

IOWA DEPARTMENT FOR THE BLIND

PERFORMANCE REPORT

Performance Results
fiscal year 2005

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**Iowa Department For The Blind
Performance Results
Fiscal Year 2005**

Introduction

I am pleased to present the performance report for the Iowa Department for the Blind for fiscal year 2005. This report is provided in compliance with sections 8E.210 and 216B.7 of the Code of Iowa. It contains valuable information about the services the Department and its partners provided for Iowans during the past fiscal year in the areas of vocational rehabilitation, library services, and resource management.

Major accomplishments of the year included new food service opportunities in the Randolph-Sheppard program, extensive remodeling of the Adult Orientation and Adjustment Center, and continued national prominence in vocational rehabilitation as measured by the U.S. Rehabilitation Services Administration, which on June 13, 2005 released data on federal standards and indicators for the year ended September 30, 2004. Earnings ratios and the percentage of employment for vocational rehabilitation clients of the Department remain among the best in the nation. This is corroborated by a report released in September, 2005 by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, which tested and summarized datasets compiled by the U.S. Department of Education for the nation's 80 vocational rehabilitation agencies.

Overall, we met or exceeded 26 of 32 results targets included in this report. Key strategic challenges, developments, and trends are also discussed in the "Department Overview" that follows.

Sincerely,

Allen C. Harris
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 lowans who are blind so that they can live independently and work competitively. The policies and procedures of the Department are grounded in state and federal law, including sections 216B, 216C, and 216D of the Code of Iowa, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as Amended, and the Randolph-Sheppard Act. The Department has used these mandates and the expressed needs of our consumers to establish a highly successful service delivery system that has been emulated both nationally and internationally.

The Department's three major service areas--vocational rehabilitation (VR), independent living (IL), and library--are provided through four organizational divisions: Field Operations, the Adult Orientation and Adjustment Center, the Business Enterprises Program (BEP), and the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. The foundation that underlies all of our programs is our positive philosophy of blindness. This philosophy also underscores the Department's mission, which guides the delivery of these services to our consumers:

The Iowa Department for the Blind is the means for persons who are blind to obtain for themselves universal accessibility and full participation as citizens in whatever roles they may choose, including roles that improve Iowa's economic growth.

The Department's philosophy of blindness is based upon the belief that, "It is okay to be blind." In fact, this concept is also our vision. The real problems of blindness do not lie in the physical loss of eyesight but in the misconceptions about blindness widely held by the general public and by many blind persons themselves. Because of these misconceptions, people who are blind are subject to discrimination that prevents them from achieving full integration into the economic and social life of their communities. Blind persons are individuals, and their ability to live independently and work competitively is contingent largely upon the effectiveness of the rehabilitation training they receive and the opportunities available to them. If dealt with properly, the effect of blindness on an individual's

life can be reduced to the level of a mere characteristic with nuisance value.

The Department's values and principles, which stem from this positive philosophy of blindness, are the driving force of our agency. We affirm that:

- the Department must operate on the demonstrated truth that blindness need not be a barrier to leading a full life as a first-class citizen in society;
- blind persons have the same rights and responsibilities as all other citizens to self-determination, including the right to enjoy full integration into all aspects of society;
- blind persons must overcome the misconceptions and the discrimination that result from their status as a minority group;
- agencies and programs serving blind persons must help blind individuals and organizations succeed in fulfilling their aspiration
- persons who are blind, both as individuals and as organized groups, must take the lead in determining the kinds of services they may need to empower themselves fully;
- all Department staff must be qualified individuals trained in the delivery of services based on the agency's philosophy;
- the Department must provide the widest possible range of pre-vocational, vocational rehabilitation, and independent living training, as well as library and other ancillary services, so that all consumers have as much opportunity as possible to make informed plans and choices concerning life goals; and
- the Department in its staffing policy must be cognizant of the importance of hiring qualified persons who may be blind.

