

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Public Meeting, Saturday, February 4, 2023
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 9:06 a.m. The meeting began with introductions.

Commissioners present: Brent Heyen, Chairperson, Lincoln; Cheryl Livingston, Vice Chairperson; 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; Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor; Connie Daly, Lincoln District Supervisor; Cristal Dimas, North Platte District Supervisor; Julie Buren, Administrative Programs Officer II; Alexander France, Orientation Counselor; Craig Kneifl, VR Counselor; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Specialist.

Public present: Jim Jirak, Omaha; Jamie Richey, Lincoln; Christine Boone, Lincoln; Brad Loos, Lincoln; Barbara Loos, Lincoln.

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

Approval of the November 5, 2022 Public Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Bulger moved to approve the Minutes of the November 5, 2022 Commission Meeting as posted on our website. Commissioner Livingston seconded the motion.

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

Report from the Commissioners

Brent Heyen: Brent reported that he works as a blind manager at a hotel in Lincoln and he demonstrates the abilities of a blind person every day in the work that he performs. Brent noted that he sets a good example of what a blind person can do.

Linda Mentink: Linda reported that she is a member of NFB of Nebraska and she attended their Board meeting on December 3.

Linda also mentioned that she serves as Vice President of the Friends Board. Friends has contracted with Annette Carter from California to build and maintain our website. Since funds from Friends are no longer needed by NCBVI, the focus will change to raising funds for homeless blind Nebraskans and those having needs which cannot be met by NCBVI. Carlos Servan and Erin Brandyberry will work with Jan Brandt and John Wick to develop the process. President Robert Newman will be stepping down from Friends in July, so they will need to elect a new president. That will take Friends down to six members. There is room for ten, so please let Friends know if you are interested in becoming a member, or if you know of someone who would be.

Linda noted that she is also a part-time music teacher at Bible Baptist Church in Columbus.

Cheryl Livingston: Cheryl reported that she has been active with the NFBN as their State Treasurer. Cheryl noted that she also serves as Treasurer for the NFB Senior Division and she was elected as Secretary for the NFB Lincoln Chapter. Cheryl reported that she is a former employee of NCBVI and retired in March 2020. Cheryl added that she currently cares for three foster cats.

Cheryl reported that the NFBN State Convention will be held March 23-26 at the Marriott Cornhusker hotel in Lincoln. NFBN is partnering with NCBVI on some things. Cheryl encouraged everyone to attend the convention. NFBN will be offering the Mangnall scholarship at the convention. The affiliate received a bequest from Gwendolyn Hangnail and NFBN decided to use some of it to set up a scholarship to assist especially first-timers to attend the convention. Applications are due on March 5 and they can be submitted to her.

Mark Bulger: Mark reported that he currently serves as the President of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska (ACBN). The ACBN will hold their State Convention in Omaha on April 15. They are currently working on all the details. Mark also reported that he serves as the President of the Omaha Association of the Blind and he has been attending monthly in-person meetings.

Mark noted that he currently lives in Sarpy County, but will be moving to a location inside the Omaha city limits so he can become more active in things that involve the city of Omaha.

Miguel Rocha: Miguel reported that he is new to the NCBVI Commission Board and he is happy to be able to serve as a commissioner. Miguel noted that he is currently attending UNO and working on his Bachelor's degree. He also serves as a member of NFB – At Large Chapter.

Focus Topic: RSA Dashboard Information

Presented by Julie Buren, Administrative Programs Officer II

Background

The Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) established six performance measures by which vocational rehabilitation programs are evaluated. Our federal governing body, RSA, bases our performance on the following areas:

1. Employment Rate in the Second Quarter after Exit
 - a. Once the consumer's case is closed, RSA tracks the number of consumers who are employed during the second quarter after closure. A percentage is calculated from total closures and the number of consumers who are employed.

- b. RSA utilizes wage information reported from the VR agency. NCBVI works with the Nebraska Department of Labor to receive Unemployment Insurance data. For consumers who are employed outside of Nebraska, NCBVI uses a federal program called SWIS.
2. Employment Rate in the Fourth Quarter after Exit
 - a. Once the consumer's case is closed, RSA tracks the number of consumers who are employed during the fourth quarter after closure. A percentage is calculated from total closures and the number of consumers who are employed.
 - b. RSA utilizes wage information reported from the VR agency. NCBVI works with the Nebraska Department of Labor to receive Unemployment Insurance data. For consumers who are employed outside of Nebraska, NCBVI uses a federal program called SWIS.
3. Median Earnings in the Second Quarter after Exit
 - a. Once the consumer's case is closed, RSA tracks the median earnings of consumers during the second quarter after closure.
 - b. RSA utilizes wage information reported from the VR agency. Once the consumer is employed, the VR counselor obtains the hourly rate from the consumer.
4. Credential Attainment Rate
 - a. RSA calculates the percentage of consumers who attain a credential (i.e. Bachelor's Degree, Associate's Degree, High School Diploma, GED), during participation in or within one year after case closure.
 - b. It is the NCBVI counselor's responsibility to keep track of when students graduate and to upload documentation of completion to our case management system, AWARE.
5. Measurable Skill Gains
 - a. RSA calculates a percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program who are achieving measurable progress towards completion. This is the only performance measure that is tracked during an open case.
 - b. Counselors are responsible for obtaining a copy of quarter/semester grades and uploading a copy to AWARE. The system administrator adds the skill gain if the documentation meets the GPA and credit requirements.
6. Effectiveness in Serving Employers
 - a. The Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator is shared outcome across all six core programs within each state. NCBVI submits our data to the Department of Labor on an annual basis.
 - i. Three Approaches to Measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers (Each State must continue to select two and may also develop a third State-established measure(s).) Nebraska chose:
 1. Retention (Retention with the same employer) – The percentage of consumers employed with the same employer in the second and fourth quarters after exit.
 2. Repeat Business Customers (Percentage of repeat employers using services within the previous three years) – The percentage of employers who receive services more than once. NCBVI staff keep track of employment services provided on an Excel spreadsheet and given to the Department of Labor to include in the state calculation.

The data used to evaluate NCBVI on these measures is reported to RSA through the 911 report. This report provides data on each consumer on a quarterly basis while their case is open and for six quarters once closed. The reason for reporting closures for more than one quarter is in order for RSA to obtain all necessary performance data. RSA needs quarterly data for open cases in order to keep track of service provision provided by NCBVI, purchased or a benefit provided by another agency (i.e. Pell grants, etc.) and school enrollment/completion.

WIOA requires the Governor of each State to submit a State Plan to the Secretary of Labor that includes a four-year strategy for the workforce development system. It is required to have a Federally-approved State Plan in place to receive funding for the six core programs. In Nebraska, all core partners within the WIOA program submit a combined State Plan every 4 years with modifications every two years. The State Plan is published for the public to view. At the NCBVI level, the plan includes the six performance measures along with other information about how NCBVI provides services through the VR program. RSA uses this document to ensure VR agencies are providing the avenues for consumers to be successful within the program.

