

WHAT IS THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND?

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THE REAL PROBLEM OF BLINDNESS IS NOT THE LOSS OF EYESIGHT.

THE REAL PROBLEM IS THE MISUNDERSTANDING AND LACK OF INFORMATION WHICH EXIST.

IF A BLIND PERSON HAS PROPER TRAINING AND IF HE HAS OPPORTUNITY,

BLINDNESS IS ONLY A PHYSICAL NUISANCE.

1. WHAT IS THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND, AND WHERE IS IT LOCATED?

The Iowa Commission for the Blind is a state agency established to give services to blind persons who live in Iowa. The Commission consists of a three member board appointed by the Governor. The present members of the board are: William Wimer, Des Moines; Mrs. Alvin Kirsner, Des Moines; and W. C. Hahle, Sumner. The Director of the Commission (pictured on the front cover) is Kenneth Jernigan. The principal office is located in the Commission Building at Fourth and Keo in Des Moines, Iowa. The Cedar Rapids Office is at 730 Higley Building, and the Waterloo Office is at 603 Black's Building.

2. HOW MANY BLIND PERSONS ARE THERE IN IOWA?

No exact answer to this question can be given, but the best available estimates indicate that there are somewhat more than 5,500 blind persons in the state.

3. ARE ALL BLIND PERSONS TOTALLY BLIND?

No. In fact, only about 20 percent of the blind are totally blind.

4. WHO IS BLIND?

For most purposes, any person is considered blind who has a central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with correcting glasses or has a field of vision which at its widest diameter subtends an angular distance no greater than 20 degrees.

To put it simply, a blind person might see at 20 feet what a person with normal vision would see at 200 feet. Of course, many blind persons see much less than this definition indicates, and some are totally blind.

To put it still another way, a person is blind who must devise alternative techniques to do efficiently the things he would do with sight if he had normal vision. A widespread, mistaken notion exists that only those without any sight at all are blind.

5. BESIDES THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND, WHAT OTHER PUBLIC PROGRAMS FOR THE BLIND ARE THERE IN IOWA?

There are two other state programs for the blind.

a. The Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School. Administered by the State Board of Regents, located at Vinton, and usually having an enrollment of about 150 students, this school provides elementary and secondary education for blind and partially

seeing children from anywhere in the state. Except for clothing and incidentals, the services of the school, including board and room, are provided without cost to the child or his family.

Anyone knowing a child with poor eyesight or wishing to have further information should write to Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School, Vinton, Iowa. Visitors are always welcome.

b. Public Assistance for the Blind. Administered by the County Welfare Departments under the supervision of the State Department of Social Welfare, this program provides cash grants on a monthly basis to blind persons who are not able to support themselves. Some people have the mistaken notion that all blind persons receive (or are entitled to receive) Public Assistance—or, as it is sometimes called by the uninformed, “the blind pension.” This is not true since grants are made only to those in need. At the present time somewhat more than 1,000 blind Iowans are receiving Public Assistance grants averaging approximately \$100 a month per person. Until quite recently, more than 1,400 blind persons were receiving such assistance. Anyone desiring further information should contact his local County Welfare Department or the State Department of Social Welfare, State Office Building, Des Moines, Iowa.


6. WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND?

The Commission offers a variety of services to the blind of the state. In general its departments and functions are:

- a. Library
- b. Rehabilitation
- c. Orientation and Adjustment Center
- d. Home Teaching
- e. Vending Stands
- f. Home Industries
- g. Special tools, devices and aids
- h. Register of the blind
- i. Public education and information about blindness

7. WHAT IS THE LIBRARY OF THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND, AND WHAT SERVICES DOES IT OFFER?

Established on July 1, 1960, the Library is one of the newest departments of the Commission. Before this date, the blind of Iowa had no library of their own but received limited service

A black and white photograph of a library checkout counter. A woman on the right, likely a librarian, is interacting with a group of blind college students. One student is seated at the counter, looking down at a book. Another student stands behind her, smiling. A man in a suit and sunglasses stands in the background. The counter is cluttered with books and papers.

