

IOWA BLUEPRINT FOR CHANGE

DIF-SWTCIE Project



Iowa Blueprint For Change
Disability Innovation Fund Project

Advancing and improving systems so that Iowans with disabilities have competitive integrated employment (CIE) opportunities that lead to economic security.

OCTOBER 2023



TABLE OF CONTENTS



01. Welcome Message

02. Our Progress

03. IPS Success Story

04. IBC On the Road

05. Meet Our New Staff

06. IBC Backbone Team

07. CEA Evaluation and Team

08. Upcoming Events

09. Talk to Us



ABOUT THE GRANT

Brandy McOmber, DIF Project Director

If you are reading about the Iowa Blueprint for Change (IBC) project for the first time, welcome! We hope you consider participating in the various activities that will lead to important systems change in the State of Iowa. The grant activities are accomplished through the Collective, and all are welcome to attend.

The project is funded by the Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) Program, provided through the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2015 (Pub. L. 113-235). The DIF Program is designed to support innovative activities aimed at improving the outcomes of individuals with disabilities (section 7 (20)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act).

The project is 100% Federally funded. Initial grant funds received totaled \$13,875,048.55 with an additional \$230,000 funds received for evaluative purposes.

OUR PROGRESS

Objective 1

Establish and engage a Collective of diverse stakeholders to develop, pilot, refine, and implement collaborative systems change models that support lowans with disabilities who are employed or contemplating employment at subminimum wage to move into competitive integrated employment.

During the first year of the grant, the IBC team has been busy developing the structure of the IBC Collective. The initial meeting was held on August 22, 2023 and the second meeting took place on October 18, 2023. The team also developed a contract with the Collective Impact Forum to assist in providing technical assistance and training both to the IBC Backbone Team as well as to the Collective itself.

The various workgroups included in the Collective have also been established.

They include:

- 14(c)/IPS/CE
- Youth/Education
- Policy
- Community of Practice
- Apprenticeship

During the next year, the IBC Team will work with the Collective to develop and implement the CIE Blueprint and strategic action plans that will identify and address:

- Critical issues and systemic barriers;
- Expectations for, and equitable access to, CIE for all lowans with disabilities;
- Innovations and implementation methods;
- Service gaps; and
- Risks and benefits related to CIE for individuals with disabilities

Additionally, a Steering Committee will be developed. The Steering Committee holds the overall vision and strategy. They will provide strategic direction for the Collective; champion the work; align their work to the common agenda; and serve on workgroups.

The Steering Committee will be established based on the Collective Impact Forum criteria, which includes:

- Decision makers
- Individuals representative of state demographics
- Influential champions
- Content experts
- Individuals with lived experience
- Those with interest, passion, and urgency

OUR PROGRESS

Objective 2

Utilize the U.S. Department of Labor’s recognized Direct Support Professional Registered Apprenticeship (RA) and quality pre-apprenticeship (PA) programs as a model to recruit, train, and retain interested Iowans with disabilities into competitive integrated employment.

The IBC team has held multiple conversations with apprenticeship experts both within and outside of the State of Iowa. All of these conversations have assisted in establishing partners that can drive the apprenticeship efforts of the Collective.

The Apprenticeship workgroup has initiated meetings to discuss the structure of the Direct Support Professional and associated RA and PA opportunities. IVRS will serve as the Intermediary agency, working in conjunction with Iowa Workforce Development as the State Apprenticeship Agency. The RA programs will be offered to adults and quality PA programs offered to transition students.

The Apprenticeship workgroup will also work on establishing partnerships with colleges to identify opportunities for building stackable credentials. This can potentially occur both at the Community College level as well as through Institutes of Higher Education.

The establishment of the PA and RA programs is an immediate priority of the Collective and the Apprenticeship workgroup will meet more frequently than other groups, with a goal of the following activities occurring in Year 2 of the grant (October 1, 2023 - September 30, 2024):

- Build the core elements of inclusive RA/PA programs and the Intermediary infrastructure
- Identify and obtain agreements with employers, schools, and organizations
- Identify related instructional components that align with defined competency areas
- Recruit participants

A special focus of the group will include recruiting individuals with disabilities to participate in the RA/PA programs, including those DIF participants taking part in grant efforts.

The IBC team is excited to bring these new opportunities to the State of Iowa that will benefit all Iowans.

