

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Public Meeting, Saturday, February 3, 2024
NCBVI, 4600 Valley Road, Room 4A
Lincoln, Nebraska

Minutes

Call to Order. Welcome and introductions. Announcement concerning public comment periods, meeting agendas, open meeting act, proof of publication, recordings and other logistics.

Brent Heyen, Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. The meeting began with introductions.

Commissioners present: Brent Heyen, Chairperson, Lincoln; Cheryl Livingston, Vice Chairperson and Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska; Lincoln; Mark Bulger, Designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Omaha; Linda Mentink, Executive Secretary, Columbus; Miguel Rocha, Scottsbluff.

Staff present: Carlos Serván, Executive Director; Erin Brandyberry, Deputy Director of Services; Kat Carroll, Deputy Director of Finance; Tammie Dunn, Deputy Director of Finance; Cristal Dimas, North Platte District Supervisor; Tim Jefferson, Omaha District Supervisor; Pam Rademacher, Lincoln District Supervisor; Charli Saltzman, OC Counselor; Connie Daly, OC Counselor; Grace Garza, VR Counselor; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Specialist.

Public present: Barbara Loos, Lincoln; Brad Loos, Lincoln; Patti Schonlau, Bellevue; Sheryl Rogge, Beatrice; Jerry Whitlow, Kearney; Lori Reed, Kearney; Myah Simmon, Kearney; Issac Hock, Beatrice; Judy Irvin, Lincoln.

The Notice of the Meeting was published in the Lincoln Journal Star, the State Government Calendar, NCBVI Website, NFB Newslines® and Radio Talking Book. The Notice was also sent to ACBN, NFBN, and the NCBVI List Serve.

Approval of the November 4, 2023, Public Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Rocha moved to approve the Minutes of the November 4, 2023 Commission Meeting as posted on our website. Commissioner Livingston seconded the motion.

Roll call: Ayes: Mentink, Heyen, Bulger, Livingston, Rocha
Nays:
Motion Carried

Report from the Commissioners

Brent Heyen – Brent reported that he attended the NFBN Lincoln Chapter Christmas party. He also works as a hotel manager where he demonstrates the abilities of a blind person every day in the work he performs, and he sets a good example of what a blind person can do.

Mark Bulger – Mark reported that he is a committee member of the ACBN, and they are currently working on organizing the details of the upcoming ACBN State convention. The ACBN convention

will be held on Saturday, April 20, in Bellevue. He noted that they have a great convention lined up. He also serves as President for the Omaha Association of the Blind and he attends their monthly meetings. They are in their 101st year.

Miguel Rocha – Miguel reported that he completed his Fall 2023 semester at UNO and he started his semester for Spring 2024. He is looking to land an internship for the Summer. Miguel reported that he has created a professional website called conqueringtechnology.com. He has attended the NFBN Board meetings and Chapter meetings.

Cheryl Livingston – Cheryl reported that she was elected to serve as the NFB Designee on the NCBVI Board of Commissioners. She has been a member of the National Federation of the Blind since 1975 and she is currently the NFBN State Treasurer. She has served in this capacity since 1988. Cheryl noted that the State Treasurers are being asked to learn Quick Books so that they can better help the National office in keeping records. Cheryl noted that she also serves as Secretary for the NFB Lincoln Chapter. They will have their elections coming up in February so she will wait to see if she is re-elected. She has been attending NFBN Chapter meetings and Board meetings. The Lincoln Chapter had a Christmas party which she attended at Outback Steakhouse.

Cheryl reported that the NFBN State convention will be held April 12-14 at the Gering Civic Center and the Monument Inn and Suites in Gering. NFBN will have a bus traveling to the convention, starting in eastern Nebraska and heading west. Cheryl noted that NFBN has a Mangnall scholarship available to provide assistance. Cheryl encouraged everyone to attend.

Linda Mentink – Linda reported that she currently serves on the NFBN Board of Directors, and she is the Secretary of the NFBN Senior Division. She attended meetings for both of those organizations. She goes out monthly to attend luncheons with the former NFBN Columbus Area Chapter members. Linda reported that she teaches music part-time at Bible Baptist Christian School in Columbus. Linda stated that she is from Wisconsin originally but has been in Nebraska for the last 20 years. She is involved with the Alumni Association of the Wisconsin School for the Blind and Visually Impaired meetings, where she serves as President. They have been having quarterly Zoom meetings and regular Board meetings.

Linda also reported that she serves on the Friends Board. They held a meeting last Tuesday. Friends has a new member, Nancy Flearl. Nancy will be taking over as the representative on the Nebraska DeafBlind Interagency Team meetings as she will be the representative for the Support Service Providers. Nancy is taking over this position from Jan Brandt. Linda reported that Friends also continues to work on their website. It is up and running, but it has not yet been advertised.

