person who is blind from working, to guide and counselor clients to develop employment goals, and to network with employers on behalf of persons who are blind. Clients receive a wide variety of services including assessment, training, rehabilitation technology services, and job placement services. In addition, the Iowa Department for the Blind provides a number of services to employers and partner agencies to assist with not only creating opportunities for clients, but also to help meet Iowa's workforce needs.

Why we are doing this: To empower blind Iowans to gain or maintain competitive Integrated employment.

What we're doing to achieve results: Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers (VRTs) provide training in disability related skills training to youth and adults across the state. Rehabilitation Technology Specialists provide advanced assistive technology instruction to clients and work with employers to make computer systems work with the assistive technology used by blind people. VRTs, VRCs, and Orientation Center Instructors work together to conduct community based trainings in various parts of the state to provide training to more clients as well as foster peer support. A VRT conducts braille learning and adjustment to blindness discussion groups throughout the state to improve braille literacy and encourage the creation of peer support networks. VRTs conduct weekend retreats throughout the school year to give youth the opportunity to work on social and other soft skills, build self-confidence, and receive other workplace readiness training. VRTs conduct an annual 6-8 week summer camp called LEAP where teens receive intensive skills training, build self-confidence through challenging activities, and develop a positive attitude toward blindness. In the fall of 2020, IDB will begin offering a 4+ program for youth who have completed the academic requirements to graduate from high school but have IEP goals yet to complete. This Young Adult Transition Program will begin with five students and baseline data will be gathered to set meaningful goals for program performance moving forward.

Vocational rehabilitation staff have provided assessments, training, guidance and counseling, referrals, employer assistance, job placement, rehabilitation technology services, post-employment follow-up, and coordination of community services to eligible individuals. In addition, the Department staff has served on Regional Workforce Boards, provided a range of

services to businesses and partner agencies, and participates in Employment First initiatives. The Iowa Department for the Blind counselors have been actively collaborating with partners and employers to connect clients to opportunities to achieve competitive, integrated employment.

Key Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Ratio of average VR wage to average state wage as a percentage.	75%	68%

What Happened: The Department sets an aggressive target for the ratio of average VR wage to state wage measure, as we believe in assisting blind Iowans in obtaining employment that is on par with individuals who do not have disabilities. The wage ratio fell short of the 2020 target with clients closed in employment achieving wages somewhat less than average wages for all workers in Iowa. During SFY20, the average hourly earnings for a client of the Department was \$15.41 per hour and the individuals worked an average of 31.18 hours per week.

Data source: The Department's case management system.

Resources: The Iowa Department for the Blind is funded through a combination of 78.7% federal funds and is matched with 21.3% of non-federal funds that are required to generate the federal funding. State appropriation for FY20 was \$2,252,001.

Services / Products / Activities of Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living Services Core Function

Product: VR Services

Description: The Department seeks to achieve a quantity and quality of employment outcomes for blind Iowans consistent with the standards set by the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration. The Department achieves this through vocational rehabilitation services for blind and visually impaired adults and transition age youth.

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
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Percentage of closures with an employment outcome after receiving services.	60%	30%
Percentage of transition age youth who obtain work experience prior to graduation from high school	75%	93%

What Happened: The percentage of clients achieving their competitive employment goals in 2020 (“status 26”) was 30% percent. The target for the percentage was not met for the state performance plan. The average hourly earnings for a person who is blind placed into competitive and integrated employment by the Iowa Department for the Blind was \$15.41/hour. Individuals reaching employment goals were working an average of 31.18 hours per week. The percentage of VR case closures that result in an employment outcome depends on job availability and client skills and experience. During fiscal year 2020, the Iowa Department for the Blind has continued to see an increase in the number of individuals with the most significant disabilities, requiring new strategies and partners to be developed so that clients are able to increase skills and develop appropriate work experience to be competitive. In order to reach employment goals, clients of the agency often require training in the alternative techniques of blindness (travel with a long white cane, use of screen readers to access print and technology, braille and other nonvisual techniques for living and working independently. IDB focuses on ensuring clients are training in these skills in order to achieve employment success. Over the last year, IDB increased trainings in the field with clients and developed a number of virtual training options to meet the needs of clients. We are also in the process of hiring additional staff and working with our partner programs to provide the nonvisual training services our clients need to participate successfully in educational and training opportunities. We are developing and providing trainings to community rehabilitation partners and state partners to ensure that individuals who are blind receive quality services and are able to access opportunities that will allow them to meet their employment goals. During the past year, almost all high school students had participated in work experiences in their communities prior to graduating from high school. Counselors are working closely with education teams, families and communities to ensure that high school students have opportunities to learn about a variety of careers, options and opportunities so that they can make informed decisions about their employment and post-secondary education or training goals. The Department continues to work on job development methods and continually seeks new techniques to improve employment outcomes, particularly for those clients who experienced difficulty in obtaining employment due to a weak work history, lack of skills, or secondary disabilities. IDB began working with core partners to develop an apprenticeship pilot project focused on informing IDB clients about apprenticeship opportunities and on assisting partners and employers in better understanding and providing the accommodations needed for