Our agency is *strongly driven* by our mission, culture, and values. Our focus is on providing the quality services blind lowans must have to achieve their VR and IL goals. Therefore, we measure results by the successful outcomes our clients achieve. Services provided in the orientation center are individualized so that its blind students can go at their own optimum pace in developing the skills and self-confidence necessary to adjust to blindness. Since our culture values equally the contributions of all staff, we have become a model for public and private employers by hiring qualified employees with disabilities. We insist that our computer software and hardware are

accessible both to comply with the law and to meet the needs of all our staff, and we share what we have learned about assistive technology and job accommodations with private employers and with other branches of state government.

The Department's central office is located in a six-story building in downtown Des Moines. This building houses the Department's administrative offices and its four major divisions. Field offices are located in Cedar Rapids and Cedar Falls. All offices are accessible to people with disabilities.

The Department has 109.5 full-time equivalent positions (FTE's). To meet the increasing demand for services, particularly from Iowa's growing elderly population, we sometimes employ temporary and contract workers in addition to our FTE's. We also rely heavily on volunteers to satisfy this need. In recent years, for example, 110 volunteers have done work equivalent to that of 15 FTE's.

Our employees are dedicated to helping blind Iowans develop self-confidence and a positive attitude toward their blindness by providing them with the services, resources, and tools that enable them to achieve their goals. Our programs focus on the primary needs of blind persons, particularly their need to obtain competitive employment and economic parity with the rest of Iowa's work force. As a result, the VR Program, which works with blind persons toward achieving their vocational goals, is the centerpiece of our services.

The Department's other programs and initiatives support these efforts toward vocational rehabilitation. Training in Braille, cane travel, and the other skills of blindness is available both through the residential program at the Adult Orientation and Adjustment Center and in the community through rehabilitation teachers. BEP provides training and entrepreneurial opportunities. Through the production and distribution of materials in such alternative media as Braille, cassette and large print, the library meets the information and reading needs of blind and other print-impaired readers. IL training helps blind Iowans who are elderly or severely multiply disabled maintain the highest possible level of independence.

In addition to these core services, the Department provides a broad array of support and outreach services. As a central clearinghouse for

valid information about blindness, we participate in public education and in-service training activities throughout the state. We cooperate with other agencies of state government to improve transition services for blind children. Through our Project ASSIST (Accessible Step-by-Step Instruction with Speech Technology) program, we produce tutorials that make Windows computer applications accessible to blind users. We also sell items like talking clocks and Braille writing supplies that are helpful to blind persons in our aids and devices store.

The Department is customer focused. Our primary customers are blind and severely visually impaired persons who have very specialized needs that cannot be met elsewhere. In developing our programs and policies, we actively seek and take seriously the input we receive from advisory councils, consumer organizations of the blind, individual blind persons, and blind staff who also make up part of our customer base. The three members of our policy-making Commission for the Blind are blind. Knowledgeable and politically active, our customers are highly interested in the policies, procedures, and practices of our agency. They support our culture and participate in our strategic planning. In fact, the Department remains in existence because of the ongoing support and demands of our customers.

We serve a variety of other customers as well. Our library serves individuals and institutions like the physically and reading disabled, blind residents of nursing homes, campus offices for disabled students, restaurants, and others who need materials in alternative media. Through our VR program, we serve such customers as area education agencies and employers, and through our IL program, we provide in-service training to group homes, senior centers, and other community organizations.

Of the Department's 109.5 FTE's, 96 work in our central office, 8 in district offices, and 5.5 at other remote locations. Our employees work in the areas of administration, service provision, and support. Most of them are non-contract workers. Contract workers are covered by the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) agreement. Most of our non-contract positions require a bachelor's degree. Although the Rehabilitation

Services Administration (RSA), our federal partner, is placing more emphasis on professional degrees, we have also found it effective to provide our staff with rigorous and extensive in-house training in our culture and philosophy of blindness.

The Department's Des Moines building includes the library's production and distribution units and 10.5 miles of shelved books, which borrowers can come in to browse. The orientation center's 24-hour training and residential facilities are housed here as well. We have our own staff and equipment necessary to maintain our physical plant.