For States with two VR agencies, like Nebraska, the performance measures are combined into one number for each measure. NCBVI, along with General VR, meet to discuss goals for the performance measures and send a proposal in the initial submission of the State Plan, called Expected Levels of Performance. The next step is to meet with RSA to discuss the previous years' number as well as utilize their data models to agree on numbers, called Negotiated Levels of Performance. The State Plan is updated to include these numbers in addition to the expected levels.

Once the data is submitted and reported, the actual numbers are calculated, called Actual Level of Performance. A performance failure occurs if the difference between the Actual Level and Negotiated Level falls above the threshold provided by RSA.

If Nebraska VR (both general and blind VR) experiences performance failure:

- After the first Program Year, we are required to receive Technical Assistance.
- For Two Consecutive Program Years of failure, RSA is required to complete a sanction.
 - Sanctions will be enforced each successive year in which the State continues to have the same performance failure.

Dashboard Sections

The quarterly dashboard is a compilation of the data from the 911 report placed into a usable format and provides VR agencies a mechanism to find outliers or anomalies in the data. RSA used this data when completing our last monitoring. In addition, the dashboard is used as a method to identify if the agency is meeting their performance measures. Each VR agency is represented on the dashboard and can be viewed by any VR agency. The dashboard also provides data for the last quarter submitted as well as each quarter prior for one year.

1. Summary

- a. This tab looks at the intake and closure of individuals, timeliness and the employment rate. There is a quarterly count of Applicants, New Eligible Individuals, initial IPEs developed, timeliness of eligibility and IPEs, services to consumers split between Career and Training services, and the total exited along with the employment rate.
- b. Highlight of information from tab: NCBVI had 100% of our eligibility determinations within 60 days and our IPE start dates within 90 days for 96.2% of consumers).

2. Participants
 - a. This tab provides a summary of VR program participant characteristics for the quarter. It includes age, barriers to employment, race, ethnicity, sex, and other WIOA program involvement collected by NCBVI counselors.
 - b. Highlight of information from tab: NCBVI served 376 consumers and 47.3% were under age 25.
3. Services
 - a. This tab shows the number of individuals receiving various VR services during the quarter and the manner of service provision (i.e. purchased, provided by NCBVI staff or a comparable benefit).
 - b. Highlight of information from tab: NCBVI staff documented 543 services to consumers within the quarter and we purchased 308.
4. Pre-ETS
 - a. This tab looks at data related to students with disabilities and describes the Pre-Employment Transition services they received during the quarter.
 - b. Highlight of information from tab: NCBVI staff documented 40 services to consumers within the quarter and we purchased 55.
5. MSG
 - a. This tab provides both a quarterly and cumulative breakout of measurable skill gains within the selected quarter.
 - b. Highlight of information from tab: NCBVI was able to document 20 MSGs within the quarter even though it was a summer quarter (7/1-9/30)
6. Disability
 - a. This tab displays data related to priority categories and disability information for VR program participants. As a blind agency, our numbers are all related to blindness as it only includes the primary disability.
 - b. Highlight of information from tab: NCBVI has 22.3% of our consumers marked as being in Supported Employment.
7. Exit
 - a. This tab displays a breakout of selected parameters by closure type, closure reason, and employment outcome at closure for the quarter.
 - b. Highlight of information from tab: NCBVI had 12 closures, and six were successful, or half, for the quarter.
8. Post-Exit
 - a. This tab shows both cumulative and quarterly performance for Employment Rate quarter 2, Employment Rate quarter 4, and credential attainment.
 - b. Highlight of information from tab: NCBVI's Credential Attained YTD is 45%.
9. CIE
 - a. This tab displays the top ten most frequently occurring employment outcomes and the distribution of hourly wage outcomes at closure for the quarter.
 - b. Highlight of information from tab: All of our closures made more than minimum wage in Nebraska (\$9.00/hour) and are working 30 hours per week or more. The range of pay was \$12 to \$22.

At the Fall 2022 NCSAB Conference, RSA presented on numbers for all Blind agencies from Program Year 2021 (7/1/2021-6/30/2022). Here are the blind agency numbers for states around Nebraska (VR Cases only):

Participants Served – Midwest

South Dakota Blind – 339

Nebraska Blind – 459

Iowa Blind – 544

Minnesota Blind – 778

Missouri Blind – 1073

Percent Enrolled (MSG Denominator) – Midwest

Missouri Blind – 12%

South Dakota Blind – 29%

Iowa Blind – 29%

Nebraska Blind – 30%

Minnesota Blind – 34%

National Average for Blind Agencies: 22%

MSG Rate – Midwest

South Dakota Blind – 23.7%

Minnesota Blind – 35.6%

Nebraska Blind – 64.2%

Missouri Blind – 67.7%

Iowa Blind – 69.9%

National Average for Blind Agencies: 52.6%

Credential Attainment Rate – Midwest

Minnesota Blind – 16.4%

South Dakota Blind – 20.0%

Nebraska Blind – 35.3%

Iowa Blind – 40.0%

Missouri Blind – 47.6%

National Average for Blind Agencies: 31.7%

Employment Rate (Quarter 2) – Midwest

Minnesota Blind – 35.9%

Nebraska Blind – 40.6%

Iowa Blind – 47.2%

South Dakota Blind – 52.3%

Missouri Blind – 59.8%

National Average for Blind Agencies: 44.2%

Median Earnings (Quarter 2) – Midwest

South Dakota Blind – \$4,758

Missouri Blind – \$6,125

Iowa Blind – \$6,640

Nebraska Blind – \$6,651

Minnesota Blind – \$7,349

National Average for Blind Agencies: \$7,263

Employment Rate (Quarter 4) – Midwest

Nebraska Blind – 29.4%
Iowa Blind – 33.7%
Minnesota Blind – 34.7%
Missouri Blind – 44.4%
South Dakota Blind – 44.5%
National Average for Blind Agencies: 35.6%

Percent of Participants Employed at Closure – Midwest

Iowa Blind – 33%
Minnesota Blind – 36%
Nebraska Blind – 43%
South Dakota Blind – 56%
Missouri Blind – 60%
National Average for Blind Agencies: 51%

Percent of Closures before IPE – Midwest

Minnesota Blind – 12%
Nebraska Blind – 18%
Iowa Blind – 20%
South Dakota Blind – 23%
Missouri Blind – 25%
National Average for Blind Agencies: 19%

Mark Bulger: Mark noted that he is a data person and that it is important that we have good information that we collect. Mark asked Julie if she feels that we are taking this data and using it to identify what we are doing good and what we can improve upon. Mark noted that we always want to do our best. Mark stated that NCBVI wants blind people to have good paying quality jobs. Also, since NCBVI provides thorough training, we do not have a lot of recidivism wherein a client needs to come back over and over again. Mark noted that NCBVI is probably the industry leader in the Pre-Ets and transition areas. Mark asked Julie if there is much data that supports this. Also, is she able to use the data that we have and compare it to others to identify some trends. Are we using this data to provide feedback to our leaders, and if she were to look at the data, what areas would she say NCBVI needs to improve upon.