Focus Topic: IL Services for OIB Clients Dealing with Loosing Vision – Attitudes and Skills for Living a Quality Life – Erin Brandyberry

As the central focus of our meeting, we have arranged for several consumers we've assisted this year to join us and share their experiences with the impact of NCBVI's OIB services on their lives. Alongside the personal stories, we would like to present key statistics outlining the dynamics of NCBVI's OIB program.

Over the past few years, there has been a notable increase in the demand for our OIB services. NCBVI's budget has effectively managed this surge by leveraging carryover funds from limited

spending during COVID and allocating Social Security Reimbursement funds towards the OIB program. In Federal Fiscal Year 2021, our total OIB purchases were \$127,198.92, which increased to \$271,228.18 in Federal Fiscal Year 2023, representing a doubling of spending in the past two years. We constantly monitor our budget, striving to strike a balance between staff time dedicated to OIB skills development and necessary purchases for consumers' access to assistive technology and training opportunities. Currently, we anticipate the need to scale back purchases to allocate more staff time to meet the growing demand for NCBVI OIB services.

We take pride in the meaningful impact our staff's work has on consumers, and it's gratifying to see this reflected in the data. In the past Federal Fiscal Year, our services demonstrated significant positive outcomes: 94% of consumers receiving technology services reported improvement, 94% of those undergoing independent living skills training reported improvement, and 86% of all consumers receiving our services expressed increased confidence in maintaining their current living situation. When comparing this data to that from two years ago, we observe notable progress. There has been a 3% increase in the number of consumers reporting improvement after technology and independent living skills training, and an impressive 8% increase in consumers expressing enhanced confidence in maintaining their current living situation. This upward trend underscores the continued effectiveness and positive impact of our services on the lives of those we serve.

As the population of Nebraskans ages, the needs of our older blind residents are expected to rise. With the aging baby boomer population, the number of individuals with visual impairment or blindness in the United States is projected to double to over 8 million by 2050. This demographic shift emphasizes the necessity to focus on the evolving needs of the OIB program. According to our 7OB reporting data from the past year, the number of individuals served in VR services was 477, while those served in OIB increased to 674, compared to the previous year's 519—an increase of 155 clients served.

The primary objectives of our OIB services are to provide training and tools for older Nebraskans to regain or retain independence, reduce their reliance on external support, in-home or facility care, and enhance their quality of life. Success in this area is evident in recent 7OB report numbers, with 457 clients remaining in their private residences, 85 in senior independent living facilities, 74 in assisted living facilities, and only 58 out of 674 clients residing in nursing homes or long-term care facilities.

Erin noted that there are several OIB consumers at the meeting to present their stories.

Jerry Witlow - Erin introduced Jerry Witlow who is from Kearney. Erin reported that once she finished Center training at the beginning of her employment, Jerry was her very first client. Erin stated that she has three questions prepared that she is going to ask each consumer who is joining us today.

What was your perspective about your blindness before you started working with our agency?

Erin stated that she is very proud of Jerry. When she went to see Jerry for the very first time at her home, she was about to have her second eye removed because of her progressive eye condition. All of her life she knew that it was a possibility that her condition was progressing, and she was able to function as a low vision user. However, Jerry was mad when she realized that this was where she was in her life. However, she always had the desire to be independent and that it was

not going to stop her. Erin noted that when she showed up at Jerry's house on that first day, she was using a curtain rod as a cane. Jerry had the intuition to know how to make it work, which is what this is all about, learning the alternatives of blindness and creative problem solving.

Jerry noted that she had seen her mother and her brother go through being almost totally blind, so it was a scary situation for her. She thought she was prepared for it; however, she was not as prepared as she thought. At this time, she has learned to overcome her fear of being totally blind.

How has NCBVI helped you?

Jerry said her life is like night and day with the services she has received from NCBVI. She said her life is so much better with the help she has received from NCBVI. Jerry noted that she has a place to turn, and she has great support. Jerry stated that she has nothing but good comments to say about NCBVI. Everyone has been very supportive, very helpful and very understanding. NCBVI has helped her build her confidence among many other things.

What is the most impactful thing that NCBVI has done for you?

Jerry stated that the services that she has received from NCBVI has impacted every aspect in her life. At first, she did not know where to turn and she had very little confidence. Jerry noted that she has been very happy with the services she has received from NCBVI and she would recommend anyone to reach out to the Commission for blindness issues. She said that one of the things that has impressed her the most, is that everyone at NCBVI has been so loving, so caring and so knowledgeable. For NCBVI staff, it is not just a job, they want to do what they are doing. The blindness sleep shade training that staff receives at the beginning of their employment gives them an idea of what it is like to be blind. In her mind, that itself says a lot.