The Department has a computer network system for word processing, database, spreadsheet, email, and Internet functions. Assistive technology makes the network accessible to all staff, and embossers are used to produce materials in Braille for our customers. A loaner pool of computer equipment is available to clients. The library lends computers to volunteer Braille transcribers, recorders to volunteer narrators, and playback equipment to borrowers. The Department also has its own fleet of cars and maintains an inventory of food service equipment.

We must abide by requirements of various federal laws and regulations and the Code of Iowa, which requires us to maintain a registry of all blind Iowans. The RSA enforces federal rehabilitation regulations, such as informed client choice and an established grievance procedure with mediation available through the Client Assistance Program (CAP). The Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals inspects food service sites. The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) audits the distribution of playback equipment and certification of eligibility for library service. Like all governmental agencies, we are subject to the regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Reinforced by the law, the Department's key customer requirements are rooted in the high expectations of the customers we serve. Our blind customers demand the individualized and quality services they need to reach their VR and IL goals without delay. Employers who hire our clients expect them to be qualified to do the job. Library borrowers expect efficient service. Suppliers and vendors expect prompt payment. The general public expects accurate information

and services when needed, and taxpayers and legislators demand cost effectiveness and accountability for funds expended.

Most of our important customer requirements are based on such state and federal regulations as eligibility criteria. VR clients must be functionally blind, have the desire to work, and need VR services in order to be employed. An orientation center student must be on the VR caseload. The IL and library programs have eligibility requirements as well. Institutions like nursing homes that are library borrowers must serve persons who are eligible for library service.

We share a variety of special relationships with our customers and customer groups, some of whom are also our partners. The RSA, NLS, and state legislature--as representatives of the taxpayer--require reports on our results. Clients control the services they receive through informed client choice. We require reports from community rehabilitation programs (CRP's), training institutions, physicians, and others from whom we purchase services for our clients. We develop collaborative agreements with a number of agencies, including Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) and the Iowa Department of Economic Development in helping blind clients set up their own businesses. We collaborate with Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services. We belong to the Consortium of User Libraries (CUL) so that we can have access to state-of-the-art circulation software. Our most important partnership, however, is the one we have with blind individuals and organizations, since we must have their constant input to provide the highest quality of services.

The Department works with a variety of suppliers of goods and services. We purchase direct services for our clients from educational and training institutions, CRP's, medical service providers, and others. We have an especially important relationship with the developers and vendors of assistive technology who produce the equipment many of our clients must have to achieve their goals. The NLS provides us with reading materials and playback equipment to distribute to our library borrowers, and both the state and federal governments provide us with the funds we need to serve our customers.

Because no systemic mechanism for referrals is in place, the Department's most important referral sources include the Social Security Administration (SSA), medical professionals, educational institutions, families, and others who refer to us the names of blind persons who need our services. We also have an important relationship with the Department of Corrections, the Telephone Pioneers, the Lions of Iowa, and others who supply the volunteers we need to maintain and expand our quality services. Because of our close relationship with them, consumer organizations of the blind supply us with support, feedback, referrals, and volunteers.

While the NLS provides guidelines for our library, the RSA and the state both fund and regulate our programs. They impose strict rules on how resources can be spent and goods distributed, including requirements governing eligibility and the service delivery process. Rules governing confidentiality regulate the relationship of both our staff and volunteers with our customers.

Because the Department provides services to blind Iowans that are usually not available elsewhere, we do not have competitors in the usual sense. Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic (RFB&D), a nationwide nonprofit organization, and some local libraries carry books in alternative media, but their holdings are limited and the NLS equipment needed to use them is distributed through our library. Because of our expertise in dealing with blindness, other rehabilitation organizations often consult and coordinate services for blind clients with us. Skills training is available through other sources, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) training centers, but many of these centers have additional eligibility requirements. Through our BEP and job placement programs, we compete indirectly with private food service businesses and with other candidates for jobs for which our clients have applied.

