

## **Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services Director's Report to the Illinois Blind Services Planning Council for December 2023**

The mission of the Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) is to assist individuals with disabilities in achieving their goals in the areas of employment, education, and independent living.

### **Highlights and Summary of Accomplishments**

#### **FY23 Highlights**

- ICRE Wood served 94 students in FY 23 with a total of 24 graduates.
- The Blind Services Bureau is currently serving 1,398 customers.
- Year to date, Blind Services has placed 176 individuals in competitive employment earning an average wage of \$20.81 working an average of 31 hours per week.
- The blind vending program is excited to expand our micro-markets and has purchased our first accessible kiosk.
- Three Wi-Fi hotspots have been provided at ICRE Wood for the training center, BEPB training unit, and classroom.
- The Older Individual Blind grant program is proud to have served 2,280 people in FY23 by its grantees providing assistive technology and support services to people over 55 years old in Illinois.

#### **Performance Snapshot**

For the Disability Type of Visual Impairment

Average Hourly Wage \$20.96

Average Weekly Wage \$673.26

Average Hours Per Week 30.73

% with Insurance 26.56%

#### **Open Issues - Job Vacancies**

There are currently 39 vacant positions in Blind Services, and they are outlined below:

- One position is being updated by the supervisor.
- Eight positions are currently being re-written internally before being sent to Illinois Central Management Services (CMS) for review.
- Eight positions have been reviewed and returned to DRS to complete the posting process.
- Twenty-Two additional positions have been requisitioned and are having the application/interview questions finalized. Once complete, they will be queued to be posted as soon as CMS approves the vacancy to be filled. Most of these 22 positions are the statewide Rehabilitation Instructor and Orientation & Mobility Instructor (O&M) (RMI) roles.
- There are currently no positions posted on the State's job site for the Bureau of Customer & Community Blind Services.

- One position has closed and has been removed from the State's job site. Depending upon the position and applicable union, the candidates who have applied for these positions are undergoing scoring and other closing activities.
- An additional three positions have gone to a status termed "Other Means" which identifies that the vacancy had no union bidders or that any employee with bargaining rights has waived. Non-union and applicants who are not already state employees will be scored on the position's requirements and job offers will be extended as applicable.

Remaining in development are the O&M positions. The Division is waiting for the RMI positions to post and complete before revisiting headcount and how our O&M positions fit within our service strategy.

DRS maintains complete transparency on the issue of vacancies and any questions should be directed to the DRS Chief of Staff, Andy Losasso.

## **Bureau Chief Report to the Illinois Blind Services Planning Council**

**Reporting Period:** October 6, 2023 to December 4, 2023

**Report Prepared by:** Kim Borowicz, Bureau Chief – Bureau of Customer and Community Blind Services (BCCBS)

### **Highlights and Summary of Accomplishments**

- Business Enterprise Program for the Blind (BEPB) staff and the Illinois Committee of Blind Vendors (ICBV) held an in-person conference for all BEPB vendors and trainees on December 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> in Springfield, IL. A Trainer and Business Consultant have been hired in Chicago. There are three trainees currently in the vending training program, they are currently participated in on-site training with experienced vendors in the program. Ms. Borowicz continues to be the Acting BEPB Program Administrator and meets with the Chair and Vice Chair along with other members of the ICBV weekly. A contract has been finalized to have a consultant assist BEPB in ICBV in revising the program's procedure manual and Illinois Administrative Code rules. The program recently purchased its first accessible payment kiosk for its micromarkets. Interviews for the Budget & Contracting Specialist staff position will be held on December 13, 2023. Interviews for the Business Consultant position in Springfield will be held in mid-January 2024. The Executive Secretary I position is being moved up to an Administrative Assistant I position.
- A grants manager was hired and began on December 1, 2023. We have also done a lot of process improvements this reporting period for the Older Individual Blind (OIB) grants program, including improving how we collect and manage data from the grantees. We have also started holding quarterly meetings for the grantees and have held two already. We are holding weekly meetings with OIB grantees on completion of the Rehabilitation Services Administration 7OB report.

- Ms. Borowicz presented virtually at the National Federation of the Blind of Illinois conference in October 2023. She also attended the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind conferences in November 2023. Also in November, she attended the quarterly meeting of the State Rehab Council (SRC) in Bloomington, IL.

### **Open Issues**

- The Bureau is working diligently on IT issues throughout the Bureau. Three WIFI hotspots have been provided at ICRE Wood for the BEPB training unit and classrooms, and a fourth was provided in Springfield for BEPB training. Work is being done to get wifi at ICRE Wood for the customers.
- The Bureau is also working on improving the accessibility of our documents and forms so they work with screen reading software and can be converted into Braille. We are working with the Bureau of Customer & Community Field services in Region 3 to put the Consent form and Individualized Plan for Employment into Docusign to allow staff, customers, and guardians to sign electronically. We are also working to ensure our Bureau's Braille embossers are properly connected and working with Duxbury software.

### **Priorities for Next Quarter**

- The main priority for BCCBS for the next quarter is completing the job descriptions for the Rehabilitation Instructors at ICRE Wood, specifically in the areas of Assistive Technology and Industrial Arts. We also continue to develop best practices to increase the provision of pre-employment transition services to students who are blind, visually impaired and Deaf/Blind.