Blind college students check out books from the Commission's Library.

from a library located in a neighboring state. As the new and expanded program of the Iowa Commission for the Blind began to take shape in 1958 and 1959, the need for improved library services was a major concern. In 1959 the Division for the Blind of the Library of Congress designated the Commission as a regional library for the blind. This designation meant that the Commission, along with the other regional libraries in the nation, would receive without charge copies of all talking books and Braille books produced for the Library of Congress—several hundred titles each year. It also meant that a great many books recorded on tape would be available. In addition, the Library of Congress and other regional libraries contributed a large, initial collection of books.

The Library is located in the Commission Building at Fourth and Keo in Des Moines. It has reading and listening rooms available for any blind person who wants to come to the building.

It also sends books by mail to blind persons anywhere in the state. The services of the Library (and the other services of the Commission) cost the blind person nothing, and the books go to and from the borrower postage free by federal law. The Library has Braille books; books recorded on tape; and talking books, books read onto long-play records. The Commission also provides without cost talking book machines (small record players to use for the talking book records). The Library gives service to more than 3,200 borrowers throughout the state. One need not be

totally blind to receive the services of the Library. For further information, write to the Library, Iowa Commission for the Blind, Fourth and Keo, Des Moines, Iowa 50309.

8. WHAT IS THE REHABILITATION PROGRAM OF THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND?

From the point of view of tax dollars spent and saved its rehabilitation program is the most important function of the Iowa Commission for the Blind. It is the goal of the Iowa Commission for the Blind to have every employable blind person in the state working at his full potential and earning his own way.

To rehabilitate a blind person is to train him for and place him in a situation where he can operate to the full extent of his capacity. There are blind people who are successful lawyers, teachers, electrical engineers or secretaries; others who are excellent masseurs, packers, farmers or machine operators. Like sighted people, blind people do not have exactly the same potential. Talents, abilities, and capacities vary. Some blind people are able to achieve complete self-support; others, only partial self-support. With some the goal is to return to their homes as competent housewives and homemakers, functioning again in a fully active capacity. The objective is the same in all cases, to assist the blind person to realize to the full his maximum potential of independence and self-support.

A blind man as an electrical engineer! Why not? This man went through college with a major in electrical engineering and now holds a responsible job in the field for which he was trained.



Can a blind person earn her living as a telephone company employee? A matter of routine for this blind woman on the CAMA switchboard equipment.



There are members of the Commission's Rehabilitation and Field Staff headquartered in the Waterloo and Cedar Rapids offices and at the Commission Building in Des Moines. The duties of these people are twofold:

a. They work with blind individuals—contact them in their home communities, inform them of job opportunities and work being done by other blind people, counsel with them concerning vocational goals, help them secure training when needed and arrange to have the Commission pay the costs involved when indicated (under certain circumstances the Commission can pay for training, tools, supplies, etc. to assist a blind person vocationally). Finally, they help the blind person to find employment or go into a business of his own. After training, the blind person may be able to return to the job he formerly held in his own community. He may need training for a new vocation. Or, he may be helped to go into business for himself.

b. They work with the public at large, particularly employers. It is not enough that a blind person be well trained and that he be able to do a given job in business or industry as well as or even better than his sighted competitor. More often than not, he is simply refused the chance to try, merely because the employer does not believe the job can be done. It is the job of the Field Staff to explain to employers the potential of well trained blind workers and to place these blind people in job opportunities.

The Commission is now rehabilitating more than eighty-five blind Iowans each year. This is more than seven times as many as were being rehabilitated in 1957. The job is difficult and much remains to be done, but real and exciting progress is being made under the Commission's new program.

9. DOES THE REHABILITATION PROGRAM OF THE COMMISSION SAVE THE TAX PAYERS OF IOWA ANY MONEY?

The answer to this question is definitely **yes!** Even a brief examination of statistics will make the point. The entire state appropriation and federal matching funds for Commission operations come to somewhere in the neighborhood of one million dollars a year. This is not merely for rehabilitation but for every program and activity of the Commission.