Erin added that when she first met with Jerry, she could only do a task for a few minutes because she would get so fed up and frustrated with not being able to do it. After about a year of this and some tough counseling, Erin convinced Jerry to go to the FYI program that they were having in the North Platte District. Jerry attended the program and a few years later attended again as a blind role model. Erin noted that Jerry has become involved in many activities of the NFBN and NCBVI.

Sheryl Rogge – Erin introduced Sheryl Rogge who is from Beatrice. Sheryl is currently working with NCBVI OC counselor, Charli Saltzman.

What was your perspective about your blindness before you started working with our agency?

Sheryl stated that her husband had gone into the hospital in June 2022. At that time, she had most of her sight and she was still driving. She also babysat her grandson and was caregiver to her husband. Five days later, he unexpectedly passed away. Sheryl noted that this was a huge hurdle after 52 years of marriage. Within a month, her eyes failed her. She could no longer babysit because of safety issues, she gave up her driver's license for fear of hurting someone else, and she was alone. She would sit for days by herself. The worst part was, it was thought that blind people don't live alone, blind people don't cook, blind people sit in a chair and melt away. That was her perspective and her family's perspective of blind people. She now realizes that this is not true, but she had never been around many blind people. While her mother was going blind, she lived in assisted living.

Sheryl gave much thanks to Charli for where she is today. Sheryl stated she started working with Charli and she found out that NCBVI could assist her with gadgets such as a magnifier. She stated that it was not the gadgets that she was really missing, it was the socialization. Sheryl stated that she currently lives in a community of over 55. There are 18 women living in this community and one man. Sheryl noted that no one gets out much and no one has much socialization. Sheryl noted that she needs to be with people and Charli showed her that she can do it. She can be a part of society and she can contribute, which she never thought she could do. Sheryl stated that when she went blind, she honestly thought that her life was going to be living in her daughter's second bedroom. She was told not to cook, not to go out of the house, and we do not expect you to do any chores around the house. Just sit and we will be home after work. Sheryl stated that she currently still lives alone, she does 90 percent of her own cleaning, she does all her cooking, and she hopes she is a blessing to those around her.

Erin asked Sheryl about some of the opportunities she has had that she never thought possible a year ago. Sheryl stated that she loves to walk, but once her sight was bad enough that she could not cross streets, she was very limited in where she could walk. Her daughters had told her that she could not cross streets because she could not see. Charli started her on some cane training which opened a whole new world for her.

Erin asked Sheryl about the blindness events she has attended over the past year. Sheryl stated that she attended the Silver Summit conference in Kearney which was the first blindness event she attended. Sheryl noted that she was alone and scared to death about how she would do things such as finding her room. Sheryl stated that she also attended the Ski for Life event. Sheryl stated that she had three goals when attending this event. They were meet new people, make new friends, and pet a lot of dogs. Sheryl stated that she had never skied before, and she did so at this event. Sheryl stated that the most rewarding part was that she meant some wonderful people. Sheryl again thanked Charli for all that she has done for her life.

Judy Irvin - Judy stated that she is in a club of ladies where one of them is totally blind. This lady has been a role model of hers for many years. She also has an uncle who lost an eye and a nephew who lost an eye. None of these people ever gave up and they keep very busy. Judy stated that she had cataracts removed in 2012 and this is when her blindness started. Now any kind of light burns her retinas. She had injections in her eyes every month for seven years and this helped at the time, but not anymore. Judy stated that she asked her doctor when he would consider her to be legally blind. Her doctor looked at her and told her that she is legally blind. This was in 2014. Judy stated that she has adapted to her blindness and Library for the Blind where she worked was helpful. Judy stated that she has lived in her home for 52 years and she knows her way around in her home. Her husband has been very helpful as well. Judy stated that she is not going to give up on things. Judy stated that she came to NCBVI and she got introduced to Charli. Judy stated that she is diabetic, and she has a very hard time seeing things. Judy stated that Charli is helping her learn technology and helping her learn how to travel with a cane. She has also been taught how to use pen friend to label items. She calls this her magic wand. Judy thanked Charli for her patience and all her assistance.

Erin stated that two other consumers that had planned on presenting today were unable to attend. NCBVI OC Counselor, Connie Daly, was present to share their stories.

Margie Worth – Connie stated that when she first met Margie she had given up in doing most things. Margie talked about in the past she loved to go to volleyball games with her family, but after

becoming blind she didn't see the use in going to the game because she could not see it. She had also loved to quilt and cook and things like that. Connie stated that NCBVI did provide training to Margie on how to use the cane and gave her some cooking and technology lessons. Connie stated that it seemed that Margie was really looking for permission to do things as a blind person. After their first visit, Margie had gone out to a volleyball game with her family and she talked about how much fun she had, and it was really more about being with her family and enjoying the experience. Margie mentioned that she used a cane to help her get around at the volleyball game. Connie stated that when she came back for another appointment where they were going to work on sewing alternatives, Margie had already gone out and made quilts for all her grandchildren.