The Department determines its competitive success in a number of ways. We look at the federal standards and indicators to learn our ranking in relation to the performance of other public rehabilitation agencies. We compare our library's production and circulation figures with those from previous years to determine trends. We set our own standards for success by looking at such factors as the number of days between referral and contact, number of successful case

closures, average hourly wage at case closure, and expressed client satisfaction.

Some changes are taking place that may make the environment in which we provide services more competitive. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is modifying the way job placement services are being provided to all job seekers. The SSA gives a "Ticket to Work" to disabled recipients who can then use it to purchase the rehabilitation services of their choice. If Medicare funds become available to pay for the rehabilitation of blind persons, new regulations may be developed to govern the use of these funds. The changing demographics of the work force are forcing BEP to compete for private food service locations, and the growing availability of electronic books through the internet will affect the kinds and numbers of materials circulated and produced by our library.

The Department's new thrusts in the types and methods of services provided are a result of changes in the law, the population we serve, and technology. WIA gives us a new set of partners and a challenging new approach to vocational rehabilitation. Iowa's elderly population is growing, and with it, incidences of blindness. Medical advances have made it possible for premature infants and trauma victims to survive. Many of these people have multiple disabilities, and if one of these is blindness, we are designated as the service provider.

Developments in technology have also had a large impact on the kinds of services the Department provides. We give financial and other support to Newsline and the Iowa Radio Reading Information Service (IRIS), which make newspapers accessible to print-impaired persons. A new medium, e-text, is on the horizon for the library, which means new equipment and training for staff and customers. More blind workers are reentering the service stream to receive the assistance necessary to cope with the technological changes in their jobs. Because the Internet is now more accessible to blind computer users, we can use it for e-commerce and other ways of delivering services to our customers.

Since the passage of WIA in 1998, the Department is participating in a major new organizational alliance. The Act requires agencies like

ours to partner with 22 diverse training and employment programs, such as community colleges, Job Corps, and IWD. We must collaborate in the writing of memoros of understanding (MOU's) with 16 regional Workforce Investment Boards in Iowa. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as Amended, also requires organizational alliances between agencies such as ours and educational institutions.

The Department is developing new strategies to deal with these major thrusts. As a result of WIA, we have played an active role in developing MOU's so that blind job seekers will have full access to the employment services they need. Because the Department's major funding stream is for the provision of VR services, we are forced to limit the services we provide directly to elderly blind lowans and instead rely more on the indirect provision of those services through self-help groups and community-based skills training efforts. Our staff also receives training to help them deal with disabilities other than blindness.

The Department is also developing strategies to take advantage of technological advances. We have installed a new state-of-the-art database system that will enable us to circulate library materials, store and retrieve client information, and produce reports for our state and federal partners quickly and accurately. Through tutorials produced by the Project ASSIST program, blind workers can learn quickly how to use common computer applications with assistive technology. We also plan to make applications for our services, library holdings, and the purchase of computer tutorials and other items from our aids and devices store available through our web site.

The Department must balance some unique factors in providing quality services to our customers. Except for public education and welfare, for whom we often serve as consultants, we are the sole provider of virtually all services needed by blind lowans. Our budget relies heavily on federal matching funds. That funding follows the most expensive service needs rather than population trends. As a result, we can meet the needs of blind persons seeking vocational rehabilitation but not those of the many older lowans who are losing their vision and who comprise approximately 82 percent of new referrals.

The success of the Department's programs is evident in the success achieved by blind lowans. It is reflected in the many blind persons who can be seen traveling about independently, going to their jobs and to the community and family activities in which they participate.