The financial difference to society when one blind person is rehabilitated is surprisingly great. If, for instance, a blind person in Iowa begins to draw Public Assistance at the age of 21 (some begin sooner) and if he continues to age 65 (some continue longer, and some stop before), he will draw, according to present averages, approximately \$100 per month for twelve months each year for forty-four years—or, \$52,800. If, on the other hand, he goes down the road of rehabilitation and self-support, the result

will be quite different. Any self-supporting person in our society will pay at least \$500 a year in taxes. Thus, from age 21 to age 65 (forty-four years) at least \$22,000 will be paid in taxes.

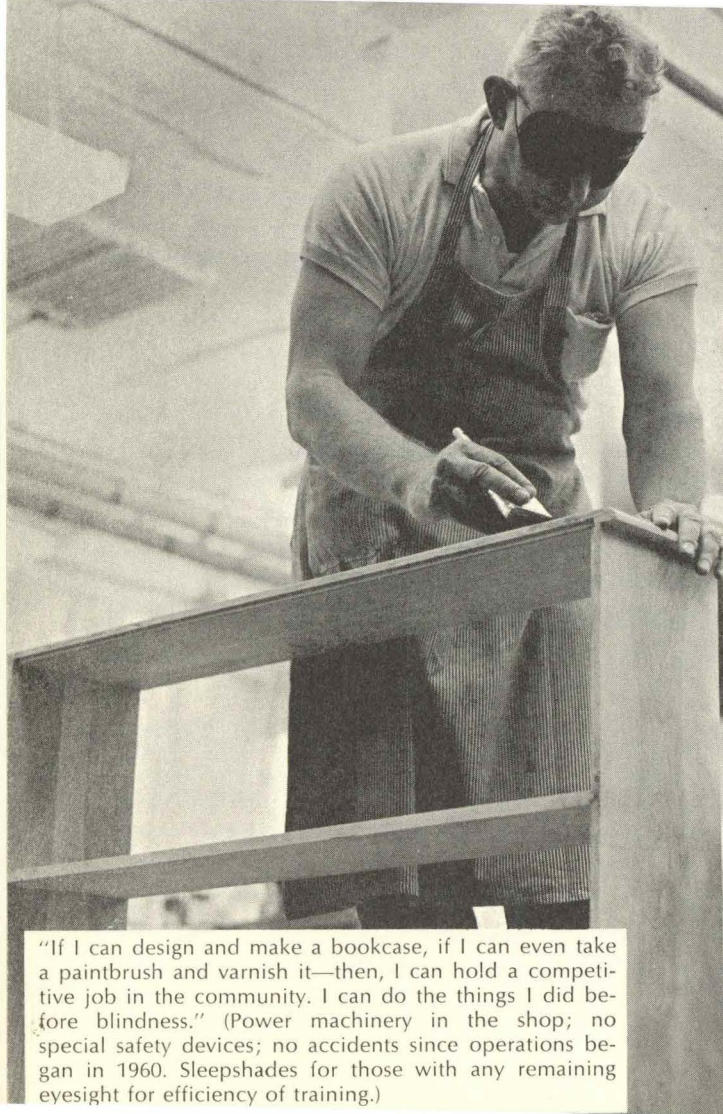
When this \$22,000 is added to the \$52,800 not drawn in Public Assistance, it makes a total difference of at least \$74,800 to the taxpayer. This still does not tell the whole story, for it fails to take into account the value of the added productivity which the person's labor gives to the community and the nation. It also fails to take into account the effect upon the children of seeing their parent supporting the family and earning his own way instead of merely vegetating at home. And, finally, it fails to take into account the effect upon the individual himself of being able to earn his daily bread.