Julie Buren: Julie noted that there are many reports that she runs and she gives those to the District supervisors before she submits her report. For example, if she is missing some grades for students that we know are in school she reaches out to get those grades. Julie said she is always working to verify our work is being shown because she knows that the counselors are doing the work, it is just that sometimes they may have forgotten to document because they are so busy. Julie noted that part of her job is make sure that everything is being documented. Julie noted that she provides these reports at the supervisory level to make sure everything is being done. Also, after our monitoring we did find some things that we could improve upon. For example, in the Pre-Ets realm we were sometimes saying that we were providing a certain service the most and so our numbers were somewhat skewed because it would show one service was provided a lot, and other services were not provided much. Part of our work after the monitoring was making sure that we are divvying out what those services are that we are providing. Many times students may get Pell

grants and we were not specifically notating that in the system because we were focused on our services, not the services of what others are providing. However, RSA actually wants to know that as well because they tie it back to the services NCBVI is providing. Julie stated that she is double-checking this data. Overall, something that NCBVI can improve upon is documenting the services that we provide. Julie noted that many agencies are not the same way as NCBVI, in that we are very much provided service driven, as we are doing a lot of the services ourselves. The counselors are out there in the field doing the services, but it is important that all the services are documented. Counseling and guidance services are provided all of the time, so she does run a report to make sure that everything is documented.

Mark Bulger: Mark stated that we need to know what is important, such as, how many jobs have we placed and what kind of earnings our clients are receiving. Mark noted that one thing that is hard to measure is how we impact the quality of life for our clients. We don't just take blind people and get them jobs, but we help them so they can live independently. Mark asked Julie if she has any statistics on independent living.

Julie Buren: Julie stated that specifically for WIOA, it is all based on vocational rehabilitation. However, if you look at independent living wherein we are getting students at a young age and providing them skills training, it is our hope that when we provide Pre-Ets services at age 14 they already know us and they know the counselors. NCBVI is very much about skills training. Julie reported that she thinks that this is something that WIOA was trying to get away from, they were focusing on successful closures. This does not necessarily mean anything if the client returns to NCBVI because they want a different job. Julie noted that she believes that if NCBVI does the right things it will show in the data.

Carlos Serván: Carlos noted that Mark had also asked if the executive director was receiving data on services. Carlos stated the Julie does also send the data to him and Erin and they review it and the data is also reviewed during the supervisor meetings. They talk about providing quality services.

Mark Bulger: Mark noted that NCBVI probably needs to have key performance indicators so he knows at any given time if NCBVI is on track. Mark noted that it is not just about the numbers, but the numbers are an indicator of what we are doing.

Julie will also begin providing a quarterly report to the commissioners on the dashboard.

The commissioners thanked Julie for her report.

Public Comment Period

Christine Boone: Christine noted that in Julie's report, she mentioned the RSA monitoring and she is wondering if the commissioners were provided with a copy of the recent RSA monitoring report. Also, Julie mentioned that when putting together the employment statistics NCBVI is combined with General VR in Nebraska. Christine asked for clarification on this. Christine stated she also wonders if NCBVI would consider allowing members of the public to have a copy of the report that Julie did for the commissioners.

Julie Buren: Julie noted that the report she wrote up for the Focus Topic will be a part of the Minutes. Regarding the RSA monitoring, the monitoring was just completed and RSA just finalized

NCBVI's part saying that we are okay. However, NCBVI still has a few outlying items that we are working on. Therefore, she does not believe that the final report has come out yet.

Carlos Serván: Carlos noted that he has been reporting to the commissioners every quarter on the progress of the Corrective Action Plan (CAP). RSA found five areas where the quality could be improved. Carlos noted that he did provide this information to the commissioners about one and a half years ago. NCBVI reported to RSA every three months and questions went back and forth. After about one and a half years the CAP was completed. The monitoring report is available on the RSA website and it is public information.

Julie Buren: Julie noted that it is kind of weird how it works, for example, when she was talking about her 911 report, it is only NCBVI that she reports on. However, on the level of the six performance measures, these are ones that are combined. This is something that was a part of WIOA so at that level we are combined. Therefore, when we look at our numbers as a whole we consider it to be State VR based. However, NCBVI as an agency is still expected to provide them the data individually. We need to ensure that as a State agency we are doing okay. This is public knowledge with the State Plan that we do. NCBVI does have its own section in the State Plan.

Mark Bulger: Mark noted that the whole dashboard thing is fairly new. Mark stated that he is hoping that as we evolve, the commissioners will have a quarterly report on the dashboard. Mark noted that the information is only valuable if we use it. The commissioners would like to know the areas that NCBVI is doing well and where we could improve. Julie will begin providing a quarterly report regarding the key indicators on the dashboard to the commissioners.

Jim Jirak: Jim noted that he recommends that the commissioners hold their upcoming Commissioner Orientation training in person.

Break

A break was taken at 10:07 a.m. The meeting resumed at 10:25 a.m.

Report from the Executive Director

I. Administration

During the last quarter, I attended the following meetings:

NCSAB Executive Committee monthly meetings over the phone: The Executive Committee held elections and I am currently the President of NCSAB. The Spring Conference will be April 17-21, 2023. There will be a fiscal focus April 17-19, April 20 the focus will be Randolph-Sheppard and April 21 will be the business meeting.

We are working on hiring a new legislative consultant or CEO for NCSAB.

We talked about the new guidance on Randolph-Sheppard limiting up-dates to equipment. According to their definition, equipment is different than tools.

In my role as NCSAB President, I sent a letter to Assistant Secretary Neas regarding a Request for Proposal (RFP) the Department of Defense is putting out for mess halls on military bases. This

RFP did not mention the Randolph-Sheppard priority. NCSAB wants the Department of Education to write an official opinion about it. As a result, RSA sent a letter to the Department of Defense and the RFP was taken off their website.

NCSAB now has a representative at the American Library Association (ALA). This person is blind, and he will help on the improvement of the services. NCSAB will send a letter to the SSA Commissioner addressing the new definition of blindness of 2007, and how many states Disability Determinations are not aware of the new definition.

CSAVR:

During this meeting, three strategic areas were announced:

1. Business relations: what we know as the business office. The need of more training in this area. Business offices and field services are disconnected.
2. Counselors training and recruitment. Modernize the projects and services but keeping the quality. For instance, how to make the IPE process faster.
3. Awareness of the VR program to the public, including consumers, other professional organizations, and businesses.

Monthly call with RSA,

RSA sent their new monitoring review guidelines. Monitoring will be focused on providing technical assistance to state agencies to come up with strategies on expending the Federal Grant. The States that are being monitored are the ones that sent funds back to the Federal Government.

Nebraska Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC):

The Deputy Commissioner talked about the role of the SEAC. It is to advise the Board of Education. This came out because SEAC wanted to lobby or advocate in front of the legislators and the Governor.

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDOE) reported that Nebraska was the state with less negative impact during the pandemic. Students in Nebraska had one of the highest scores in reading, writing, math, and science.

StarTran:

We discussed the impact that the location for the new Convention Center could bring to traffic.

StarTran announced that in the case of blind consumers, they will have the driver call them when they are in front of the house so the blind person will know when to come out. This was not the case before and counted as a "no show." In addition, we talked about the "no show" policy for people with disabilities when canceling a ride without advance notice.

The Olmstead Steering Committee and Advisory Committee:

We worked on aspects of the initial draft for the State Plan. Here we included new data driven outcomes and eliminated approaches that no longer meet the needs, desires, or priorities.

We came up with seven goals:

Goal 1: Nebraskans with disabilities will have access to individualized community-based services and supports that meet their needs and preferences

Goal 2: Nebraskans with disabilities will have access to safe, affordable, accessible housing in the communities in which they choose to live.

Goal 3: Nebraskans with disabilities will receive services in the settings most appropriate to meet their needs and preferences.

Goal 4: Nebraskans with disabilities will have increased access to education and choice in competitive, integrated employment.

VR and NCBVI will continue to work with supported employment clients and milestones. We will also continue providing transition services to students with disabilities (matching our federal goals).

DOL, VR, and NCBVI will continue working with businesses to retain, hire or advance employment to people with disabilities.

Goal 5: Nebraskans with disabilities will have access to affordable and accessible transportation statewide.

Goal 6: Nebraskans with disabilities will receive services and supports that reflect data-driven decision-making, improvement in the quality of services, and enhanced accountability across systems.

Goal 7: Nebraskans with disabilities will receive services and supports from a high-quality workforce.

The Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) contacted the director of VR General and me to talk about the section from the Rehab Act that talks about Innovation and expansion. According to Silk, they would not approve the State Plan if Innovation and Expansion funds are not used for ILC. RSA provided technical assistance and confirmed that the interpretation has not changed; therefore, we do not have to provide Innovation and Expansion funds to the SILC.

On January 11, I was part of a panel to talk about disability and minority issues at the AJC in Omaha. This was part of a series of leadership training provided to public servants from Omaha. As a result, I was invited to be part of Nebraska Public Connections and the first zoom meeting was January 12. During this meeting we shared what is available in Nebraska to serve our constituents better.

On December 28, NDOL sent a news release announcing the following:

Commission for the Blind Upgrades NDOL Job Center Accessibility Tools

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) has outfitted Nebraska Department of Labor Job Centers with updated accessibility technology. NCBVI has equipped the Job Centers with ONYX electronic video magnifiers and LyricQ readers. The LyricQ readers can instantly read a document to someone who does not have any usable vision, while the magnifiers allow users to adjust the size and brightness of screen content.

I was also interviewed about our partnership with the State Public Libraries regarding the CCTVs we purchased. That interview was published on the NTV website.

In December, I attended the Center of Operation for Excellence on Continuous Improvement sponsored by the Governor. The main message was to take risks to improve services. The message was also to provide good services with less money.

RSA approved our Corrective Action Plan (CAP). This took about a year between reports, follow-up questions, answers to those questions, and providing extra information.

Kat Carroll completed sending all the information requested by RSA to complete the fifth CAP.

Kat also worked on the following items:

Completed the Federal Fiscal Year reports due for September 2022.

Worked on the Final Federal Fiscal Year reports due for September 2022 by January 31, 2023.

Continued to improve the Internal Budget Projection for FFY 2023 that shows budgeted, year to date expenditures, projected fixed expenditures for the remainder of the year, and remaining funds to spend on client services.

NCBVI is in a very strong financial position. We carried over all the FFY 2022 VR grant plus \$1.5 million of Reallotment and have received \$159,382 in social security reimbursement so far this Federal Fiscal Year. In addition, the preliminary estimates from RSA for FFY 2023 grants show a 6% increase in grant funds for the new fiscal year. For OIB we carried over most of the FFY 2022 grant and some Social Security funds that were transferred from VR.

The 2022 Annual Report was completed and sent to the Governor and the senators. It is on file with the Unicameral.

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

OIB clients was 396.

IL clients under 55 was 79.

VR clients was 402.

II. Human Resources

Erin Brandyberry is now the Deputy Director for Services and she is doing a wonderful job.

North Platte District: Cristal Dimas became the new District Supervisor. Kimberly Scherbarth finished her Center training and began working as a VR counselor in Kearney last December. Angie Hoff became the new OIB coordinator and she will also carry a caseload. The position that Angie left will become a VR counselor position and this position is currently being advertised. We are also posting the VR position that Cristal Dimas vacated. Aaron Sands resigned on January 26, 2023.

Lincoln District: Connie Daly accepted the OC position and will start on February 27. She is leaving her supervisory duties after 24 years. She is excited to be able to focus more on serving

consumers in her new role. Kelly E. Coleman accepted a job with the University of Nebraska, and her last day was December 2. Gracie started working the field in Norfolk in December. We are advertising for the supervisor position and the technology specialist position for Lincoln.

Omaha District: Nancy Flearl announced that she is retiring on February 28 after 40 years working for the agency. Nancy contributed in building NCBVI and to our great reputation. She will be greatly missed and we wish her the best. Alexander France (Alex) finish Center training and started to work in Omaha as an OC on January 30. We are hiring Miki Saltzman to be the technology specialist in Omaha. Miki is blind himself and he has years of experience using and teaching accessible technology at Outlook Nebraska. He should start Center training on February 20 or 27. We are also hiring Tammy Thomas as a VR counselor. Tammy has worked with the Omaha Social Security Office for many years. She also worked with Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative. Tammy will start Center training on February 13. The only position open in Omaha will be the supervisor position.

Training Center: Mark Coleman finished his training in the middle of December and is now working as the apartment resource/special needs counselor. Mark will be visiting his counterparts at the Colorado Center for the Blind during the week of February 6. CCB has a student services coordinator as well as an apartment resource counselor, both of whom will be an excellent source of information for Mark. We hired Ted Haubrich for the shop instructor position. Ted started Center training on January 9. Ted has a number of years of experience working in woodshops, doing maintenance projects, and outdoor beautification. After Ted completes Center training, he will visit another Structured Discovery Center to shadow a more experienced shop instructor and later have a mentor come to Nebraska to provide some on-site coaching. With Ted on board, the Center is now fully staffed.

NBE: We hired Lizzie Heidenreich who started Center training on January 3.

Administration: The technology manager position is still vacant; however, we received some applications and we plan to interview some of these applicants.

Since 2020, NCBVI has hired 18 new staff. If we hire six additional new staff in the next few months, it will be 24. This will be more than 50% of our team members.

Jessica Bartenbach participated in the fourth NRLI session, and thus, completed her leadership training.

Nancy Coffman is halfway completed with the Rehabilitation Teaching for the Blind Graduate Certificate program offered by Louisiana Tech University.

Shane Buresh visited the Louisiana Center for the Blind the week of November 28 to shadow the braille instructor.

III. Field Services

In order to accomplish our mission and goals, the NCBVI team continues to be engaged on different Boards and committees. They also attend stakeholder meetings. Some of these are: ESUs, NCECBVI Vision Partners , Transition committees, Project Search, WIOA Local Boards

meetings, retirement homes, youth programs, Employ LNK, Heartland Workforce Solutions, Scottsbluff Public schools, the Kearney Housing Authority, Wel-Life in Kearney, Stone Hearth Estates in Gothenburg, and the Ainsworth Senior Center to name a few.

Winnerfest took place the first part of December.

We are working with Dynamic Buna to provide an Employment Conference to our clients in May. We are also working with Play Creative to develop some PSA's to educate the Public about our services.

Lincoln:

The Lincoln District had another session of GATE this month. The last two months of GATE were cancelled due to the weather. The next one is in February.

Gracie has spent a lot of time networking with those in the Norfolk community. She is working with Nebraska VR and ESU 8 in developing a Job Exploration Fair for Pre-Ets clients.

Lincoln also had a Pre-Ets group. The focus was on volunteering and outdoor chores. Participants went to some of our elderly client's homes to clean up the leaves. It was meaningful for all involved.

Lincoln staff continues to attend Employ LNK and the Coalition for Older Adult Health Coalition. We helped a client maintain a job as a switchboard operator. We set up OJT's at the Humane Society and at a daycare center.

Omaha:

Craig and Alex toured Radio Talking Book and had the opportunity to meet and visit with staff.

Group teaching sessions are held monthly.

Adrienne and Craig will be on the planning committee for the Pre-Transition Job Fair to be held at ESU #3.

We have had several clients work with Legal Aid at Heartland Workforce Solutions to have their criminal history expunged. This is opening doors for them vocationally. Craig had an opportunity to work with Jeff Scheer on vocational skills with students at NCECBVI in January. Jeff and Craig will attend "Bring Your A Game" training at Heartland Workforce Solutions. This training will teach valuable skills for working with young job seekers.

North Platte:

Networking: Cristal networked with Service Master and Kearney YMCA. Kimberly and Cristal networked with Department of Transportation and Tommy's restaurant. Aaron provided a presentation to the Grand Island Nebraska Department of Labor (DOL) office about NCBVI and introduced himself to the DOL staff. Angie attended IEP meetings that included NCECBVI discussing a partnership and working together to support the students. Fritz provided an agency presentation to the following: North Platte Sunrise Rotary Group and Stepping Up Classes in Hastings.

Projects:

Angie attended the Ski for Light Program, representing the agency to learn more about the program and how it can benefit our clients. Kimberly and Cristal are working with Tommy's restaurant setting up an on-the-job training opportunity. Kimberly and Cristal participated in the Project Search reverse job fair.

Most field staff received circular saw training using alternative techniques.

Counselors from the field brought several tours and three-day-stay to the Training Center. Some of them are already planning to come to the Center for training.

IV. Training Center

We contracted with Doug Boone to teach Shop at the Center and this contract expired at the end of December.

Currently the Center has one VR client attending training who started at the end of November. A second VR client is tentatively scheduled to begin training in mid-February, and an OIB client in March. There are two VR clients and one OIB client on the waiting list who plan to begin training in the spring. Another VR client was scheduled to start this month but had to postpone due to health and family issues. Another VR client is eligible to return to training once his health has improved so that he can participate in full-time training. If all these clients begin training, we are anticipating 6-8 clients by the next Board meeting.

We also have two staff attending Center training and two more will attend within the next few weeks, making a total of four staff trainees.

There have been 3 three-day stays and four tours this quarter. All the 3-day stays plan to return to attend training. Connie also brought two individuals from Community Workforce Partners to tour the Center.

The prerequisites for attending the Center have been loosened to allow more clients to be eligible to attend training.

Center staff will be switching from landline telephones to cell phones during the next quarter. We have found that texting has become more prevalent. Students can text their grocery lists and recipes to Nicole, text Shane the sentences that they read for homework so that he can give them feedback during the next class, call Jeff if they get turned around in Travel class, and practice texting and making phone calls with Nancy. It will also facilitate more timely communication among the instructors and allow staff to work from home when needed without requiring them to use their personal cell phones. The cell phones provided to staff will also be used to demonstrate to students and train them on accessible apps.

There were two activities this quarter: Rural travel and crossing the train tracks in Hickman and a holiday meal, decorating a tree, and wrapping gifts.

TDL's covered deep cleaning the cupboards, sweeping, and mopping, vacuuming, and maintenance of the vacuum cleaners.

V. Nebraska Business Enterprise

Federal Sites

The renewal for the contract for the USSTRATCOM is this year. Some negotiations are underway.

State Office Building – Lincoln

A planned remodel, delayed by the pandemic, is now taking place in the basement of the State Office Building in Lincoln. Cafeteria services are temporarily located in the fourth-floor breakroom. The expected completion date of the remodel is in April.

The basement of the Chief Standing Bear Building also is currently undergoing renovations. Vending services that were available in the basement have been moved to the first floor.

An expansion of the Douglas County Civic Building to another existing building will take place in the spring. NBE is working with the building to prepare for placing vending services in this building.

The new rest area located on Eastbound I-80 near Ogallala is now open for business.

NBE replaced and added several machines at NDCS locations operated by a sub-contractor.

NBE Licensee Update

There are currently 13 licensed Vendors in the NBE program.

Vending Site Complaints

This past quarter NBE received some complaints about vending machines not dispensing product correctly. The machines are again operational. These machines are scheduled for replacement due to age.

VMS

Six vendors are currently in a trial of a vending management system (VMS) through our credit card service processor. VMS allows vendors to see which items their machines need remotely, so they can better plan for stocking machines and placing orders. We are in the very beginning of this trial.

Crane Vending Machines

Crane, the company who produces most of our vending machines, has stopped producing their touch-pad style machines and gone exclusively to touchscreen. NBE's distributor has several touch-pad style machines left in stock, and has held them exclusively for NBE and a few other customers. The touch-screen style machines have a 'talk' feature that NBE will be exploring for when the touch-pad machines are no longer an option.

Looking Ahead

NBE, in conjunction with the Committee of Blind Vendors, is looking at holding a retreat style event for Vendors in the spring.

Mark Bulger: Mark stated that when reading the Executive Director report, he noticed that Carlos is involved in many different things. Initially, he wondered if he was getting involved in too many things, but then Carlos said something that reinforced the importance of being involved in other things - You become aware of things that you do not know when you get involved. Mark noted that

there is a lot of value when you have supervisors and staff involved in serving a body and the value is that we learn ourselves and we share with other entities our expertise. Mark stated that he hopes we do more of it. Carlos noted that networking is key in finding new opportunities for our clients.

Mark stated that when Carlos was talking about the Center he was thinking about the prerequisites we have for our clients to attend Center training. He wonders if the prerequisites have been high in the past because there was a waiting list to attend the Center. Now, we may want to loosen those standards because he feels that the sooner we get clients into the Center, the better. Carlos mentioned that the prerequisites for attending the Center were raised because some of the clients who enrolled in Center training did not even know how to prepare a meal. However, now the staff at the Center have more time to train in those areas.

Miguel Rocha: Miguel asked about the letter Carlos sent to Assistant Secretary Neas. Miguel asked if this affects Nebraska or if this is National. Carlos stated that it is National, but because Nebraska has federal buildings here, it could affect us too.

Miguel asked about the new definition that the Social Security Administration has for blindness. Miguel asked if this decreased the number of people who were accepted as being blind. Carlos noted that he thinks that is why it was brought up. Less people were being considered blind and they were not referred to agencies for the blind for services.

Linda Mentink: Linda asked if all NCBVI staff are working in the office now, or are some staff still working remotely. Linda said she is also wondering what the Center staff does with all their time now that there are only two clients attending Center training.

Carlos reported that NCBVI changed its policy to allow staff to work from home as long as they are being productive. Carlos noted that in the North Platte district, and part of the Lincoln district (Norfolk area), the staff do a lot of work in the field and they have a home office. In administration, everyone in the Business office, except Brandy, works primarily from home, but comes to the office one day per week and as needed. Carlos noted that Julie Buren also works from home.

As for the Center, Carlos noted that the Center staff are not as busy as they should be since there are currently only two clients in the Center. However, the Center does also currently have four staff trainees. Also, the Center has been short of a Shop instructor and an apartment resource counselor. Therefore, the instructors at the Center were helping out in other areas. At this time, the Center has an average of five to six individuals receiving training.

Brent Heyen: Brent stated that he does like to see that the staff at the Center are going to visit other Centers to get experience from other people. What they learn they can bring back to NCBVI and make our Center training even better. Also, as for Carlos's HR report, on one hand Brent stated that he liked to see NCBVI getting new blood which brings new experiences and new ideas which may help rejuvenate NCBVI as an agency. However, on the other hand, he is also sad to see all these staff leave, many who have been with NCBVI for many years.

Newsline® Update – By Kimberly Scherbarth, NFB Newsline Outreach Coordinator for Nebraska

NFB Newsline currently has 2,170 subscribers of which seven are new this past quarter. There were 27 new publications added to Newsline during 2022, some titles include: CNBC (Breaking News Online), Navajo Times, Royal Gazette, Times News, and Mashable.

Trainings are planned for state Newsline coordinators, hopefully starting this month. Newsline will have a table set up at the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska State Convention, which will be held during March 2023.

No other updates at this time.

2022 NFB Newsline Stats

	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Number of Subscribers:	2139	2140	2133	2134	2138	2138	2145	2160	2163	2166	2168	2170
New Subscriptions:	4	1	1	2	4	0	5	15	3	2	3	2

Telephone Usage:

Total calls:	1033	671	692	740	786	778	708	601	718	735	663	765
Average call length: (Minutes)	14.41	15.56	13.44	14.77	14.39	14.3	13.82	15.23	18.23	15.12	18.21	13.99
Percent local calls:	39.8	55.35	50.13	49.34	40.66	45.78	45.2	44.19	54.76	52.51	64.62	59.12
Total call minutes:	14880	10440	9301	10928	11309	11127	9782	9155	13089	11109	12073	10701

Online Usage:

Web Sessions:	5726	4956	6069	6391	6813	5801	5930	5919	6475	6763	5534	6320
NFB-NEWSLINE Mobile Sessions:	487	445	547	491	439	427	505	554	389	420	450	532
In Your Pocket Deliveries:	1474	1388	2023	2438	6179	4892	4428	3402	4376	4890	3665	4094
Email Deliveries:	556	496	587	560	587	608	591	563	558	569	554	536
Total Online Accesses:	8243	7285	9226	9880	14018	11728	11454	10438	11798	12642	10203	11482
<u>Total Content Accesses:</u> Content Access Frequency(Minutes)	5072	4158	5042	5566	9266	7990	7363	6087	7113	7581	6055	6869
	8.8	9.71	8.85	7.76	4.82	5.41	6.06	7.33	6.07	5.89	7.13	6.5
Nebraska Newspapers:	3627	3377	3339	3310	3942	3365	3706	3574	3584	3476	3338	3677
Nebraska Local Channels:	42	24	24	21	27	15	35	19	20	21	33	29
Local Weather & Emergency Alerts:	179	139	238	239	286	255	210	186	146	148	146	166

National Newspapers	1220	969	1105	1178	1538	1575	1345	1248	1452	1557	1101	1311
International Newspapers:	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
My Newspaper:	75	70	41	88	72	78	73	34	102	79	131	135
Breaking News Online	218	187	177	159	765	448	410	314	388	400	322	342
Nmagazines:	33	41	36	97	340	254	193	163	392	312	167	209
TV Listings	464	301	372	287	306	337	301	279	241	381	271	369

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Complaints or issues

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

Jodi Bodnar was hired as the new CAP Director and she began her duties on January 30, 2023.

New Business

Discussion regarding scheduling an orientation training for new Commissioner

It was noted that almost every two years NCBVI has a new commissioner(s) added to the Commission Board. The commissioners have felt that it is a good idea to have a new Commissioner Orientation training. This includes training for the new commissioners and going over such items as the history of NCBVI, commissioner job duties, the role of the commissioners, and their communications between meetings.

The commissioners discussed whether to have the orientation training for our new commissioner held in-person or virtual.

Commissioner Livingston moved to hold the training in-person.
Commissioner Mentink seconded the motion.

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

The commissioners discussed what date and location to have the training.

Commissioner Bulger moved to have the training on Saturday, April 1 in Kearney, Nebraska and to have Lincoln, Nebraska as an alternative location in the event that all the hotels in Kearney are already full.

Commissioner Rocha seconded the motion.

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

Public Comment

Jim Jirak: Jim congratulated Nancy Flearl on her upcoming retirement. Jim noted that Nancy has worked for NCBVI for 41 years. Jim stated he wanted to thank Nancy for everything she has done for the agency and the clients of NCBVI.

Jamie Richey: Jamie expressed her concern about some NCBVI staff members working remotely.

Christine Boone: Christine expressed her concerns about safety protocol at the Training Center, the low number of clients currently attending the Training Center and the low pay for NCBVI employees. The commissioners and the executive director responded to her concerns.

Nancy Flearl: Nancy noted that this is the last NCBVI Commission Board meeting that she will be attending as a staff member. Nancy stated that she was privileged to have worked under three different executive directors in her 41 years of serving the agency.

Final Announcements

The next NCBVI Commission Board meeting will be held on Saturday, May 6, at the Ramada in Columbus. There will be no Focus Topic since the Annual Evaluation of the Executive Director will take place.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:46 p.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the May 6, 2023 Commission Board meeting, please email it to the NCBVI Commission Board at ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens, Administrative Specialist
NCBVI

Brent Heyen, Chairperson

Staff Quarterly Reports for February 4, 2023 Commission Board Meeting

Lincoln District Activity Report – Connie Daly

Kelly E. Coleman accepted a job with the University of Nebraska. Her last day was December 2. We are recruiting for her position. I have interviewed for the OC II position in my district and will start in that position on February 27. I have been honored to work as a supervisor for the last 24 years. I am very excited to be able to focus on serving clients in this new role. I appreciate the support of staff and leadership. Gracie started working the field in Norfolk. Gracie has spent a lot of time networking with those in the community. She is working with Nebraska VR and ESU 8 in developing a Job Exploration Fair for Pre-Ets clients.

Winnerfest took place the first part of December. Jeff Scheer worked the program. We had another session of GATE this month. The last two months were cancelled due to the weather. We had six participants. We will host the next one in February.

We had a Pre-Ets group. The focus was on volunteering and outdoor chores. Participants went to some of our elderly client's homes and clean up the leaves. It was meaningful for all involved.

Carlos Servan and I attended the City of Lincoln's Proclamation Signing ceremony declaring October as Disability Awareness month. We are working with Dynamic Buna to provide an Employment Conference to our clients in May. We are also working with Play Creative to develop some PSA's to educate the Public about our services.

Jeff has taken the lead in developing twice a month training for the NECEBVI clients. Craig Kneiff from the Omaha office and Charli Saltzman are also working on the project.

We had four clients tour the Center. Two clients completed a 3-day stay.

Staff continue attend Employ LNK and the Coalition for Older Adult Health Coalition. We helped a client maintain a job as a Switchboard Operator. We set up OJT's at the Humane Society and a daycare center.

Omaha District Activity Report – Nancy Flearl

I am excited that Alexander France has completed Center training and began working in the Omaha office on January 30. He is a welcome addition to our staff. We were fortunate to have him here in Omaha during the Center break as he had the opportunity to meet with a number of consumers.

Craig and Alex both toured Radio Talking Book and had the opportunity to meet and visit with staff.

I had a second interview for the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II position on January 26 and an interview for the Orientation Counselor II Tech position on January 25.

We have been holding our monthly group teaching sessions on the second Thursday of the month. We have several people participating that are interested in attending the Center and they are working on pre-requisite skills.

Kelly has been working with B & K on the Project Independence meetings to recruit students for these sessions.

Adrienne and Craig will be on the planning committee for the Pre-Transition Job Fair to be held at ESU #3.

Craig has been attending Employ/Oma and the Partner Meetings at Heartland Workforce Solutions on the third Friday of each month.

Adrienne will be meeting with the planning committee for the Employment conference to be held later this year.

We have had several clients work with Legal Aid at Heartland Workforce Solutions to have their criminal history expunged. This is opening doors for them vocationally. Craig had an opportunity to work with Jeff Scheer on vocational skills with students at NCECBVI in January. Jeff and Craig attended "Bring Your "A" Game" training on January 11. This training was held at Heartland Workforce Solutions and it focused on important employment skills for job seekers.

It is a very busy time for us all. This is my last report from the Omaha District as supervisor. As always, I am honored to work with such a dedicated team.

North Platte District Activity Report – Cristal Dimas

Happy New Year! There have been lots of exciting changes in the North Platte District! Kimberly Scherbarth completed her Center training on December 13. She is our new VR counselor covering central/southwest Nebraska. Angie Hoff has started covering OIB Program Manager duties in addition to her role as a VR counselor. She has been busy learning this new role and has been attending the OIB Program Manager's meetings. Cristal Dimas was offered and accepted the North Platte District Supervisor position. She transitioned into this position in January. The District will be hiring for Cristal's replacement for a VR counselor position, as well as adding a VR counselor position to the west central part of the state due to increased demands for services.

Networking: Cristal networked with Service Master and Kearney YMCA. Kimberly and Cristal networked with Department of Transportation and Tommy's restaurant. Aaron provided a presentation to the Grand Island Nebraska Department of Labor (DOL) office about NCBVI and introduced himself to the DOL staff. Angie attended IEP meetings that included NCECBVI discussing a partnership and working together to support the students. Fritz provided an agency presentation to the following: North Platte Sunrise Rotary Group and Stepping Up Classes in Hastings.

Projects: Angie worked with Doug Boone on a two-day extensive training for two clients in preparation for Center training. Angie attended the Ski for Light Program, representing the agency to learn more about the program and how it can benefit our clients. Kimberly and Cristal are

working with Tommy's restaurant setting up an on-the-job training opportunity. Kimberly and Cristal participated in the Project Search reverse job fair.

Training: Aaron, Fritz, Angie and Kimberly received circular saw training.

Client Outcomes: Cristal had four students attend Winnerfest in Aurora. Cristal had an OIB client complete a three-day stay at the Center. Angie had a client start Center training after the Thanksgiving holiday.

Center Activity Report – Jessica Bartenbach

Ted Haubrich has been hired as the new Shop Instructor in the Center. The position was first advertised in February 2022 and vacated in July when Mike Rains retired. Ted's first day with NCBVI was January 9. After Ted completes immersion training, he will have the opportunity to visit another Structured Discovery Center to shadow a more experienced Shop instructor and have a mentor come to Nebraska to provide some on-site coaching. Ted is new to VR but brings a variety of professional and personal experience to the position, along with a positive attitude and willingness to learn. We are looking forward to the day that Ted completes training as the Center will then be fully staffed for the first time since April 2022 when Laurie Jacobsen retired.