**AGENCY PERFORMANCE PLAN RESULTS
FY 2005**

Name of Agency: Iowa Department For The Blind			
Agency Mission: The Iowa Department for the Blind is the means for persons who are blind to obtain for themselves universal accessibility and full participation as citizens in whatever roles they may choose, including roles that improve Iowa's economic growth.			
Core Function: Vocational Rehabilitation Services & Independent Living			
Performance Measure (Outcome)	Performance Target	Performance Actual	Performance Comments & Analysis
1. Ratio of average VR wage to average state wage as a percentage.	83%	94%	What Occurred: Critical quality services were provided efficiently to blind citizens in Iowa. Information and consulting services were provided to Iowa employers to help them to hire and promote qualified blind individuals. Resources used: Vocational rehabilitation \$ 6,760,779 Independent living 437,829 Data Source: Electronic client data
2. Competitive employment outcomes as a percentage of all employment outcomes	60%	92%	

3. Percent of objectives to increase independence met as a percent of all objectives set (client goals achieved)	85%	84%	system (eFORCE). This is a reliable source.
Service, Product or Activity: Provide skills training and related services			
Performance Measure	Performance Target	Performance Actual	Performance Comments & Analysis
1. Number of skill units provided	2,800	2,940	What Occurred: A significant, meaningful level of training was provided in the following critical skill areas: mobility (travel with the long white cane); home management (cooking, cleaning, etc.); technology (instruction in the use of assistive technology and adaptive equipment); communication (phone use, and instruction in alternative media including Braille). All individuals who
2. Number of individuals receiving training.	800	997	
3. Number of community-based, group training sessions provided.	20	28	

4. Number of in-service training sessions provided.	20	25	<p>sought training were served. Some chose to receive training only through a home training program. More and more individuals opted to participate in the community-based training program, which affords more concentrated training in conjunction with positive peer interaction.</p> <p>IL staff members were able to provide training on blindness to 25 service-providing organizations throughout Iowa to improve their ability to meet the unique needs of individuals who are blind. Training was provided to in-home health providers, hospital social workers, and staff in residential facilities including nursing homes.</p> <p>Data Source: eFORCE.</p>
Service, Product or Activity: Increased independence and productivity of blind lowans			
Performance Measure	Performance Target	Performance Actual	Performance Comments & Analysis

1. Number of VR applications	160	180	<p>What Occurred: Quality rehabilitation services to blind individuals in Iowa while facing a soft Iowa labor market, limited budget and staff. Iowa employers were provided with qualified blind job applicants who exhibit competitive performance, productivity, and reliability. Employers received vital support services including screened, job-ready applicants, assistance with access issues, task analysis, job accommodation, supervisory training if needed, follow-up services after placement, assistance with awareness and diversity orientation and information, and necessary information on complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Counseling and referral for employees who developed vision problems or accessibility problems with their job was provided.</p> <p>Data Source: eFORCE.</p>
2. Number of people served	475	711	
3. Number of IPE's developed	120	153	
4. Number of people receiving VR training	175	261	
5. Percentage of individuals achieving competitive employment outcomes reporting own income as primary source of support at closure.	75%	82%	
6. Number of individuals with employment outcomes	128	115	
7. Percentage of individuals with an IPE with employment outcomes	85%	76%	

8. Number of student tours provided	80	89	
9. Number of students attending the Orientation Center	40	34	
Service, Product or Activity: Assistive Technology			
Performance Measure	Performance Target	Performance Actual	Performance Comments & Analysis
1. Number of technology skills assessments performed	20	35	<p>What Occurred: We have created a model distance-learning program to deliver computer training to blind and visually impaired people. This will increase educational opportunities and employability in many fields and provide training materials and research results to agencies serving blind and visually impaired individuals.</p> <p>Data Source: Records maintained by rehabilitation technology specialists.</p>
2. Number of worksite visits	16	18	
3. Number of access technology training units provided	90	509	
4. Number of people provided access technology training	75	215	
5. Number of contacts for technical support	140	180	
Core Function: Library services			
Performance	Performance	Performance	Performance Comments & Analysis

Measure (Outcome)	Target	Actual	
<p>1. Number of lowans using services (readership).</p>	<p>6,663</p>	<p>9,090</p>	<p>What Occurred: 9,090 lowans 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. Resources used: \$ 1,864,458</p> <p>Data Source: All data is pulled from our automated circulation system. Because all patrons are served through the automated system, and all transactions are captured by the system as part of its basic functionality, the resulting data is highly reliable</p>