Of course, each rehabilitation is unique. Some persons become blind after the age of 21, and some lose their jobs after only a few years or die before age 65. On the other hand, some (as has been pointed out) draw Public Assistance for far longer than forty-four years. Some achieve full self-support, and some only partial self-support. It is not necessary to set the figure of saved tax money at \$74,800 per rehabilitant to make the point. Even if one is ultra conservative and cuts the figure almost in half, the answer is conclusive. Even if only \$40,000 is saved on the average for each blind person rehabilitated (and this figure is unrealistically low), then twenty-five rehabilitations each year would pay for the

entire operation of the Iowa Commission for the Blind—not for just the rehabilitation function of the Commission but for each and every one of its programs and activities, for every phase of its work. The Commission is now rehabilitating almost four times this number.

10. WHAT IS THE ORIENTATION AND ADJUSTMENT CENTER OF THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND?

In many ways, the Orientation Center (sometimes called the Rehabilitation Center) is the symbol and the heart of the Commission's new program for the blind. Until 1959 Iowa had no training facility whatever for its adult blind, no place at all where the newly blind could receive encouragement and instruction in techniques. It now has one of the finest programs in the nation. The Orientation and Adjustment Center of the Commission for the Blind located at the Commission Building at Fourth and Keo in Des Moines gives intensive training in many techniques. Any adult blind person living in the state can come to the Center for training. The Center does more than teach. It exemplifies the philosophy: blindness need not be as tragic and limiting as most people consider it to be. Many totally blind persons are working every day as machinists, lawyers, farmers,



"If I can design and make a bookcase, if I can even take a paintbrush and varnish it—then, I can hold a competitive job in the community. I can do the things I did before blindness." (Power machinery in the shop; no special safety devices; no accidents since operations began in 1960. Sleepshades for those with any remaining eyesight for efficiency of training.)

factory workers, and even as electricians and scientists. With proper training and opportunity, a blind person can be a successful housewife, schoolteacher, or almost anything else. This is what the Center must help its students to learn and accept, emotionally as well as intellectually. At the Center, a blind person may learn how to travel by himself independently in city traffic or rural areas. This is done by using the new "long-cane" method. Also, he may have classes or instruction in physical conditioning; problems of daily living, cooking, sewing, and other homemaking skills; personal grooming; typing; spelling; handwriting; the use of dictating equipment; switchboard operation; Braille reading and writing; Braille shorthand; and machine-and-wood shop.

The Orientation Center has as its basic philosophy the idea that it is respectable to be blind. For the purposes of the Center a person is blind who must devise alternative techniques to do efficiently the things he would do with sight if he had normal vision.

Each member of the orientation staff strives to help the individual come to the realization, emotionally and intellectually, that he can lead a normal life. The skills which he learns, such as Braille, travel, typing, home economics, etc. are taught, in part, in order to aid him in this realization. When he has mastered these techniques and has accepted the fact that he can lead a normal life, he is helped to realize that he still may fail if he does

In snow or sunshine, good weather or bad, blind trainees at the Orientation Center learn independent techniques of travel and mobility with the long, fibreglass cane. Those with some remaining eyesight wear blindfolds (sleepshades) for efficiency in training.



LIBRARY
Iowa Employment Security Commission
1000 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

not come to understand the public attitude toward blindness and why that attitude exists, and if he does not learn to understand and control his responses and reaction to the public attitude.

No formal techniques are used for determining admission to the Orientation Center. It is done through in-the-field interviews between the applicant and home teachers and counselors, with a final interview with the director. Usually the applicant must be a high school graduate or eighteen years of age.

An effort is made to have a balanced group with some younger trainees and some older and about an equal number of men and women. A four-to-one ratio of trainees to instructors is maximum for the type of intensive, individual training provided by the Orientation and Adjustment Center.