Connie reported that Margie asked Connie to share that she really appreciated all the staff who came and visited her. Margie mentioned that she truly felt that NCBVI offered the best service that she received.

Ferne Mingus – Connie noted that Fern had been a client of NCBVI in the past and then, when she started to lose more vision, NCBVI began providing services again. Fern lives independently and she bakes dozens of delicious cookies for neighbors, friends, family, and others who she comes in contact with. Ferne had planned to talk about how attending the Silver Summit impacted her. Fern attended the Silver Summit with her daughter. The community and the positive attitudes that were available to her really empowered her to keep doing what she is doing and not let her blindness stop her.

In closing, Erin stated that she is incredibly proud of all NCBVI staff. Erin stated she is also very proud of our consumers who have worked hard to make their possibilities endless.

Commissioner Bulger recognized executive director, Carlos Serván, because several years ago NCBVI did not have a lot of funding for OIB. We have always known that when you help people with blindness to learn the skills of being independent, it is a great investment. About five years ago NCBVI, along with some consumers, went to the State legislature and were able to get about triple the OIB funding that we use to have so that we could serve our consumers better. Commissioner Bulger stated that he is proud that NCBVI has the funds to help our older blind consumers. Our consumers success stories are what drives our state representatives to fund the funding that they do so NCBVI can provide the services that are needed. The success of our older blind consumers also helps others who are blind. It is important to share the importance of alternative training with others who are blind. Mark stated that he is very proud of the consumers who spoke today for all that they have done. Mark noted that NCBVI has a great staff who is committed to helping the blind of Nebraska. Mark thanked Carlos for having a vision and getting NCBVI the funding that was needed.

Commissioner Rocha thanked everyone for coming to the meeting today and sharing their stories. He stated that he always enjoys listening to success stories.

Chair Heyen also thanked the three presenters for coming to the meeting and sharing their stories. It is always good to hear about what NCBVI is doing to provide a great impact on our consumers and their lives. A lot of people only think about the services and training that NCBVI offers for the youth so they can become productive and contributing members of society and pay their taxes. The older blind population has already done that, and they deserve the same services as the

youth. He is happy to hear about the great services NCBVI is offering to them and hearing about the positive impact the services are having on their lives.

Director Serván stated that about five years ago, before NCBVI received the OIB budget increase, we were limiting our services to the older blind to about six visits. At that time NCBVI had about 250 older blind clients and now we have 508, which is more than double. Also, we now have no limits on how many visits will be provided. Director Serván thanked the staff for their dedication and he also thanked the commissioners for their support.

Commissioner Bulger noted that he has been fortunate to attend the Silver Summit a couple of times as a commissioner and a vendor. He noted that he feels this event is life changing for those who come, and he encouraged our presenters today to try to convince other older blind individuals to come because it is a wonderful opportunity.

Public Comment Period

Barbara Loos – Barbara thanked everyone for their stories. She noted that life has a lot of twists and turns and for a lot of blind people it is wonderful that we have NCBVI to help people. Barbara stated that she also wanted to remind people that life goes beyond being a client of an agency. So, when searching for life beyond NCBVI services, she is hopeful they will contact the Senior Division of the National Federation of the Blind. Barbara noted that she is the vice president of this organization and Robert Newman is president. Robert worked at NCBVI for approximately 37 years. Barbara reported that they have monthly Zoom calls on the second Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. central time. If anyone wishes to get in contact with the Senior Division, Robert can be reached at 402-660-1743 or robertleslieneuman@gmail.com. Barbara noted that the NFBN Senior Division is a great resource for older blind individuals.

Break

A break was taken at 10:15 a.m.
The meeting resumed at 10:30 a.m.

Report from the Executive Director

I. Administration

During the last quarter, I attended the following meetings and activities:

SEAC: The Nebraska Department of Education, Special Education gave a report on the progress for their different programs for 2023 and they provided examples on how students with disabilities move up year by year in their different programs. NCECBVI also gave an annual report, including the partnership with NCBVI.

NCSAB monthly meetings:

During my last meeting as President of NCSAB with RSA Deputy Commissioner, Carol Dobak, we talked about the importance of improving communication between RSA and NCSAB. As a result, RSA will hold quarterly meetings with state directors to go over ideas and training items from new policies; the first meeting is on February 6. We are also working on the agenda items for the 2024

Spring conference. The Spring conference will be April 10-12 in Bethesda, Maryland. We also talked about having three (3) Randolph-Sheppard trainings for agency staff this year.

ADA Task Force: EnterpriseOne (E1) is very complicated to navigate for both sighted and blind users. Therefore, the issue is whether E1 is inaccessible or not friendly to the "regular user". It was also reported that there is a lack of elevators on some apartment buildings that are over 30 years old. Director Serván noted that the ADA does not apply to apartment buildings that are over 30 years old.

StarTran monthly meetings: We approved the recommendation for the Lincoln Safety Plan and the Lincoln Surveillance Report. The paratransit vans are finally coming, as they were back ordered due to covid. At the January meeting, during the public comments, there was much opposition for the new temporary location for the Downtown Transfer Center to L Street and 11th, as the one right now is being demolished. A new permanent one will be built within two to three years.

Attended the Friends quarterly meeting where we talked about needing support for SSP, OIB technology, and home appliances for low-income consumers.

During the CSAVR Regional Conference call, we talked about recruiting and retention; customized employment and progressive employment; and the combined State Plan.

Some of the other meetings I usually attend were canceled due to the weather.

We are working on starting a pilot project to provide a support service provider (SSP) for deaf-blind Nebraskans. This will help them to be independent and feel more integrated in society. One of the main disadvantages for a deaf-blind person is not to be able to socialize, which builds self-esteem and advocacy skills. The first training for SSPs had to be canceled due to weather. It has been re-scheduled for the first weekend in February.

Tactile Images 3-D Works started to meet with different museums and organizations dealing with art. This is to bring accessibility to the blind in art and science. The first exhibit is tentatively scheduled for June 2024.

Kat Carroll and Tammie Dunn completed and submitted all the federal reports and met all the deadlines.

Kat continues to train Tammie on all her Deputy Director of Finance duties, as she will retire on February 29, 2024.

Kat and Tammie worked on sustaining efforts in enhancing the Internal Budget Projection for FFY 2024, illustrating budgeted figures, year-to-date expenditures, projected fixed expenditures for the remaining year, and the remaining funds earmarked for client services. This comprehensive information is being presented to leadership and supervisors on a monthly basis to facilitate strategic planning and optimal utilization of available funds.

We continue to improve the client supply inventory tracking and the items kept in client supply.

We are currently engaged in the preparation of two Request for Proposals (RFPs): one for a Public Service Announcement Campaign, Video Development, and Marketing Materials, and another for the WAGES program.

The 2023 Annual Report was completed and sent to the Governor and the senators. It is on file with the Unicameral.

We worked on updates to the NCBVI Website as needed.

In the area of technology, Hugh Phan continues to provide staff with day-to-day technology support. We reconvened the monthly Technology Committee meetings. A new landline phone was installed for the business office and a landline phone was ported to mobile phone for the business office. Hugh worked to upgrade cell phones for staff who were due for a new device. He also setup a NCBVI agency calendar. A SharePoint demo website was setup, and we are testing accessibility. After testing is completed, we can move forward on a production website for staff communications. He is also working on DocuSign templates and accessible documents.

II. Human Resources

Staff Up-Date:

At the Lincoln District: Kaytlyn Hilligas finished Center training in December and is now working as a VR counselor in the field. The Lincoln District is now fully staffed.

At the North Platte District: We hired Candice Dollar who started Center training on January 3. She was hired to be the VR counselor in Kearney for the North Platte District. However, after she learned that there is a position open in Omaha, she is requesting to be transferred to that district. We still have the Technology Specialist position open which was vacated several months ago. However, we are contracting with a blind consumer, Tina, to help with some of the technology issues for this district.

At the Center: The Training Center still has the home management instructor vacancy. Lucy Alexander contracted with us in December, and Maura is now helping in this area until we can fill the position; but no later than August when she starts graduate school. We hired Sarah Vrana who finished her Center training at the end of December. In addition to her sleep-shade training with us, she started the graduate program with the Louisiana Tech University, and she is getting more sleep-shade training at LCB as part of the program. She is expected to graduate in May, so she can be certified as an O&M instructor. This will give us enough time for Jeff to train Sara before he retires.

At NBE: Jeff sheer started his new duties in December and NBE is now fully staffed.

At Administration: Tammie Dunn was promoted to Deputy Director of Finance and Brandy was promoted to be Accountant II (the position Tammie held since December 16, 2023). Vanessa is now taking over the duties of Brandy's previous position. Carolina Mejia, a temp from SOS, is helping at the front desk covering the position Vanessa left.

We completed our strategic and succession planning. After thorough analysis by our Leadership team, considering factors such as organizational need and long-term sustainability within our fixed budget, we have decided to move forward with the creation of the following positions:

1. Full-time VR Tech in Omaha
2. Full-time HR and Policy Development
3. Full-time Quality Assurance/Programs Coordinator/Contracts Coordinator
4. Administrative Programs Officer I (overseeing OJTs/WBLEs, determining NCBVI academic support for consumers, tracking grades, gathering info for measurable skill gains, assisting with case management, overseeing supported employment milestone processes)

Training Opportunities:

Cristal Dimas and Tim Jefferson were accepted to attend the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute (NRLI) training. Their first cohort session is later in February. We are planning for Tammie and Pam to get this training also.

In mid-January, all Lincoln district staff attended the Eschenbach training on new equipment.

Charli, Kathy and Gracie sat in on a webinar through Eschenbach.

Gracie completed trainings of CSAVR Case Documentation Webinar #1 and #2.

Alex France completed a Cultural Diversity and Humility training course.

Kelly Coleman completed a series of courses through CSVAR.

Craig Kneifl completed a Business Services course on Identifying Employer needs through TACQE.

Mickie Saltzman is pursuing his JAWS certification through Freedom Scientific.

Fritz participated in a webinar on accessible phones.

Center staff participated in a training through the NBPCB to receive an introduction to ethical principles. Center staff also attended a webinar regarding working with people whose behaviors are stigmatized.

III. Field Services

WINNERFEST was held in November at Aurora with 17 participants and the focus was Financial Literacy. We also had eight students attend an advocacy event in Washington, D.C.; where they also had the opportunity to attend a job fair and student seminars.

Field staff continue to network with stakeholders across the state to promote our services, build trusting relationships with employers, and to provide training about blindness. They have also meet with teachers in the public schools, nursing homes, and businesses, among others.

The Lincoln district staff have held several GATE teaching programs where clients participated in several activities designed to put blindness alternative techniques into practice. Some of the older clients don't have enough stamina for an entire day of training. Therefore, a half day training alternative was offered.

Our field counselors continue to attend IEPs and network with the public and private schools in Nebraska to enhance services to blind students. Some of the schools are: Fremont High school, Columbus Public schools, Lincoln Public schools, Omaha Public schools, Millard Public schools, NCECBVI, and the Blair school district. They also network with public schools in Pleasanton, Kearney, Gibbon, Kenesaw, Lexington, Alma, Central Valley, Wood River and Gates Elementary, among others.

Jeff Sheer will finish out the school year with Project Search partnering with Lincoln Public Schools and the Embassy Suites.

Omaha staff attended the Regional Transition meeting with ESU III. They presented information about NCBVI services at an open house for parents and teachers.

Our field staff participated in several presentations and networking events.

In the Lincoln District:

Held a booth for the Lincoln Area Senior Care Expo,
Nursing Career Expo at Northeast Community College,
MOSAIC in Fremont,
American Job Center,
Employ Columbus,
Nebraska Department of Labor meetings in Norfolk and Columbus,
Veteran Career Fair/Hiring Event in Norfolk,
Salvation Army in Norfolk,
Kathy Navrkal also worked on providing a Topaz video magnifier to Prairie Village in Columbus for all residents to use.

In the Omaha District:

Tim participated on a Diversity panel at Bellevue University on January 24.
The Omaha Vet Center and Platte,
WIOA Adult program,
MCC and their Disability Support Services team,
Provided services to a client via the ATP's I-Can Connect programs.

In the North Platte District:

Department of Labor offices in North Platte and Lexington.
ILC staff in Scottsbluff,
ASC Capacitors,
Agape Medical Solutions,
Employ Kearney and Grand Island,
Project Search in Kearney and Grand Island.

Client Statistics:

Number of Clients in All Statuses Served at the end of the Period:

OIB clients was 508.

IL clients under 55 was 81.

VR clients was 430.

We had clients obtain jobs as:
Business Operations Specialist,
Postsecondary Teacher,
Elementary school Teacher,
Janitor/Cleaner,
Landscaping/Grounds keeping,
Mental Health Counselors,
Project Management Specialist,
Randolph-Sheppard Vendor, and
Teaching Assistant.

IV. Training Center

We are planning the 50th anniversary celebration of the Nebraska Center for the Blind. This is tentatively scheduled for October 15, 2024 in Lincoln. October 15 is White Cane Awareness Day, and October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

We currently have eight people attending training: five VR consumers, one out-of-state VR consumer, and two staff trainees.

Two new VR consumers are scheduled to begin training in February, once few final arrangements are made.

An Oregon consumer is completing an 800-hour apprenticeship to become a Certified Rehabilitation Teacher for the Blind through the National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB).

During this quarter, we had four tours for consumers and two 3-day stays. One consumer has scheduled a 3-day stay for the end of February. Out of the 3-day stays, one consumer has already started Center training, and the other is expected to start in February once interpreters are arranged. We also provided a tour to a new employee of the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and shared information on how NCBVI and NCDHH work together when working with deafblind consumers.

In March, most of the Center staff will have the opportunity to collaborate virtually with some of their colleagues from across the country to share ideas. Since we are such a small Center, this is a valuable opportunity to develop a professional network and continue to improve service delivery by gathering ideas from other states. These collaboration meetings are not limited to Structured Discovery Training Centers.

The remodeling at the Center is completed. The tile in the hallway and Home Management classroom were replaced with a vinyl flooring. The hallway, classrooms, and bathrooms walls and door frames have been painted, and new signs have been installed with room numbers. We hope to soon replace the Center's metal and hollow wooden doors with solid wood doors to match the rest of the agency. Filming of a promotional video of the Center is planned for this year.

V. Nebraska Business Enterprise

VENDING SITE UPDATE

NBE has installed new vending sites at the Lincoln Regional Center, YRTC-Kearney, YRTC-Hastings, and DHHS-York. A micro market has also been installed in the STRATCOM building on Offutt Air Force Base. The micro market has proved to be especially popular with employees in the building and is a great addition to our vending services. Additional changes will be made to the Diner facilities at USSTRATCOM that will improve what we are able to offer.

We still have vending and micro market locations pending to be installed at a DHHS-Omaha office, DHHS-Bellevue, DHHS-Hastings, the Nebraska Department of Education Office in Lincoln, and at the Beatrice State Developmental Center. These projects have been delayed for a variety of factors; but should be completed during the month of February. NBE has one federal project in the works as vending is slated to start at the new USDA office in Lincoln at the beginning of February.

NBE Licensed Vendors

There are currently 12 Licensed Vendors in the NBE program and 3 Vendors operating sites as Trainees.

Vending Site Complaints

There were no significant vending site complaints in the last quarter.

Other Updates

NBE Retreat

NBE along with the Committee of Blind Vendors are working on plans for a retreat style event to take place in the spring.

Vice Chair Livingston noted that it was mentioned that three administrative positions will be created because of the additional workload and added paperwork required by the Federal Government. She asked what the function of the HR position would be. She stated that her concern as a consumer is having a heavy load of administrative personnel, and yet there is so much need for counselors to serve the consumers of the agency. Vice Chair Livingston stated she would like the commissioners to receive an accessible organizational chart which shows where the added positions will fall. Director Serván asked Kat and Tammie to work on creating said organizational chart.

Director Serván reported that his first thought was that NCBVI would hire more counselors for the field, and as he reported, NCBVI engaged field counselors and line staff because we wanted to hear from them regarding what they need. The counselors stated for them to provide better services to the clients, they need this type of support. Therefore, this added support will be to mainly facilitate the work of the counselors, not administration. The new HR position will be for HR,

policy, and public relations. There are a lot of documents that NCBVI needs to write for reporting to the Federal Government and our deputy directors do not have full-time administrative support. This position will be part-time HR, part-time policy development and part-time public relations. Currently we contract with Shared Services to help us with our HR work. NCBVI pays them over \$20,000 per year for their services. We have found that Shared Services is not providing the quality support to meet the needs of NCBVI. The person in the HR position will do the work that Shared Services is currently doing for us. Director Serván noted that he did not attend the succession planning meetings because he did not want to influence the outcome. These meetings were to engage the staff members and to listen to their concerns and needs.

Erin Brandyberry added that for the position that will be helping the counselors, we really do see that as a field/client services specific position. As regulations have changed, especially throughout the recent years, what we have been doing to adapt is making everyone a jack of all trades. This keeps building and building so we feel like we are at a point where no one is doing what they want to do the best they can because they are so overwhelmed in trying to make time for things that we must do. Erin noted that we have great staff out in the field, and we want to help them by removing those things that distract them from providing services. In turn, by adding this position that can take care of those important and time-consuming tasks, it will free up our counselors to be out in the field more providing services.

Vice Chair Livingston thanked Carlos and Erin for the report.

Commissioner Rocha asked if NCBVI has a plan on how to implement the three new positions. Director Serván stated that NCBVI will need to create a PDQ (Position Description Questionnaire) for each position. Once this is completed, it needs to be submitted to State Personnel for review and approval. NCBVI also needs to ensure that we have enough funding to sustain the positions and this is also reviewed by the State Budget office. The funds used to pay for these positions will be fixed expenditures. After this is all completed, the positions are approved. Therefore, it will take some time for the approval of these positions, but we hope to have them all in place sometime this year.

Commissioner Rocha asked what RFP stands for. Director Serván reported that RFP stands for Request for Proposal. The executive director is only able to authorize up to \$49,999 for contracts. Anything above this needs to go out for competition, which involves a RFP.