Service, Product or Activity: Circulation of Library Materials			
Performance Measure	Performance Target	Performance Actual	Performance Comments & Analysis
1. Number of items Circulated	1. 240,000 books 2. 1,400 videos 3. 140,000 magazine issues circulated	1. 259,543 books 2. 1,765 videos 3. 155,063 magazine issues circulated	<p>What Occurred: 9,090 lowans who cannot read standard print gathered and used information from books, magazines, newspapers, 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.</p> <p>Data Source: All data is pulled from our automated circulation system. Because all patrons are served through the automated system, and all transactions are captured by the system as part of its basic functionality, the resulting data is highly reliable.</p>

Service, Product or Activity: Instructional Materials Center services.			
Performance Measure	Performance Target	Performance Actual	Performance Comments & Analysis
1. Number of educational and vocational requests filled by Instructional Materials Center	2,000	1,399	<p>What Occurred: 1,399 requests for educational and vocational materials were filled, permitting students and workers to have textbooks and work-related materials in a format they can use so they can continue their education and maintain employment.</p> <p>Data Source: All requests are tracked through an automated system; data is highly reliable.</p>
Service, Product or Activity: Production of materials in alternative formats.			
Performance Measure	Performance Target	Performance Actual	Performance Comments & Analysis
1. Number of items produced in alternative media	1,500 documents.	1,368 documents produced	<p>What Occurred: 1,368 documents comprising 43,494 volumes were transcribed and produced in alternative format 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,</p>

			<p>etc.) and thus remain competitively employed; reading-disabled lowans were able to manage personal, medical, and financial affairs independently.</p> <p>Data Source: All production is tracked in a Production Tracking System and the data is highly reliable.</p>
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Core Function: Resource Management			
Performance Measure (Outcome)	Performance Target	Performance Actual	Performance Comments & Analysis
1. Number of reportable comments in the annual audit	0	0	<p>What Occurred: This pertains to results of reviews that were performed by other agencies and released in 2005 for periods preceding the fiscal year for which this report is issued. Resources used: \$ 1,087,379</p> <p>Data Source: Annual audit report performed by independent agencies.</p>
2. Number of compliance issues raised by federal agency during monitoring visit	0	0	

Service, Product or Activity: Department Administrative Services			
Performance Measure	Performance Target	Performance Actual	Performance Comments & Analysis

<p>1. Percent of compliance with pre-audit regulations as measured by post-audit sampling by Department of Administrative Services</p>	<p>100%</p>	<p>100 %</p>	<p>What Occurred: The most recent report on compliance with the existing statewide pre-audit agreement MOU was issued on December 19, 2003 and indicated no instances of non-compliance and we have no reports of non-compliance since then.</p> <p>Data Source: Letter from Department of Administrative Services and Department for the Blind records of documents required by the Accountable Government Act. The data pertaining to pre-audit compliance is based on samples determined independently by the Department of Administrative Services.</p>
<p>2. Percent of compliance with Accountable Government Act</p>	<p>100%</p>	<p>100%</p>	
<p>Service, Product or Activity: Inbound Call Management</p>			
<p>Performance Measure</p>	<p>Performance Target</p>	<p>Performance Actual</p>	<p>Performance Comments & Analysis</p>
<p>1. Percentage of calls resulting in complaints.</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>What Occurred: Employees handling inbound calls through the Department's switchboard received training in directing calls to their proper destination.</p> <p>Data Source: Records maintained by Deputy Director. These records are reliable, although we do not monitor calls for quality control purposes.</p>

RESOURCE REALLOCATIONS

For the third consecutive year, the Department used funds from its gifts and bequests accounts to offset reductions in its general fund appropriations and sustain services. This occurred pursuant to specific authorization from the Commission for the Blind as called for by administrative rules.

AGENCY CONTACTS

This report is available at www.blind.state.ia.us. Copies of the report can also be obtained by contacting Bruce K. Snethen at 515-281-1293.