## **Division of Rehabilitation Services – Bureau Customer and Community Blind Services (BCCBS)**

### **Assistant Bureau Chief - Field Service Report**

- BCCBS and Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing are hosted a cross training for staff who serve customers who are DeafBlind. The purpose of the training was to share resources, discuss how to determine which bureau would work with the individual, and how to collaborate between the bureaus. Between both bureau's, DRS is serving 65 VR customers who were determined DeafBlind at eligibility status. One of the biggest challenges staff face is to identify customers as DeafBlind at the time of eligibility. Many times, customers do not disclose that they have a dual sensory loss until after certification. There are an additional 79 customers identified as DeafBlind after certification.
- During the month of October, RMIs provided 785 blind skill training services to customers. The blind skill training areas are:
  - Adjustment counseling
  - Assistive technology
  - Braille
  - Communication

- Health and Wellness Independent Living skills
- Keyboarding
- Mobility Advanced
- Pre-Cane Skills
- FY24 Year to date
  - serving 1,551 customers
  - wrote 108 new Individualized Plans for Employment
  - closed 35 individuals in competitive integrated employment.
- Staffing
  - Region 1 has two new hires. A Rehab Counselor started on 12/1 and another will start on 12/18. There are eight vacancies in region 1. Three Rehab Counselors, two Rehab Case Coordinators, and three Rehab Mobility Instructors.
  - Region 2 has two new hires. Both Rehab Counselors started on 12/1. There are six vacancies in region 2. Two Rehab Case Coordinators and four Rehab Mobility Instructors.
  - Region 3 has four vacant four Rehab Mobility Instructors.
  - Region 4 has one new Rehab Counselor who started on 11/16. There are six vacancies. Three Rehab Counselors, one Rehab Case Coordinator (effective 1/1/24), and two Rehab Mobility Instructors.
  - Region 5 has a new Rehab Counselor who started on 12/1, There are a total of five vacancies. One Rehab Case Coordinator and four Rehab Mobility Instructors.

## **ICRE – Wood’s Report to BSPC for 12/8/23 Meeting**

### CENSUS

There is a total of 26 customers (10 residents and 16 commuters) in the program. The total count includes: 1 deafblind and 1 Spanish speaking customer.

### WAITING LIST

Currently there are 21 eager individuals on the waiting list.

### STAFF SHORTAGE

There is still a need for 3 Rehab Instructors, 2 Mobility/Orientation Instructor, RCW, Office Coordinator and Receptionist.

### END OF TERM

Term will end Wednesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>

### GRADUATION

Thursday, December 21<sup>st</sup> will be the next graduation. At this point, staffing has yet to begin, therefore, graduate count is unavailable.

### NEW TERM

Term will begin Monday, January 8, 2024

## **Illinois Council of the Blind (ICB) Report to BSPC for 12/8/23 Meeting**

President Ray Campbell attended the BSPC meeting on October 6 in order to hear a presentation from Andy Losasso concerning staff vacancies of rehab counselors, rehab instructors and instructors at ICRE-Wood.

The ICB Education and Welfare Committee has resumed monthly meetings. Initiatives include electronic vote by mail. Little movement is expected on the state or federal level due to the state veto session and other events occupying the Congress and Senate.

The Education and Welfare Committee has also discussed local issues such as the audible pedestrian signal suit brought against the City of Chicago.

ICB continues its fundraising efforts which includes a virtual piano concert scheduled for December 10, 2023, at 7 PM. Cost for a ticket per household is \$25.

The ICB will hold its annual state convention in Springfield from April 4-7, 2024. Planning has already begun.

## **National Federation of the Blind of Illinois – BSPC Report for December 2023.**

### **NFB of Illinois State Convention**

The 2023 NFB of Illinois State Convention took place on October 13th and 14th at the Naperville Marriott Hotel in Naperville, Illinois.

NFBI members from across the state came together for a weekend of programming that focused on our theme of "Rooted in Philosophy". Members had the opportunity to meet with various vendors from our exhibit hall, participate in breakout sessions, and engage in general; sessions programming.

We will share information about the state convention in fall of 2024,

### **State and National Scholarships**

Visit [www.nfbfillinois.org/scholarships](http://www.nfbfillinois.org/scholarships) and [www.nfb.org/scholarships](http://www.nfb.org/scholarships) for information regarding state and national scholarship applications going live. Our scholarship program is a great opportunity for blind and low vision students to potentially win funds to help pursue their educational goals.

Applications will be available sometime early to mid December of this year.

### **Voting Rights**

The NFB of Illinois, Access Living Chicago, Equip for

Equality, Illinois Council of the Blind, Tusk Philanthropies, Secure Family Initiative and Reform for Illinois has begun meeting since August on efforts regarding voting rights for blind people in Illinois.

For more information, please contact Denise Avant at [davant1958@gmail.com](mailto:davant1958@gmail.com)

### **Washington Seminar**

The National Federation of the Blind annual Washington Seminar will kick off with the Great Gathering on Monday, January 29th 2024. Washington Seminar is an annual event where hundreds of blind people advocate for issues that impact blind and low vision Americans.

### **Federal Legislation**

There are currently bills on the floor of congress that the NFB of Illinois are asking for co sponsorship from our members.

Medical Device Nonvisual Accessibility Act H.R. 1328:

Transformation to Competitive and Integrated Employment Act H.R. 1263:

Transformation to Competitive and Integrated Employment Act S. 533:

Access Technology Affordability Act H.R. 3702:

Access Technology Affordability Act S. 1467: