



October: National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Have you heard the news? The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has announced that “Increasing Access and Opportunity” is the 2020 theme for October’s annual National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM).

2020 marks the 75th time our country has taken the month of October to remind businesses about the important part individuals with disabilities play in the workforce. “People with disabilities are experienced problem solvers with a proven ability to adapt,” said Office of Disability Employment Policy Deputy Assistant Secretary, Jennifer Sheehy. “Now more than ever, flexibility is important for both workers and employers. National Disability Employment Awareness Month celebrates the ingenuity people with disabilities bring to America’s workplaces.”

Each October, America celebrates workers with disabilities and reminds employers of the importance of inclusive hiring practices. Employers of any size, in any industry—as well as community organizations, advocacy groups and schools—are encouraged to participate. The Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council and Iowans with Disabilities in Action will be highlighting many Iowans with disabilities and their

continued on page 2

IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 Views on Employment: From Dentistry to Action
- 4 Future Ready Iowa: Employment Resources for Iowans with Disabilities
- 5 Update on Governor’s Economic Recovery Task Force
- 7 Oh, Yeah- The Election

October: National Disability Employment Awareness Month

(continued from page 1)

employers throughout the month, so watch for opportunities to learn more. We are also planning a legislative breakfast where legislators from all over the state can learn more about the jobs lowans with disabilities are doing and the efforts their employers have made to accommodate them.

At the end of October, we will all join together to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you would like to get more involved in celebrating National Disability Employment Awareness Month, contact the Iowa DD Council (800/452-1936) or check out some of the ideas below:

- Ideas for Employers and Employees - <https://bit.ly/3id9Qec>
- Ideas for Educators and Youth Service Professionals - <https://bit.ly/3mUHGrJ>
- Ideas for Associations and Unions - <https://bit.ly/30dGUMN>
- Ideas for Disability-Related Organizations - <https://bit.ly/3mWp7TV>
- Ideas for State Governors, Legislators and Other Policymakers - <https://bit.ly/3i5Pd3w>

Views on Employment: From Dentistry to Advocacy

By Steven Falkner

In 1985, I was in my 6th year of private dental practice in a small town of about 700, in the middle of Cedar County, Iowa, out in the eastern part of our state. It was the beginning of something you may have heard of, the “farm crisis”. It was a stressful time for rural lowans whose jobs depended on agriculture. It was a time of economic recession, and many of our Iowa farmers found themselves overextended financially, with the result being several farm foreclosures, a slowdown in ag manufacturing, and layoffs in Iowa ag businesses. In my town, small businesses were closing up and down main street such that someone put an ad in the Sun Times saying, “Will the last person leaving town please turn out the lights?” My practice up to that point had been going very well, my debt was eliminated, and finally I was anticipating some real financial growth, and even the ability to expand my practice. But, my business, like many others, had drastically slowed due to the farm crisis, and I was only barely able to meet payroll.



To add to this stress, I was beginning to realize some of the visual disturbances that I had been told to expect from my recent diagnosis of progressive blindness due to retinitis pigmentosa. You know, I had been losing peripheral vision all along, but we are so fearfully and wonderfully made that until the loss became very significant, I just didn't realize that the blindness was progressing so rapidly. Thankfully, my close-up vision was still very good and adequate to my needs in the clinic setting. However, I had night blindness, and my long-distance vision was slightly affected, and now I was beginning to notice issues with my peripheral vision. I noticed that I was having difficulty finding my way out of a parking lot with the car because though I thought I could see everything, somehow, I just wasn't getting the whole picture. I was lost in a parking lot and couldn't figure out how to get out! This is difficult to describe; but a year later, I had to give up my driver's license due to this, and then I was really limited in my ability to get around, other than by foot. It is a very lonely and frightening feeling to be in a small town out in the middle of farm country, with people depending on me, and my business failing due to the local economy, and I could not see how to change my circumstances due to the implications of this vision loss. I had to get out of town and start a new life, but my practice value was plummeting which means I couldn't really sell, and I had no idea what I'd do if I did sell. Whenever I tried to

continued on page 3

Views on Employment *(continued from page 3)*

look for jobs by calling companies or colleges to see about options, I came up with a goose egg, and I was beginning to become desperate.

When I heard of the Iowa Department for the Blind, I was ecstatic, probably beyond a reasonable measure, because I had the idea they'd be able to lead me out of this "valley of the shadow" that I was in. I called the local office and the receptionist was very pleasant, and that was a great comfort to me because I could tell that I was nearing a crossroad in my life. This situation truly was a very big deal for me! I feared losing my livelihood in short order, being stuck in a small town with no prospects and no guidance on the future. What about my dreams for a wife and family, a nice home, an 8-5 job? To me, this was life and death, and even though that might have seemed like an overreaction, I could see no future at that point. All I could see was my wonderful dental career simply crashing on the rocks, leaving me out in small town America with no source of income.

The Iowa Department for the Blind is one of the two public vocational rehabilitation agencies in Iowa, both arising from the Federal Rehabilitation Act. The Iowa Department for the Blind, of course, works with Iowans who have significant sight disorders, and Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) works with Iowans who have other types of disabilities. Both of these agencies provide services to persons with disabilities in order to help them achieve their independent living and vocational goals.

From the Iowa Department for the Blind, I received vocational counseling and assistance for training, instruction in coping skills such as Braille and cane travel, plus the opportunity to learn to use various types of assistive technology. I went back to school and completed my master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling in 1988 (yes, I wanted to help others who were faced with the need to change their careers due to a disability). I was then hired by Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services as a rehabilitation counselor in Mason City, and here I have been ever since.

It's a wonderful job that I have, working with people who have disabilities to help them get into (or back into) great jobs. It hasn't been easy—as my sight has continued to diminish, I have had to learn new coping skills all along the way. At first, I got along with using \$1.00 bar magnifiers and strong desk lamps for my paperwork; then later, I had to jump up to stronger, lighted magnifiers. For years I used rolling writer pens (hard point for carbons, but thick black lines). After this came the CCTV magnifier for print material and forms. These days, I need to have someone read print materials to me, and I use Braille a lot. I use a personal talking laptop computer for note taking. I also use a desktop computer that has had a talking program loaded onto it--this was provided as an accommodation by IVRS. Most recently, I am working to master the iPhone's accessibility features. As you see, we can learn new ways of getting things done!

With my technology, a few accommodations from my employer, and my blind skills training, I am well able to handle my job. I am now in my 32nd year of employment with IVRS; in fact, I was promoted to area office supervisor about 17 years ago, and in January 2018, to the position of chief of field services at IVRS! What a life!!

Here's the deal: people with significant barriers can be very successful in pursuing not just employment, but truly great careers (like mine). In order to work when you have a disability, I think it takes faith, a good attitude, adequate preparation, and a little help from those who have been down the path. I couldn't have succeeded without the specialized rehabilitation services I received. Both the Iowa Department for the Blind and IVRS have helped me develop the confidence and skills to pursue a great career and lead a full and satisfying life.

The VR program has been helping people with disabilities in Iowa since 1921, and there have been many thousands of success stories over the years. Since the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law in 2014, IVRS has become a proud partner of the Iowa One-Stop System! Now, with our fine One-Stop partners, we can be part of the finest public employment system in the country and can work together to facilitate even better success stories for the citizens who have barriers in our state.

Since the implementation of WIOA, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services has placed special emphasis on improving outreach and services for certain populations which we feel have been underserved in the past, including individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, those with autism, those with mental illness, and those with developmental disabilities. Employment First is a philosophy that IVRS has been a system leader in since 2011. **It is a belief that all**

continued on page 4

Views on Employment *(continued from page 4)*

individuals can work with the right services and the right supports. Our goal is competitive community integrated employment at a minimum wage or above. We are learning through an approach integrating Customized Employment Strategies and Discovery, that all individuals can have employment success. Historically, many lowans with the most significant employment barriers have only had sheltered work outcomes to look forward to. We will continue to partner with our Workforce partners and the community rehabilitation programs in creative ways to help make the dream of employment success a true possibility.

The Iowa DD Council has been a key and critical partner in these efforts helping to support pilot projects that are implementing these employment strategies and pushing systemic change for individuals with disabilities. We have amended the policies governing our Iowa Self-Employment program, which can accommodate supported self-employment, or small business endeavors with the needed supports. There are a handful of these small businesses currently operating in Iowa with growing success, and we anticipate more in the future. Also, we have an innovative pilot in several of our counties called the Individual Placement with Supports (IPS) project, and in this we partner with Medicaid, DHS, local community rehabilitation programs, and local mental health centers in order to support rapid placement of individuals with significant mental illness. This IPS movement, as it is called, is demonstrating very encouraging outcomes nationally, and our hope is to see these strategies grow in Iowa, leading to more and better employment outcomes with the correct supports for the population in Iowa with mental illness.

I'm proud to be a part of such a program, and I'm hoping you're proud that such services are available to lowans right here in Iowa where we live. Our mission is: We provide expert, individualized services to lowans with disabilities to achieve their independence through successful employment and economic support.

Steven J. Faulkner is the Bureau Chief of the Rehabilitation Services Bureau at Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services in Mason City, Iowa. We thank him for his contribution and sharing his story with our readers!

Future Ready Iowa: Employment Resources for lowans with Disabilities

Whether your disability is visible or not, a recent change or a long-term condition, there are jobs in Iowa for you! Use the information and resources below to move your job search and career forward. Governor Kim Reynolds has made a Future Ready Iowa a top priority for her administration. The goal of this initiative is to connect lowans of all abilities to the education and training needed to get good paying jobs and careers to improve people's lives. The Future Ready Iowa goal is to have 70% of lowans with education and training beyond high school by 2025.



There is a lot of information, videos, and links to resources on the Future Ready Iowa website (www.futurereadyiowa.gov). **Most importantly, the website includes resources for individuals with disabilities who want to improve their skills and find employment.**

Know your rights: A Guide for lowans of the Americans with Disabilities Act (<https://bit.ly/2RZbLs3>): The Americans with Disabilities Act was intended to reflect the balance between the employer and the employee with a disability. This booklet contains information on Title I of the ADA, and was designed with the belief that the bill addresses both employers and employees to achieve a viable workforce and productive society.

Build your skills (<https://bit.ly/30dJfHz>): Do you need to build your skill set before you can pursue the career you want? This page offers you many options to consider for furthering your education--explore the resources below to find what is right for you.

Another avenue to improve your skills is available on the Iowa Workforce Development site with an introduction to Ticket to Work (<https://bit.ly/3cz9DjZ>).

continued on page 5

Future Ready Iowa *(continued from page 5)*

Explore careers (<https://bit.ly/3mVbiW8>): Be bold and explore the many different career paths available to you. There are lots of different routes you can take from pursuing an apprenticeship to attending college. These tools will help you learn about the number of job openings, how much money you can make and the education needed.

Prepare for an Interview (<https://bit.ly/3i7grGE>): Use these tips to prepare for interviews by knowing how to handle questions related to your disability.

Share your disability with an employer (<https://bit.ly/3cyfbLL>): Disclosing a disability requires thought and planning. Many individuals with disabilities feel uncertain about disclosure. Ultimately, the job candidate must decide the time, place, and degree of information to share with others.

JOB ACCOMMODATIONS

Job Accommodations from Career One Stop (<https://bit.ly/335JgPB>): Learn about technology and job accommodations that can be made to help individuals working a job with a disability.

Job Accommodation Network (JAN-<https://askjan.org/index.cfm>): Ask JAN if you have questions about job accommodations and what the Americans with Disabilities Act means to you.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

If you have a disability that is a barrier to employment, you may be eligible for the following services to help you prepare for, obtain, maintain, and advance in a job.

Vocational Rehabilitation (<https://bit.ly/3i3LlzJ>): Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a U.S. Department of Education funded program that provides these services to individuals with a disabilities in every state, including Iowa.

Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services Application (<https://bit.ly/30bmVhY>): The mission of the Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services is to work for and with individuals who have disabilities to achieve their employment, independence and economic goals.

Iowa Department of the Blind Referral Form (<https://bit.ly/2S3WoyA>): The Department provides employment services to blind and visually impaired Iowans who are looking for a job or want to retain or advance in their current career. The Department for the Blind believes that with the right skills and opportunities a blind or visually impaired person can be a competitive and valuable employee.

Update on Governor's Economic Recovery Task Force

COVID-19 has not just affected our health, it's affected our jobs. Businesses are struggling and some Iowans are still not back to work, or their jobs are no longer there for them. Finding a way to help businesses, workers, and Iowa's economy recover from COVID-19 will be a top issue when the Iowa Legislature returns in January 2020.

Governor Kim Reynolds has appointed an Economic Recovery Task Force, which has met monthly through the summer to develop strategies to help Iowa's economy recover, businesses stay in business, and workers get back to work. Hundreds of Iowans have participated in the subcommittees of this task force, which will issue its final report on October 6.

You can view the preliminary recommendations at <https://bit.ly/333i3NC>. Some of the things the task force will be recommending include:

- **\$80-\$100 million for matching grants to expand high speed Internet to more areas in Iowa.** The group thinks it will cost about \$810 million to make sure every area of Iowa is covered, so they are also looking at



continued on page 6

Governor's Economic Recovery Task Force *(continued from page 6)*

ways to use mobile broadband units to help areas where Internet is needed until coverage can be complete. The goal is to have 100% of Iowa's homes and businesses with reliable high speed Internet services by 2025. They also want to start training workers for jobs in this industry.