individuals who are blind or have low vision. In addition, we have had a number of individuals over the past year exit services and choosing to continue supporting themselves through public benefits. As a result, the Department supported several staff in advanced knowledge benefits counseling and now has one individual who is a certified benefits counselor. The additional knowledge of benefits has allowed staff to work with clients to ensure they understand the choices they are making with regard to their benefits and employment. The Department's aim is that through skillful counseling and motivation, fewer clients will lose interest in working.

Activity: Adult Orientation and Adjustment Training

Description: The orientation center is a residential blindness training program available to vocational rehabilitation clients of the Iowa Department for the Blind. It provides in-depth, individualized blindness training to those with significant vision loss aged 17 and older so they can return to their home communities confidently equipped to work competitively and live independently.

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Results on skills and attitude assessments for students who have completed orientation center training.	90%	100%

What Happened: There were 4 surveys completed during FY 2020 (beginning and end of training). Unfortunately, with the Covid crisis, training went to a virtual model, so not only were graduations not attainable, new students were not admitted in to the program. 30 students were in the orientation center during fiscal year 2020. 24 of these students began their center training in fiscal year 2020. Although some students had to leave the program early due to health or family issues, others have returned to work, are looking for employment, or pursuing higher education. For example, 1 is currently employed at a school, one is going back to college, one is pursuing the Business Enterprise Program, and one is working on the Hi-set equivalency test. Instead of consuming tax dollars, these individuals are or will soon be paying taxes and contributing their talents to the benefit of Iowa.

Service: Business Enterprises Program

Description: The business enterprises program (BEP) provides opportunities for legally blind vocational rehabilitation clients of the Iowa Department for the Blind to manage their own businesses -- operating vending machines, road side vending sites, or snack bar/catering services. These businesses are in federal, state, county, municipal, and private locations throughout Iowa.

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Average net income to vendors	\$55,000	\$29,083

What Happened: The number of blind managers, 18, experienced an increase with a new licensee. The average income per manager was down in 2020 due to a variety of factors, most markedly COVID-19 which brought to a halt sales facilities for the last quarter in a majority of the vendor's and great slow-downs for rest area vendors. Buildings are nearly empty with most employees working remotely and very few buildings open to the public. Also, because of the trickle effect of Covid-19 on the economy, suppliers of vending snacks, food and beverages are experiencing shortages, limiting the variety of selections vendors can offer. At least one manager experienced a significant illness affecting assigned operations and bringing the average income down. Managers continue to use creative methods to deal with current economic realities, including switching to items with a greater margin of profit, and keeping prices in line with nearby competition. At least one manager took advantage of Covid-19 and was innovative in providing PPE as a vending offering, which has helped sales. Vendors have reported both profits and losses over the year.

Increased marketing and responding to customer demands for different products continues. Healthy vending and additional food service options also remain in the forefront in our industry. We have continued to install cashless vending payment options in our facilities as our budget has allowed. In FY 2020, the Department purchased \$164,000 in new equipment give operators the ability to offer cashless options at locations that legally can accept them. The results have been positive overall and have shown a need for credit card based payment options in our rest areas. Customer demands for cashless payment options are changing rapidly, and our involvement in this arena will have to increase.

Over the past years our program has not expanded. This year, the program added one site and two more contracts for sites are about to be signed with more on the horizon for Fall 2020.

Managers continue to explore locations in the private sector. This can increase their bottom line, visibility, and shows self-motivation and initiative. The need to find increased opportunities for locations is paramount. Three persons have expressed interest in the program this year and more will continue to follow as more locations are identified and facility routes created.