A new trainee, perhaps a former insurance salesman, does not believe that he can now support himself or lead a regular social life. When the orientation instructors tell him he can return to competitive employment and continue to fit into the regular social and civic life in his community, he finds this difficult to believe. He may even resent being told that it is possible. And when he sees for the first time the shop machines—band saw, jointer, wood lathes and metal lathes, milling machine, radial arm saw, table saw, power hacksaw, wood shaper, drill press, etc.—all regular pieces of equipment with no special attachments or devices and is told that he can make a book shelf of commercial

Students at the Orientation Center learn techniques of cooking and then enjoy the results.



quality (even doing the varnishing, shellacking, and staining himself), the trainee is certain that this is impossible.

However, if in three months he has made such a book shelf, he is well into the essential process of re-evaluating his potential as a blind person. In all classes the trainee is helped to realize what blindness actually means as opposed to what he may have thought. In shop he learns to build what was before impossible. In travel he learns to go where he wants whenever he desires—alone and efficiently.

At the same time while the trainee learns that a blind person can have a successful life, he himself is having just that. Confidence, social and vocational skills, and a true understanding of blindness build daily, and the trainee graduates not merely from the Orientation and Adjustment Center but into a complete and competitive world.

11. WHAT IS THE HOME TEACHING PROGRAM OF THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND?

The Commission has home teachers who visit blind persons throughout the state in their homes to teach the skills and techniques of blindness, disseminate information regarding blindness, and prepare referrals to other divisions of the Commission

for the Blind, or, in some cases, to other state agencies. Now that the Orientation and Adjustment Center is in operation, much of the work of the home teachers is done with elderly blind persons who are unable to receive intensive training. They are given skills to make them independent in daily living activities so that they will not require nor demand the additional attention of others who might be working.

12. WHAT IS THE VENDING STAND PROGRAM OF THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND?

At the Commission building at Fourth and Keo in Des Moines a grill is located which is open to the general public as well as Center trainees and Commission personnel. Not only does this grill offer the opportunity for one blind person to make a living as its operator, but it also serves as a training stand for other blind persons who are interested in restaurant or vending operation. As soon as one trainee becomes proficient he is helped to go into business and another trainee takes his place at the grill.

More and more new stands are being opened. At these locations newspapers, magazines, tobacco products, food, coffee, confectionery items, etc. are sold. The Commission is placing more and more emphasis on the operation of restaurants and



Can a blind person operate a restaurant with success and efficiency? Yes. A good example is the cafeteria at the State Office Building in Des Moines.

cafes, as opposed to the smaller newsstands. Blind managers are now operating cafes in many state and federal buildings in Iowa and further expansion is contemplated.

13. WHAT IS THE HOME INDUSTRIES PROGRAM OF THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND?

The purpose of the Home Industries Department is to give employment to blind persons who, because of age or some additional handicap, are unable to work in competitive occupations. Products such as rugs, towels, tablecloths, dishcloths, ironing board covers, and aprons are made or assembled by blind persons in their homes and are then marketed through the Federated Womens Clubs of Iowa. This project gives over seventy blind women needed employment.

14. WHAT DOES THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND DO TO MAKE AVAILABLE TO THE BLIND OF THE STATE SPECIAL TOOLS, DEVICES, AND AIDS?

The Commission serves as a central source of supply for a great variety of specialized products, tools, and aids useful to the

blind. Braille watches and clocks; Braille writing devices; Braille paper; specialized rulers and other measuring devices which can be read by touch; canes of all types; cooking utensils with specially marked dials; standard playing cards with Braille markings added; other games such as chess, checkers, bingo, and scrabble (with special markings as needed); Braille thermometers and barometers; specially marked volt meters and similar electrical measuring devices; specially marked insulin syringes for blind diabetics; and Braille cookbooks are samples of the items stocked. These items are made available to the blind of the state at the Commission's cost, or they are provided without cost when the blind person is unable to pay, when there is a clearly demonstrated need for the product, and when the resources of the Commission will permit. The Commission also assists blind persons to procure at cost certain needed nonspecialized items such as tape recorders, tape, and headphones for talking book machines. Again, there are instances in which these items are provided without charge when there is need and when resources will permit.

15. WHAT DOES THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND DO WITH RESPECT TO KEEPING A REGISTER OF ALL KNOWN BLIND IN THE STATE?

The Commission maintains a register of all known blind in the state. It is, of course, impossible to keep this register entirely

up to date in respect to current addresses, deceased persons, and similar information, but every effort is made to do so. The register currently contains more than five thousand names and addresses. Other details, such as causes of blindness and age are also included. The information contained in the register is confidential except for use in the administration of the programs and other officially authorized purposes.

16. HOW MANY BLIND PERSONS RECEIVE SERVICES EACH YEAR FROM THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND?

In view of the variety of programs and activities carried on by the Commission, the answer to this question must necessarily be an estimate. The Library has more than 3,200 active, blind borrowers; between four and five hundred persons are contacted each year by the Field Units (rehabilitation and home teaching); the Home Industries Department gives service to more than one hundred; the vending stand program serves between twenty-five and forty; and between thirty-five and fifty come to the Center for training each year. In addition, more than five hundred blind persons are helped each year with special tools, aids, devices, and products. There is, of course, some duplication in that the same person may, for instance, come to the Center, be a library user, and receive help from the Rehabilitation Department.

17. WHAT DOES THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND DO TO INFORM THE GENERAL PUBLIC ABOUT BLINDNESS AND ITS PROBLEMS?

The education of the public about blindness and its problems is an important part of the Commission's program. The age old concept of the helpless blind man is deeply imbedded in the public mind. To give training, job skills, and hope to the blind is only half of the task; for unless the community at large is willing to afford an opportunity to the blind person to use his talents and capacities, the training and skills are of little value. Booklets and reports like this one are circulated widely throughout the state, and the work of the Commission and the accomplishments of individual blind persons are publicized as often as possible through press, radio, and television. Also, representatives of the Commission will, upon request, go anywhere in the state to speak before any interested group. There is no charge made for this service.

18. ARE THERE GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS IN THE STATE WHICH ASSIST THE COMMISSION'S PROGRAM?

To bring about a total resource program for the blind of Iowa requires great co-operation from many groups. Such co-opera-

tion has been one of the keystones of the program of the Iowa Commission for the Blind.

Iowa Lions clubs have worked in many areas to promote the welfare of the blind. The Braille transcribing and tape recording being done at the Iowa State Penitentiary at Fort Madison have been financed through the Iowa Lions Sight Conservation Foundation and local clubs. The Lions have supplied many pieces of training and library equipment in the program. They have largely provided the furnishings for the model home economics department. Above all, Lions have carried word of the program to hundreds of Iowa towns and have helped immeasurably in the general success of the work accomplished.

Inmates of the State Penitentiary at Fort Madison have worked hard through the Prison Department of Education to Braille and tape many badly needed books for blind students. This work, now largely financed by the Lions, was begun by women of Jewish Temple Sisterhoods, who also have produced many hundreds of books in Braille and on tape. Increasingly, individual members of the general public are volunteering to do taping, Braille transcribing and to copy books into large type for the Commission. Such volunteers receive instructions through the Commission.

The Hawkeye Chapter of the Telephone Pioneers of America, the Thomas Griffith Chapter of the Independent Tele-

phone Pioneers, and other telephone people play an active role in the Commission's program. (The Telephone Pioneers are employees or retired employees of the telephone industry.) The Pioneers personally deliver talking book machines to blind borrowers throughout the state and help with a variety of other activities—explanation to the borrower of how to operate the talking book machines, help with book selection, location of blind persons needing service but not known to the Commission, repair of talking book machines, and overall interpretation of the Commission's program to the general public. Since there are more than two thousand Pioneers in Iowa, the value and effectiveness of their work are vitally important.

The Federated Womens Clubs of Iowa render valuable service by selling towels hemmed and ironed by blind women in their homes. State wide in nature, this program gives employment to more than seventy blind women and involves thousands of dollars each year.