Commissioner Bulger inquired as to if NCBVI has a position for Pre-Ets or if this is a shared responsibility among staff. Director Serván stated that this is a shared responsibility. For Pre-Ets it is the responsibility of the counselor to provide those services. When NCBVI had a transition counselor it was mainly for the various Pre-Ets programs that we have. We have found that contracting works well for the various programs.

Newsline® Update – by Kimberly Scherbarth

Kimberly noted that this attachment has data through the end of December 2023. January's stats are not available until February 1, 2024.

Kimberly also noted that she did not write a report for this quarter, as there was nothing new to report (other than she updated local chapter and division meeting information on Newsline). Kimberly noted that she is no longer coordinating but wanted to help out and finish some things before passing things on to someone else. Kimberly stated that Jamie Richie has access to Newsline and should be able to take care of anything from here on.

NFB Newsline Stats for 2023

	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Number of Subscribers:	2170	2171	2172	2174	2175	2178	2179	2183	2183	2184	2185	2185
New Subscriptions:	0	2	1	2	1	3	1	4	0	1	1	0

Telephone Usage:

Total calls:	795	716	783	738	782	716	835	695	657	646	515	730
Average call length: (Minutes)	15.27	15.27	16.76	13.64	16.06	13.97	11.31	15.47	15.62	13.9	8.99	12.6
Percent local calls:	54.3	57.43	62.99	52.71	62.23	50.62	30.7	47.63	53.62	52.2	21.9	52.3
Total call minutes:	12138	10929	13126	10069	12556	10004	9447	10751	10263	8982	4629	9171

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Online Usage:

Web Sessions:	6700	5775	7072	7848	4354	3723	3216	2317	3012	3139	3061	3561
NFB-NEWSLINE Mobile Sessions:	549	416	459	572	497	525	648	622	499	575	691	594
In Your Pocket Deliveries:	4086	4020	4067	4014	3196	2928	2388	2232	2176	2128	2462	1884
Email Deliveries:	461	455	491	439	472	433	286	282	255	201	207	210
Total Online Accesses:	11796	10666	12089	12873	8519	7609	6538	5453	5942	6043	6421	6249
<u>Total Content Accesses:</u>	6966	6501	6716	6667	5826	5605	5185	4723	4506	4272	4463	4311

Content Access Frequency(Minutes)	6.41	6.2	6.65	6.48	7.66	7.71	8.61	9.45	9.59	10.5	9.68	10.4
Nebraska Newspapers:	3250	2811	3110	3777	3495	3261	2614	2654	2622	2491	2385	2387
Nebraska Local Channels:	20	15	28	30	23	37	38	41	52	85	67	34
Local Weather and Emergency Alerts:	169	150	163	198	163	187	186	135	104	127	101	94
National Newspapers	1448	1337	1640	1509	1188	998	1131	927	804	680	870	680
International Newspapers:	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0
My Newspaper:	131	100	137	77	126	69	43	77	120	107	6	124
Breaking News Online	366	359	324	215	242	225	285	327	279	245	224	128
Nmagazines:	206	189	109	158	187	139	92	93	90	135	121	88
TV Listings	447	314	302	358	261	308	344	270	327	261	310	367

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Complaints or issues

There were no cases to the Client Assistance Program relating to the NE Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) during this quarter.

There was one complaint from a client, but CAP could not move forward as client did not sign a release and was unable to reach. CAP has pursued efforts to ensure that CAP's release is accessible via adobe sign. The release is offered to be completed by the method client prefers (email, mail, adobe sign or in person).

CAP provided two in person trainings to nine new NCBVI staff during this quarter.

Jodi Bodnar continues to attend NCBVI monthly supervisor meetings.

New Business

Discussion regarding scheduling an orientation training for new Commissioner

This item was tabled as NCBVI has no new commissioner appointments at this time.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Final Announcements

Chair Heyen asked if any commissioners would like to put in a request for financial reimbursement for attendance at a national convention, state convention or other national or state events for this year. Per policy, approval of attendance will be accomplished by a member requesting funds in a public meeting of the Board of Commissioners, a reason why he or she wanted to attend the event, followed by majority approval of the other Commissioners.

No requests were made.

The next meeting will be held on May 4, 2024 at the La Quinta Inn and Suites in North Platte.

Executive Session

Vice Chair Livingston moved to go into Executive Session at 11:25 a.m. to discuss a NCBVI personnel issue. Commissioner Mentink seconded the motion.

Roll call: Ayes: Mentink, Heyen, Bulger, Livingston, Rocha
 Naves:
 Motion Carried

Vice Chair Livingston moved to come out of Executive Session at 11:47 a.m. Commissioner Mentink seconded the motion.

Roll call: Ayes: Mentink, Heyen, Bulger, Livingston, Rocha
Nayes:
Motion Carried

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:48 a.m.