OUR PROGRESS

Objective 3

Increase the ongoing delivery of preparation, placement, and support services that begin in early high school and result in uninterrupted transition to competitive integrated employment for youth with disabilities.

The Youth/Education workgroup has been established and meetings have commenced. Like the Apprenticeship objective, the transition work has been deemed a higher priority. This is due to the desire to implement two transition pilot projects that will begin at some point within Year 2 (October 1, 2023 - September 30, 2024).

The Youth/Education workgroup is currently developing a Request for Letters of Interest. This Request will be an opportunity for local school districts to be considered for a pilot project in their area. The Youth/Education workgroup will establish the parameters of these pilot projects, including the amount of money allowable per pilot site, the services available, and the time frames.

A component of the pilot sites will be to:

- Assess current resources, training and practices related to supporting students with competitive integrated employment
- Identify opportunities for embedding best practices surrounding competitive integrated employment opportunities within the Iowa Department of Education's Specially Designed Instruction;
- Identify promising and emerging life skill practices and resources to assess and build students' ability to manage life skills areas; and
- Identify and define critical elements, components and parameters for replication.

Assistive Technology opportunities will also be explored, including virtual options for a variety of services such as Supported Employment.

Another exciting development is the establishment of resources to initiate Individual Placement & Support (IPS) services for youth. This has never been initiated in the State of Iowa, and will be a wonderful opportunity to introduce new evidence-based services to transition students with disabilities in Iowa.

OUR PROGRESS

Objective 4

Facilitate an increase in Iowans with disabilities with obtaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment that leads to economic security.

The 14(c)/IPS/CE workgroup has initiated activities in this area. Regular meetings occur during the Collective meetings. Discussions thus far have stemmed around a focus on ensuring there are better service alternatives for individuals with disabilities. Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) are making sound business decisions when they decide to move towards models focused on competitive integrated employment, rather than models with a primary focus on services that segregate individuals with disabilities or pay subminimum wages.

Workgroup members have focused on ways to provide education on needs in Iowa communities for individuals with disabilities, such as wraparound services, transportation, etc. Workgroup recruitment efforts have included educators; content/context

experts; 14(c) certificate holders; employers who have transitioned away from 14(c) certificates, and those with current competitive integrated employment business models; other Iowa employers; individuals with lived experience, including those who have participated in subminimum wage employment; MCOs/case managers, and mental health providers.

The workgroup also oversees conversations regarding the DIF Customized Discovery (CD) and IPS pilot sites currently underway. One of the biggest barriers CRPs have shared is that providing services such as CD and IPS can cause a loss of income. This is due to the fact that current funders of such services do not reimburse CRPs for various costs such as training time, administrative activities, etc.

The DIF pilot projects for CD and IPS include reimbursement to CRPs for these costs on approved tracking sheets. The tracking sheets will be compared to placement data at the end of the pilot project to determine the sustainability of incorporating these costs into service fees. This would ensure competitive integrated employment services such as CD and IPS are more desirable for CRPs to provide, as they are able to meet costs and not lose income.

OUR PROGRESS

Objective 5

Increase expectation and demand for competitive integrated employment for all Iowans with disabilities.

The Community of Practice (COP) workgroup is underway, with discussions surrounding ways to utilize multiple modalities to promote the message of competitive integrated employment as the primary desired outcome and to market and educate stakeholders regarding the benefits.

Conversations have also been held on how the COP workgroup functions within the broader Collective to share information to change the narrative on employment. The workgroup will need to determine how to create a Community of Practice that reaches all stakeholders. Workgroup members will begin determining the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, and how to create opportunities for training, technical assistance, and solutions to ensure that the needs do not become (or continue to be) barriers to employment.

This workgroup will develop trainings

or identify experts that can be brought in to provide content expertise to the Collective as a whole.

The workgroup is currently reviewing a model that offers different approaches to the idea of a Community of Practice. Once this model is reviewed, the workgroup will proceed with the most effective way to distribute training and information to all stakeholders.

The COP group is responsible for working with the other Collective workgroups in a manner that will bring all identified needs to the table of the larger Collective so the whole group can work on these efforts. In this manner, there will be cohesion amongst groups rather than isolation of efforts.

In addition to the workgroup efforts, the *Everyone Can Work* three-part series began. The series is designed for all disability service professionals - including Direct Support Professionals, case managers, educators, Community Rehabilitation Provider employment staff, vocational rehabilitation counselors - as well as parents, families, guardians, and self-advocates. The series challenges participants to think differently about employment possibilities and how they can actively support better outcomes.

OUR PROGRESS

Objective 5, continued

Through training and discussions, the series seeks to increase expectations, knowledge, and tools that all disability service professionals - regardless of their role - can implement person-centered thinking and planning, and provide individualized services that lead to quality outcomes for all.

The series began with a two-part webinar, *Person-Centered Thinking and Employment*. It grounded participants in the philosophy and values that underpin best practices in community employment. These sessions challenged participants to think differently about employment possibilities and how they can actively support better employment outcomes in their daily work. Over 70 participants representing key partners in employment from across the state participated in these webinars.

The four-module online course, *Everyone Can Work - You Make it Happen!* was made available following the virtual sessions. It provides a framework for person-centered

thinking, planning, and implementation. The self-paced course includes short, interactive lessons and activities that support growth in person-centered thinking and actions in employment that lead to competitive integrated employment. A total of 95 participants have registered and are currently participating in the online course.

The series will culminate on November 16, 2023 with the *Everyone Can Work Summit*. Series participants are invited to gather with other employment partners to explore Iowa's "state of the State" in employment services. Participants will identify critical opportunities to make meaningful and financially rewarding competitive integrated opportunities a reality for all Iowans with disabilities.

Registration is still open for the *Everyone Can Work Summit*. The Iowa Blueprint for Change team encourages disability service professionals in Iowa to attend!

OUR PROGRESS

Objective 6

Align public policies, funding, and practices that support competitive integrated employment as the first and preferred outcome for all Iowans with disabilities.

A lot of action has taken place under this objective! In Year 1 (October 1, 2022 - September 30, 2023), a tiered support model has been developed within Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS). Two Counselor Specialists were hired to focus solely on IBC efforts. The positions build internal capacity within IVRS across the State to ensure IVRS effectively services and supports Iowans with the most significant disabilities. IVRS offices now have access to a specialized Counselor Specialist who can problem solve, train, and provide technical assistance and support surrounding this population.

The policy workgroup has also been working tirelessly towards the implementation of an Employment First and Technology First policy for the State of Iowa. Having legislation or an Executive Order in this area will be

the next logical step for the State. Iowa has a rich history of Employment First efforts and support for legislation will be the fruition of those efforts. In addition to the Policy workgroup, the Iowa Blueprint for Change Backbone Team have held numerous meetings to try to push these initiatives forward. Listed below are just a few of these meetings:

- Iowa APSE
- National APSE
- Iowa DD Council
- The Harkin Institute
- Self-Advocates
- Money Follows the Person
- Brain Injury Alliance of Iowa
- CDD

The Iowa DD Council has agreed to include these policy efforts in their asks for the year. Additionally, the IBC team has been invited to participate in the CDD/DD Council legislative event, where the IBC team can share policy efforts. Partnerships are extremely appreciated and demonstrate the commitment of the professionals in Iowa towards these efforts!

The DIF Project Director also met with the Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy Assistant Secretary Taryn Williams on the Iowa IBC project and the need for State legislation. ODEP is a strong supporter of Employment First efforts.

IPS SUCCESS STORY

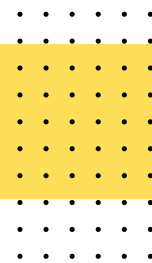
Matthew Adamson was introduced to IPS (Individual Placement & Support) and Kayla Robinson at Hope Haven through his Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Ashley Banes. Matthew wanted to work but knew he would need assistance to find and keep a job. He also had an interest in going to school as he wanted to become a counselor. At one point, he was going to give up on working and just focus on school.

The Employment Specialist connected Matthew with a mental health agency who was hiring for a Peer Support Specialist. Matthew went for an informational interview and was eventually hired for the position.

Matthew reports, “I struggled with mental health and substance but with the support and encouragement of the IPS program, I am now able to provide support to other people who struggle like I have in the past. I was going to give up on everything, but being a part of IPS changed my life and I am grateful for this opportunity.”



IBC ON THE ROAD



Make Your Mark Conference

Partnered with the Iowa City VR office and WCDC, Inc. to share success stories and discuss the mission to increase employment access in Iowa for Iowans with disabilities.



Iowa APSE Conference

Presented on activities accomplished during the first year of the IBC grant, as well as plans for the upcoming year and the importance of this work to achieve systems change.



Annual Evidence-Based Practices in Behavioral Health Summit

Held a session on the history of competitive integrated employment in Iowa, Employment First, and how current initiatives will catapult Iowa forward.



MEET OUR NEW STAFF

Ben Grauer, *DIF Project Coordinator*

Ben is new to the world of competitive integrated employment but is excited to learn from the great group of individuals from IVRS and the UCEDD. He graduated from Iowa with his Master of Health Administration in May and is excited to contribute by sharing his unique perspective and experience with project management and policy development.

In addition to his own disability, he previously worked alongside and supported others who benefitted from IVRS and Waiver programs at the YMCA in downtown Des Moines, before moving to Iowa City in the fall of 2019.



Kelly Strydom, *DIF Project Coordinator*

Kelly comes to the UCEDD from community-based neurobehavioral rehabilitation services. She has more than 10 years of experience working in disability services as a direct support professional, targeted case manager, brain injury specialist, and memory care director.

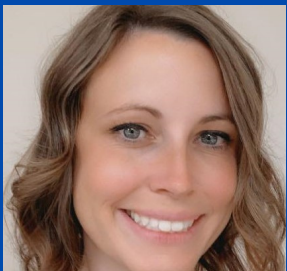
She is excited to use the knowledge of Medicaid services, HCBS waivers, and serving individuals with diverse needs to prioritize competitive integrated employment.



IBC BACKBONE TEAM

The IBC Backbone Team receives technical assistance and training from the Collective Impact Forum to ensure they are aligning with the Collective Impact model.

The role of the IBC Backbone Team is to provide dedicated staff to support the work of partners by assisting with strategic guidance, supporting aligned activity, establishing shared measurements, building community engagement, advancing policy, and mobilizing resources.



Brandy McOmber
Project Director



Vienna Hoang
CRP Resource Manager



Ashley Banes
Counselor Specialist



Paul Fuller
Counselor Specialist



Derrick Willis
UCEDD Director



Judy Warth
Project Manager



Ben Grauer
Project Coordinator



Kelly Strydom
Project Coordinator

YEAR 1 – 5 FORMATIVE EVALUATION

Information that can be used to improve the program in order to achieve project outcomes

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

The local evaluation team has reviewed previously created documentation (the grant proposal, annual reports, past survey data) to understand existing data collection practices and to better understand how future data collection efforts may align.

MEETING FACILITATION

In addition to attending meetings, the local evaluation team will hold meetings with various program stakeholders to ensure the local evaluation plan aligns with the project goals and objectives. The evaluation activities will be mutually agreed upon with IVRS and will be implemented according to program evaluation standards.

MEETING ATTENDANCE

The local evaluation team will attend the monthly DIF Contract Meetings. Attendance and participation of the local evaluation team at meetings with the grant project director, partners, and external evaluators will also take place.

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

The local evaluation team will assist project partners in developing, administering, analyzing, and disseminating the results of surveys. Survey findings will be used to inform the development and the refinement of the project.

FOCUS GROUP FACILITATION

Small focus groups will also be used at the beginning of program implementation to proactively identify potential deployment barriers. Themes that emerge from the focus groups will be shared with the project director in a timely and professional manner.

INTERVIEW FACILITATION

Interviews will be conducted with stakeholders receiving IBC services mid-program implementation to assess potential deployment barriers. Themes that emerge from the interviews will be shared with the project director in a timely and professional manner.

YEAR 4-5 SUMMATIVE EVALUATION

Information that can be used to demonstrate the results of the program

OUTCOME EVALUATION

To assess the overall impact of the program, program evaluators will analyze employment outcome data for program participants compared to non-participants by using an estimation technique called propensity score matching.

PROPENSITY SCORE MATCHING

Propensity score matching is a technique used when participants cannot be randomly assigned to participate in a program. This statistical technique facilitates the ability to estimate the impact of the IBC program on employment outcomes.

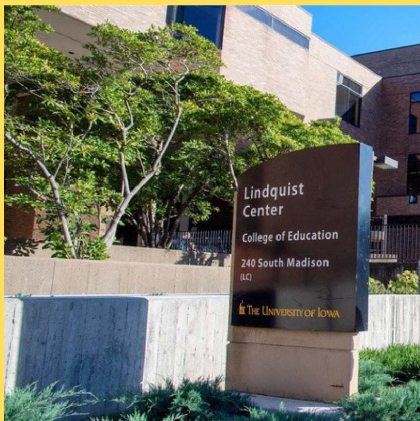
CASE STUDIES

Case studies of IBC participants will be conducted to provide additional data that will contribute to a Playbook for program replication.

PLAYBOOK

Using all findings from evaluation activities throughout the life of the grant, the CEA will create a Playbook that can be used to replicate the success of the program.

MEET OUR CEA PROGRAM EVALUATORS



Center for Evaluation and Assessment

The University of Iowa Center for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA) provides third-party program evaluation, assessment, and other research services to a broad range of clients working in multiple programmatic areas. CEA staff and evaluators collaborate to write program evaluation proposals, design and implement evaluation methodologies, communicate with project staff and stakeholders, and report evaluation results to stakeholders and funding agencies.

CEA PROGRAM EVALUATORS

Kayla Jackson, Ph.D.

Research Specialist

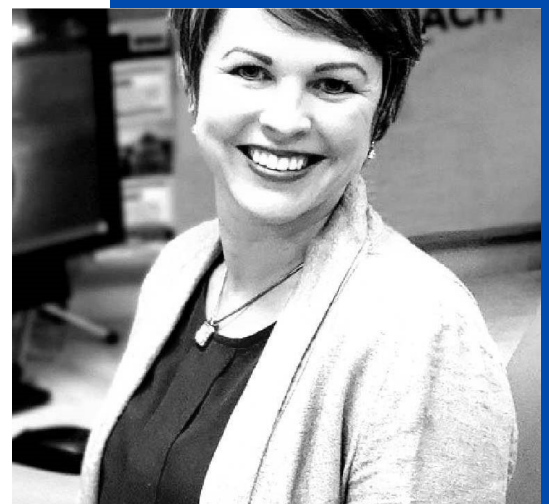
Kayla has been working for the CEA since 2018, leading program evaluation activities for a variety of projects and programs, including before and after school programs, funded by the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, pharmacy research for the dissemination of a telehealth cardiovascular risk service, and Iowa Governor's STEM Advisory Council programs to advance opportunities for students in STEM fields. She has also been an adjunct professor for the University of Iowa teaching Program Evaluation since 2022. In May 2023, Kayla completed her research on survey design and graduated with her Ph.D. in Psychological and Quantitative Foundations.



Erica Kaldenberg, Ph.D.

Ph.D. Associate Research Scientist

Originally from Fargo, North Dakota, she obtained a bachelor's in journalism mass communications from Iowa State University in 2005. She then moved to St. Louis where she took a position as a special education teacher and completed her Master's degree in Special Education at the University of Missouri St. Louis. In 2008, she moved to Iowa City and began her doctoral degree in Special Education at UI in 2010, which she completed in 2015 prior to her current employment with the UI REACH Program. Along with her research and grant-related responsibilities, Kaldenberg continues to actively pursue advanced program evaluation training and scholarship activities and is engaged with program evaluation efforts at local and state levels.

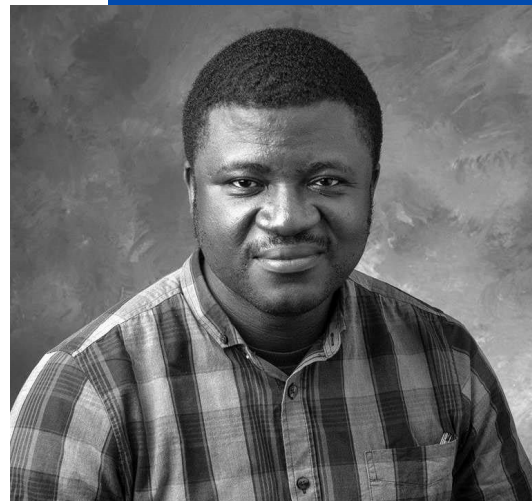


CEA PROGRAM EVALUATORS

Elias Ejeh

Graduate Assistant

He has over ten years of experience working in higher education administration in a research project manager role at the University of Ibadan. During these years, he worked on research project management, planning, monitoring, and implementing developmental interventions with MacArthur Foundation funding, which has contributed to the University's transformation of Higher Education to an appreciable level. Through collaborative efforts and partnerships with stakeholders, he has provided project management and research administrative oversight on (16) MacArthur-funded research projects and (6) Centers of Excellence at the University since 2012. He is now pursuing a Ph.D. in Higher Education and Student Affairs at UI.

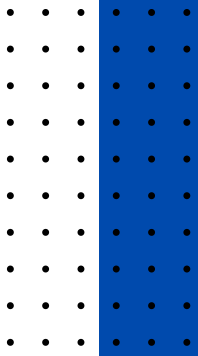


Cecilia Botwe

Graduate Assistant

She has both a Bachelor's and Master's in Educational Administration. She has worked for over fifteen years at higher institutions of learning (private and public). She started her career at Christian Service University College where she played several administrative roles, including supervising students' admission process, organizing graduation and matriculation, handling human resource matters, organizing Council meetings, departmental and other statutory and non-statutory committee meetings, receiving and responding to students' inquiries, evaluating administrative policies, and initiating policy formulation on academic matters. She is pursuing a Ph.D. in Higher Education and Student Affairs at UI.





UPCOMING EVENTS



Collective Meetings in the upcoming year will be held the 3rd Wednesday from 1pm - 3pm (Central).

- Wednesday October 18, 2023 1-3 p.m. – to register
<https://uiowa.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJYkdeGppz4tG9L49pQdjWxrNxXKKGLm3DnG>
- Wednesday November 15, 2023 1-3 p.m. - to register
<https://uiowa.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJMqduuqrToqHtZvCWtjgON1G7u6E0KOyZEN>
- Wednesday January 17, 2024 1-3 p.m. – to register
https://uiowa.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJMkc-GprD4rGNKm_xQuFPg9VAHwb97iGPKf
- Wednesday March 20, 2024 1-3 p.m. – to register
<https://uiowa.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJwodeutqz0sH9GbCGYSq2xGhdT8FCaTd0uz>
- Wednesday May 15, 2024 1-3 p.m. – to register
<https://uiowa.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJclcOutqjkiGNOSmO5lXaiEi03fW61W9M6T>
- Wednesday July 17, 2024 1-3 p.m. – to register
https://uiowa.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJlkce2qqzMoGtAhoT_sx6rhGgjcNs8bx9xB



CDD Legislative Event: November 2, 2023



Everyone Can Work Summit: November 16, 2023. Sign up:
<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/e5c9dedcf4c5440bad802d9b7d9d316c>



DIF Staff will present at the IPS International Learning Community on December 5, 2023 on IPS-Youth.

TALK TO US

Please feel free to reach out with any comments, suggestions, or questions. We look forward to hearing from you!

Brandy McOmber

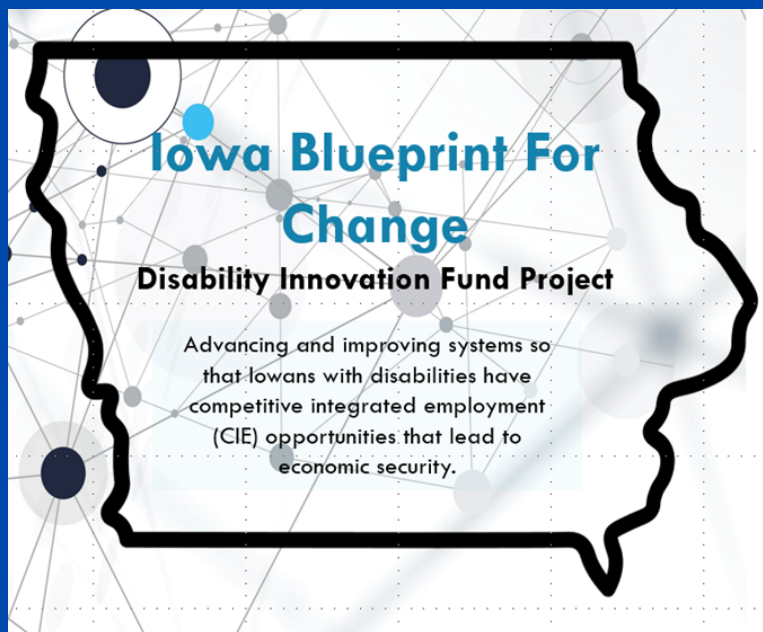
DIF Project Director

brandy.mcomber@iowa.gov

319-830-0423



Visit our webpage to continue learning about the Iowa Blueprint for Change project, join the Collective, access meeting notes, leave comments, and more!



Please note, the contents of this newsletter were developed under grant number H421D220013 from the Department of Education. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. (Authority 20 U.S.C. §§ 1221e-3 and 3474)