The blind themselves have combined into a state-wide organization—the Iowa Association of the Blind. This organization holds an annual meeting and works to improve the general welfare of the blind of Iowa and of the nation.

Beta Sigma Phi has recently developed a state-wide interest in work with the blind and provides significant contributions to the Commission's resources.

Tactile Aids for the Blind, a volunteer group, makes valuable contributions to the Commission's work by manufacturing educational aids and appliances.

In addition, many church groups, sororities, and others too numerous to mention help in a variety of ways.

19. HOW ARE THE PROGRAMS OF THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND FINANCED?

The Commission receives an annual appropriation from the state legislature, and it receives federal funds. In addition (and extremely important to the program) the Commission receives gifts and donations. Such gifts should be made to: Iowa Commission for the Blind Gift and Bequest Trust Fund.

20. WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO WHO WANT FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT MAKING USE OF THE SERVICES OR FACILITIES OF THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND?

They can contact the Iowa Commission for the Blind, Fourth and Keo, Des Moines, Iowa 50309. Phone 283-0153.

21. WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO WHO WANT TO ASSIST THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND IN FURTHERING ITS PROGRAMS?

They can contact the Commission and register as volunteers.

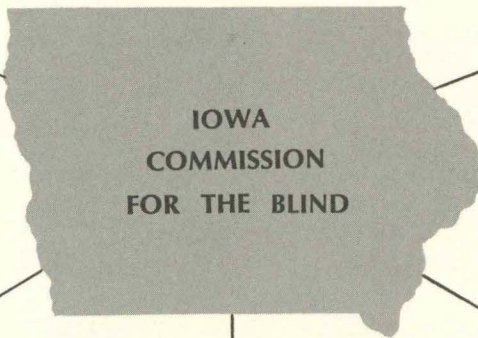
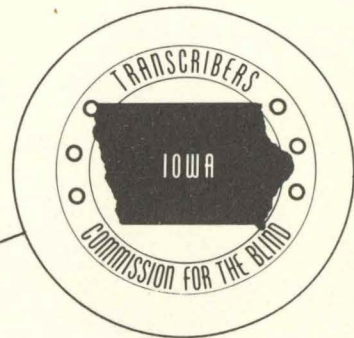
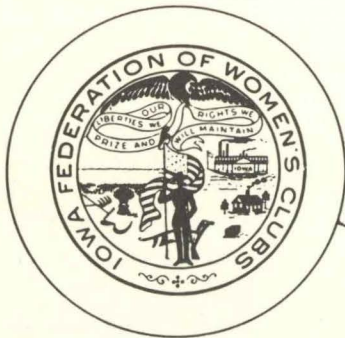
The need is great for many types of volunteer services—driving, typing, shellacking, and binding Braille pages, etc. Interested persons may also volunteer to receive instructions so that they can become Braille transcribers. More Braille material is badly needed and this in turn means a need for volunteer transcribers. Volunteers are also needed to read material onto tapes. Employers can contact the Commission and arrange to have a field representative make a survey of their business establishments to determine potential employment opportunities for the blind. Members of civic, social, fraternal, or church groups can arrange to have a Commission representative invited as a program speaker. Finally, cash contributions are most helpful, and most appreciated.

22. WHAT IS THE OVER-ALL PHILOSOPHY OF THE IOWA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND?

The Iowa Commission for the Blind believes that blind people are essentially normal people and that blindness in and of itself is not a mental or psychological handicap. Each blind person should be judged according to his individual talents and capacities or shortcomings and weaknesses. Generalizations about the blind as a class are usually false and are based upon preconceptions and prejudice instead of knowledge and understanding. What the blind need is not sympathy but opportunity. They should be expected to carry their full share of responsibilities and burdens.

Gifts and donations to the Commission are always welcome and meet vital needs. One dollar, ten dollars, one thousand dollars — all are put to good use in promoting the total program. Generous donations made it possible for the Commission to have this tape duplicating machine to be operated by this volunteer, who gives her valuable time.





STATE LIBRARY OF IOWA



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