- **Invest in telehealth and look for new and creative ways to use it to meet the health needs of Iowans.** They recommend requiring all insurers to pay equally for health care services delivered using telehealth (both plans regulated by Iowa as well as "self-insured" employer plans regulated by the Federal government). They also recommend addressing the technology needs of Iowans so they can use telehealth from their homes, schools, or work.
- **Improve access to health care in rural Iowa by encouraging regional partnerships.** Specifically, they recommend making EMS an essential service to be provided by cities and counties and using community needs assessments to find areas where health services are at risk of closure.
- **Address health care workforce shortages** by creating more behavioral health residency and training programs, developing incentive and loan forgiveness programs to recruit and keep health professionals in Iowa, ensure salaries are competitive with other states, and look for new ways to get young people into these careers. The group would also like to get rid of unnecessary regulations that hold some health care workers back from their full scope of practice.
- **Address Iowa's overall workforce shortage** by making sure that every high school graduate has had at least one work-based learning opportunity by the year 2024, make sure each school has a work-based learning coordinator, connect schools and businesses in each community, expand STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) programs to all middle and high schools, engage non-profits to expand work-based training programs statewide, expand connections to the minority community and diversify mentorships, and make safe child care more affordable and accessible throughout Iowa.
- **Help rebuild Iowa's agricultural economy** by expanding markets for biofuels (like ethanol) produced by Iowa farmers, investing in new value-added crops to build on Iowa's agricultural economy (example: did you know that a soybean additive is now being used in asphalt?), developing an "Iowa brand" market campaign, expanding conservation programs, and assisting farmers recover from COVID-19 challenges through changes to the federal crop assistance program.
- **Growing Iowa's economy** by encouraging more people to move to Iowa (and keeping the Iowans we already have), creating targeted strategies to help particularly hard hit restaurants and bars, and investigate new loan programs for very small businesses and entrepreneurs.
- **Helping Iowans find their path to financial independence** by getting rid of regulations that create barriers for some Iowans (minorities, Iowans with disabilities, small businesses, entrepreneurs), stop landlords from asking about a person's criminal history on rental applications, end the ability for landlords to use the source of a person's income as reason to deny a lease (some landlords will not rent to people who have a Section 8 housing voucher or receive SSDI), and look for new ways to create more affordable housing options.
- **Increase educational opportunities** by improving access to Iowa's universal preschool program (only 62% of eligible kids are in programs), conducting a statewide "equity audit" to address student achievement gaps and get more funds to "high need" schools.

What's this mean to Iowans with disabilities? It means a lot. Brooke Lovelace, Executive Director of the Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council, was a part of the work group dealing with health and human services. Iowans with disabilities were mentioned as a population that needs to be considered for jobs in the community, trained to help fill those shortage areas, ripe for self-employment and entrepreneurship, and often overlooked in many workforce discussions. In addition, the use of telehealth and ensuring access to services in rural areas for those that lack reliable transportation are incredibly important to Iowans with disabilities. We will make sure you have access to the final plan on October 6 and will post it on our social media and webpage!

Oh, Yeah - The Election

While this issue is focused on employment, we cannot forget to include a plug about the 2020 Election! Iowans have a choice in how they want to vote:

1. **In person** on Tuesday, November 3.
2. **In person early** (starting at your county auditor office and select community sites on October 6 through November 2).
3. **By mail** (you need to use an absentee ballot request form to do this; ballots will be mailed beginning October 6).

Our next issue will focus on voting, but there are a few things we wanted to let you know right away:

1. **If you want to vote at home by mail, you need to get your request form in sooner than later.** You want to have enough time to fill it out and mail it back in, so you are sure your vote is counted. Contact Iowans with Disabilities in Action or your county auditor for more information.
2. **There were three counties that had some of their absentee ballot request forms thrown out by a court.** The county auditors in Linn, Johnson, and Woodbury County are reaching out to the affected voters now, and you may have seen a letter from them. If you live in one of these counties and requested an absentee ballot on a form that had already been partially filled out (and you haven't received a letter about it), you might want to reach out to your county auditor to make sure your request is on file:

Johnson County Auditor's Office: 319-356-6004

Linn County Auditor's Office: 319-892-5300

Woodbury County Auditor's Office: 712-279-6465
3. **Many Iowans lost their homes in the terrible "Derecho" storm that hit Iowa on August 10.** If you are no longer able to live in your home because of the Derecho, you may want to contact your county auditor to find the best voting option for you. This is particularly important if you requested to vote by mail before the storm, and are no longer living in your home. Your county auditor will be helping individuals in this situation, so do not hesitate to call them for help!

Iowans with Disabilities in Action (866.432.2846) and the Iowa DD Council (800.452.1936) want to make sure you are able to vote in 2020.

Let us know how we can help you make your mark in 2020!



This project was supported, in part by grant number 1801ABSD, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201. Grantees undertaking projects with government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official ACL policy.

c/o Iowans with Disabilities in Action

PO Box 737

Des Moines, IA 50303

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

Des Moines, IA

Permit No.

Representing you in Congress:

Sen. Charles Grassley

Sen. Joni Ernst

Rep. [Representative]

Representing you at the State Capitol:

Sen. [Name-Senate]

Rep. [Name-House]

infoNET is a free policy resource published by the Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council in partnership with Iowans with Disabilities in Action.



IOWA'S DISABILITY POLICY RESOURCE