Starting in July 2020, for FY 2021, two vendors have retired after many years in the program. The new licensee referenced above has taken on one of the retiree's locations and the other is being served by another vendor with hopes for future expansion and additional new licensees in FY 2021. Traffic at rest areas is picking up, however most government buildings are not planning to return to more than skeletal crews until October through January. Sales and profits for FY 2021 are expected to be significantly down due to this impact, and the program expects to help vendors pivot to the new reality during FY 2021 for a more robust following year.

Product: Education and Outreach

Description: The Department engages in a variety of outreach activities to promote the Department's services, generate referrals to the Department, and to educate service providers and the general public, including newly blind persons, regarding the capabilities of persons who are blind.

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of in-service training sessions conducted for community service providers.	23	18

What Happened: The Department uses a variety of strategies to inform the public about the Department's services and to educate the public about the capabilities of blind Iowans. In addition to traditional outreach efforts, the Department conducted in-service training to in-home health providers, staff at community rehabilitation programs, and staff at long-term care facilities. As a result of COVID19 during March of 2020 to current, the IL program experienced restricted travel and many cancellations from those who were planning to hold speaking engagements or in-services. Many agencies and business were reorganizing their businesses and staff so they were not ready or able to conduct in-person or virtual visits due to the pandemic.

Due to COVID19, this unexpectedly slowed our progress to deliver speaking engagement and in-service trainings to our communities; however, this also allowed us time to deliver service with our clientele instead as well as provide additional educational training for program staff. Once

COVID19 has been mitigated to the point where organizations and other local businesses are once again comfortable and able to invite our staff back in-house, we will gladly accommodate those invitations. In the meantime, we can and will offer those organizations and businesses virtual speaking engagements as a means to inform them about our program services.

CORE FUNCTION: LIBRARY SERVICES

Description: The Iowa library for the blind and physically handicapped acquires, manages, and circulates information to eligible borrowers. Collections may include books, journals, data bases, videos, state and federal documents, and access to web sites.

Why we are doing this: To provide access to information to blind and visually impaired Iowans in specialized alternative media so they can obtain or retain employment, pursue educational goals, and meet all other personal needs consistent with each individual's strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.

What we're doing to achieve results: The library produces and circulates books and magazines on digital media, in Braille, and in large print to eligible borrowers throughout Iowa.

Key Result

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of Iowans Using Services	6,500	5,721

What Happened: The number of Iowans using services in 2020 was 5,721. Iowans who cannot read standard print gathered and used information from books, magazines, newsletters, educational, job-related, and personal materials to pursue education from kindergarten through advanced post-graduate degrees, acquire and maintain a wide variety of jobs, manage personal affairs (including medical and financial), participate in community activities and in the democratic process, and read for leisure and personal enrichment. They also received information on other services available to them through a variety of sources. The number of Iowans using library services fluctuates each year and is dependent on public demand.

Data sources: The Department's automated circulation system.

Resources: Total spending for the library was \$1,672,406.

Services / Products / Activities of Library Services Core Function

Service: Circulation of library materials.

Description: The library maintains a collection of over 150,000 book titles and makes available to its borrowers over 150 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.

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of items (books, magazines, and playback units) circulated.	280,000	321,626

What Happened: The library exceeded its circulation target by 41,626.

Iowa's patrons continued borrowing more magazines and more digital books than the previous year. The increase in the use of BARD (the National Library Service's download site) and its mobile application contributed to the most significant increase in Iowa patrons borrowing materials in all formats. Download and duplication on demand services contributed to increases in circulation. Locally produced materials; including magazines and books, continue to show increases in circulation.

Service: Access to downloadable books online through BARD (Braille and Audio Recording Download)

Description: BARD, Braille and Audio Download, includes the National Library Service's download site and mobile application. It allows Iowa patrons to download materials in both electronic Braille and audio to their computers, tablets, mobile phones and other devices. Iowa's library contributes to the BARD collection by adding locally produced books and making them available to library patrons. BARD usage continues to increase and is another tool for patrons to access library materials.

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of items downloaded from BARD.	39,000	42,646

What Happened: The Library exceeded its target for number of items downloaded from BARD by 3,646 downloads.

Service: Production of materials in alternative media.

Description: Employment-related, educational, and leisure materials not already available in alternative media are transcribed for the collection and for patrons upon request.

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of items produced in alternative media.	1,400	2,435

What Happened: Necessary documents were transcribed and produced in alternative formats and used by students from pre-school through postgraduate to continue their education; employed lowans were able to read work-related materials (e.g., handbooks, product brochures, memos, etc.) and thus remain competitively employed; reading-disabled lowans were able to manage personal, medical, and financial affairs independently.

The number of items produced in alternative media increased by 30% from last year exceeding our target by 1,035 items.

Service: Instructional Materials Center (IMC)

Description: The IMC produces and locates textbooks and other educational materials in alternative formats for Iowa's Pre -K-12 and college students who cannot use standard print, and it locates job-related materials for employed lowans who cannot use print. Alternative formats include; audio, braille, electronic text and large print.

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of educational and vocational requests filled by instructional materials center.	1,100	2,077
Percentage of instructional materials center requests filled in a timely manner.	97%	97%

What was achieved: The number of educational and vocational requests filled exceeded our target by 977 items. The number of educational material requests filled by the Instructional Materials Center increased by 34% from last year.

CORE FUNCTION: RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Description: Provides all vital infrastructure needs necessary to administer and support agency operations.

Why we are doing this: To ensure effective administration of the Department for the Blind.

What we're doing to achieve results: In addition to exercising stewardship over resources and other administrative functions the Department is working on the replacement of legacy servers and systems, upgrading outdated equipment in the Business Enterprise Program, and increasing transparency and communication with all stakeholders.

Key Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of reportable comments in the annual audit.	0	0

What Happened: The state's single audit report in Spring of 2020 for fiscal year 2019. The auditor has not reported any issues.

Data Source: Annual audit report issued by Iowa's Auditor of State.

Services / Products / Activities of Resource Management Core Function

Service: Department administrative services

Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of compliance issues raised by federal agency during monitoring visit.	0	0
Percent of compliance with Accountable Government Act.	100%	100%

What Happened: The National Library Service conducted an on-site monitoring review during August 25-26, 2016. The report issued pursuant to the review did not cite any compliance issues.

AGENCY CONTACTS

This report is available at www.IDBonline.org. Copies of the report can also be obtained by contacting Cheri Myers at cheri.myers@blind.state.ia.us .or 515-250-2936,

PERFORMANCE PLAN FOR FY2021

Name of Agency: Department for the Blind				
Agency Mission: To empower blind lowans to be gainfully employed and live independently.				
Core Function	Performance Measure (Outcome)	Performance Target	Prior Year Actual	Link to Strategic Plan Goal(s)
CF: Vocational Rehabilitation Services & Independent Living				
Desired Outcome(s):				
Increase productivity and independence of blind lowans	Ratio of average VR wage to average state wage as a percentage.	75%	68%	Department goal number one as stated in the strategic plan.
Services, Products, Activities	Performance Measures	Performance Target	Prior Year Actual	Strategies/Recommended Actions
1. Org# VOCR A. VR Services	Percentage of closures with an employment outcome after receiving services.	60%	30%	Vocational rehabilitation counselors meet regularly with rehabilitation teachers, employment specialists, assistive technology specialists, and orientation center instructors to maximize services for each client..
	Percentage of transition age youth who obtain work experience prior to graduation from high school	80%	93%	Provide targeted services to youth ages 14 to 21. Services include counseling regarding careers and post-secondary options, work-based learning experiences, work place readiness training, social skills and independent living skills training, and training in self-advocacy, including opportunities for peer interaction, mentoring and confidence building activities.

B. Adult Orientation and Adjustment Center	Results on skills and attitude assessments for students who have completed orientation center training.	90%	100%	Using the structured-discovery approach to instruction, provide comprehensive residential training to blind adults in the skills of blindness and the development of a positive attitude toward blindness.
C. Business Enterprise Program	Average net income to vendors	\$35,000	\$29,083	Provide effective vending management assistance and continually seek new, profitable locations for vending facilities.
2. Org# VOICR/INDL A. Education and Outreach	Number of in-service training sessions conducted for community service providers	20	18	Increase the capacity of community-based service providers to meet the needs of older Individuals who are blind.
B. Education and Outreach	Number of Independent Living Objectives Met	1,162	1,056	Using the structured-discovery approach to instruction, provide comprehensive residential training to blind adults in the skills of blindness to enable them to live independently in their communities.
Core Function	Performance Measure (Outcome)	Performance Target	Prior Year Actual	Link to Strategic Plan Goal(s)
CF – Library services				
Acquires, manages and circulates information to eligible borrowers. Collections may include books, journals, databases, videos, state and federal documents, and access to web sites.				

Desired Outcomes:				
That lowans who cannot use standard print have access to printed materials of all kinds in alternative media.	Number of lowans using services.	6,000	5,721	Department goal number three as stated in the strategic plan.
Services, Products, Activities	Performance Measures	Performance Target	Prior Year Actual	Strategies/Recommended Actions
1. Org# LIBR A. Circulation of library materials.	Number of items (books, magazines, and playback units) circulated.	250,000	321,626	<p>Provide information and reader advisor services to patrons in person and by telephone; circulate books using automated system. Use qualified staff to perform functions.</p> <p>Receive new equipment from National Library Service (NLS); ship machines and accessories to patrons upon request; receive and clean damaged and returned machines; repair damaged machines. Use staff, volunteers, and prison inmates to achieve goals.</p> <p>Catalog new titles from NLS, locally produced books, and books purchased from other sources. Use automated system and professional librarian with cataloguing skills to perform work.</p> <p>Conduct public service announcement campaign; conduct public outreach activities including open houses, speaking engagements, conference exhibits,</p>

				<p>etc. Make initial contacts with all new patrons to retain or start services.</p> <p>Purchase and distribute sacred texts upon request.</p> <p>Label and ship books and video using automated system to generate mailing cards; receive returned books and magazines; inspect, rewind, repair, and re-shelve returned items; receive, label, inventory and shelve new books; excess and discard obsolete and unneeded volumes; inventory, shift, and maintain entire physical collection. Maintain proper inventory in automated system.</p>
<p>2.</p> <p>Org # LIBP</p> <p>Access to downloadable books online through BARD (Braille and Audio Recording Download)</p>	<p>Number of items downloaded from BARD.</p>	<p>35,000</p>	<p>42,616</p>	<p>As a National Library Service Network Library, provide information and assistance in to our library patrons in accessing BARD (Braille and Audio Recording Download) site and accounts. Include informational and account management for library patrons.</p> <p>Library adds locally produced Braille and audio items to BARD.</p> <p>Conduct awareness campaign to inform patrons of BARD access.</p>
<p>3.</p> <p>Org # LIBP</p> <p>Production of materials in alternative media.</p>	<p>Number of items produced in alternative media.</p>	<p>1,800</p>	<p>2,435</p>	<p>Use staff, volunteers, and prisons program, record, duplicate, label, package, and ship recorded material to patrons and other requesting agencies.</p> <p>Use services of staff, volunteers, and prison program to transcribe printed material into Braille.</p>

				Emboss, burst, thermoform, bind, label, and ship completed documents to patrons and other requesting agencies.
4. Org # INMC Instructional Materials Center and Braille Production services.	Number of educational requests filled by Instructional Materials Center.	1,600	2,077	Work closely with Iowa schools and area education agency personnel to fulfill requests for students' textbooks in alternative media.
	Percentage of Instructional Materials Center requests filled in a timely manner	97%	97%	Using services of staff, volunteers, prison programs, and contractors, provide requested textbooks and classroom materials in specialized formats at the same time as sighted peers receive their materials.
Core Function	Performance Measure (Outcome)	Performance Target	Prior Year Actual	Link to Strategic Plan Goal(s)
CF – Resource Management (Enterprise or Agency)				
Provides all vital infrastructure needs necessary to administer and support agency operations. Key activities may include financial and personnel services such as payroll, accounting and budget; purchasing of goods and services; media management; information technology				

enhancement, management and support; staff development; leadership; planning; policy development; maintenance of physical infrastructure and governance system development to achieve results for Iowans.				
<i>Desired Outcome(s):</i>				
Effective administration of the Department for the Blind.	1. Number of reportable comments in the annual audit. 2. Number of compliance issues raised by federal agency during monitoring visit.	1. No reportable comments in the annual audit pertaining to the Department. 2. No compliance issues raised by federal agencies.	0 0	Supports all four goals in the Department's strategic plan for the period ending June 30, 2020.
Services, Products, Activities	Performance Measures	Performance Target	Prior Year Actual	Strategies/Recommended Actions
1. Org# RESM Department administrative services.	1. Percent of compliance with Accountable Government Act.	1. 100 % compliance with Accountable Government Act	100%	1. Achieve compliance with Chapter 8E and executive orders.