Mark Coleman completed Center training on December 21. He is now working at the apartments and at the Center. He has been busy researching and meeting with community resource providers to provide information and referrals to students who are facing challenges. Mark will be visiting his counterparts at the Colorado Center for the Blind (CCB) during the week of February 6. CCB has a student services coordinator as well as an apartment resource counselor, both of whom will be an excellent source of information for Mark. We are very excited that he has finished training. Laurie Jacobsen has finished her contract work with us. She came out of retirement to work part-time at the apartments once Mark was hired and provided some training to him.

Our contract with Doug Boone expired at the end of December. Before his work with NCBVI was finished, he provided training to some field staff from each district on a handheld circular saw and track setup, which can allow for accurate cuts without the use of a table saw. This setup was purchased for each district as well as the Center and is portable enough to fit in the trunk of our state cars so that training can be provided to clients in their homes.

Currently the Center has one VR client attending training who started at the end of November. A second VR client is tentatively scheduled to begin training in mid-February, and an OIB client in March. There are two VR clients and one OIB client on the waiting list who plan to begin training in the spring. Another VR client was scheduled to start this month but has had to postpone due to health and family issues. Another VR client is eligible to return to training once his health has improved so that he can participate in full-time training. If all of these clients begin training, we are anticipating 6-8 clients by the next Board meeting.

There are currently two staff trainees at the Center: Ted Haubrich (Shop Instructor), and Lizzie Heidenreich (NBE Counselor). Gracie Swim (VR Counselor in Norfolk) completed staff training on November 23. Kimberly Scherbarth (VR Counselor in Kearney) completed staff training on December 14. Mark Coleman (Client Resource Counselor in the Center) completed training on

December 21. Alex France (Orientation Counselor in Omaha) completed staff training on January 27.

There have been 3 three-day stays and four tours this quarter. All of the 3-day stays plan to return to attend training. Connie also brought two individuals from Community Workforce Partners to tour the Center.

The prerequisites for attending the Center have been loosened to allow more clients to be eligible to attend training, and hopefully minimize the field counselor's work to prepare clients for training. This is possible with Mark being a full-time employee and having low enrollment at the Center, which will enable instructors to provide more individualized training to clients needing additional support.

Center staff will be switching from landline telephones to cell phones during the next quarter. Currently only Jessica and Mark have agency cell phones; Jessica due to being on call for emergencies, and Mark due to working at the apartments during a portion of the week. While instructors do not travel regularly outside of the Center, we have found that students develop skills in texting more quickly than other forms of written communication, such as email or the slate and stylus, and texting has become more prevalent. Students can text their grocery lists and recipes to Nicole, text Shane the sentences that they read for homework so that he can give them feedback during the next class, call Jeff if they get turned around in Travel class, and practice texting and making phone calls with Nancy. It will also facilitate more timely communication among the instructors and allow staff to work from home when needed without requiring them to use their personal cell phones. The cell phones provided to staff will also be used to demonstrate to students and train them on apps such as Seeing AI or Be My Eyes.

Center staff have participated in Lincoln and Omaha group teachings to help the districts and provide the staff trainees with some supervised teaching experience. Center staff also worked with a Lincoln District client who is unable to attend the Center at this time due to family obligations, but is very interested in intensive training.

The Center schedule has been adjusted so that staff no longer have an office day while Shop class is unavailable, which will minimize the number of staff able to help with group teachings and meeting with clients in the field, but we continue to be happy to help when possible. Classes are not held on Friday afternoons to allow instructors time to plan lessons and write reports.

Shane visited the Louisiana Center for the Blind the week of November 28 to shadow the Braille Instructor. Jessica completed the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute after attending the final session in Washington DC the week of December 5.

The remaining Center staff, as well as staff trainees, had the opportunity to participate in diabetic alternatives training with Mary Davis. Staff trainees also had the opportunity to learn about the Client Assistance Program (CAP) in a training provided by Shari Bahensky. Ted and Lizzie will also receive training in diabetic alternatives and an introduction to CAP later in their staff training.

Nancy is halfway through the Graduate Certificate in Rehabilitation Teaching for the Blind program with Louisiana Tech University. She successfully completed the Braille course. She is now taking Advanced Rehab Systems and Issues as well as Intro to Orientation & Mobility, and just completed her midterm exams. During the spring quarter, she will complete a 300-hour apprenticeship during

her workday to gain some experience teaching other classes at the Center. She is anticipating graduating in May, and will then be eligible to take the National Certification in Rehabilitation Teaching for the Blind exam to earn her NCRTB for five years.

There was one vocational seminar this quarter. The topic was the real test of confidence in blindness skills training, specifically going home to family over the holiday break. A couple of VR clients from the Omaha District attended, but due to some technological difficulties, they were unable to participate in the discussion. All VR clients are invited to participate in these Zoom meetings which are scheduled roughly once per month.

There were two activities this quarter: Rural travel and crossing the train tracks in Hickman and a holiday meal, decorating a tree, and wrapping gifts.

TDL's covered deep cleaning the cupboards, sweeping and mopping, vacuuming, and maintenance of the vacuum cleaners. Drops were conducted two times.

Nebraska Business Enterprise Activity Report – Eric Buckwalter

VENDING SITE UPDATE

State Office Building – Lincoln

A planned remodel, delayed by the pandemic, is now taking place in the basement of the State Office Building in Lincoln. Cafeteria services are temporarily located on the fourth floor breakroom while this remodel is taking place so that operations can continue in the building. The expected completion date of the remodel is in April.

Chief Standing Bear Building (formerly Executive Building)

The basement of the Chief Standing Bear Building also is currently undergoing renovations. Vending services that were available in the basement have been moved to the first floor while this work takes place. When finished, the basement will have a dedicated breakroom, where vending services will be available.

Douglas County Civic Building

An expansion of the Douglas County Civic Building to another existing building will take place in the spring. NBE is working with the building to prepare for placing vending services in this building.

Ogallala East Rest Area

The new rest area located on Eastbound I-80 near Ogallala is now open for business.

NDCS

NBE replaced and added several machines at NDCS locations operated by a sub-contractor.

NBE LICENSEE UPDATE

There are currently 13 licensed Vendors in the NBE program.

VENDING SITE COMPLAINTS

This past quarter NBE received some complaints about vending machines not dispensing product correctly. The machines are again operational. These machines are scheduled for replacement due to age.

OTHER UPDATES

New Hire

NCBVI hired Lizzie Heidenreich to fill the Orientation Counselor II position to work exclusively with the NBE program. Lizzie comes to us from Nebraska DHHS and will be a great asset to our team. Lizzie started with NCBVI on December 27. She is currently attending Center training.

VMS

Six Vendors are currently in a trial of a vending management system (VMS) through our credit card service processor. VMS allows Vendors to see which items their machines need remotely, so they can better plan for stocking machines and placing orders. We are in the very beginning of this trial.

Crane Vending Machines

Crane, the company who produces most of our vending machines, has stopped producing their touch-pad style machines and gone exclusively to touch-screen. NBE's distributor has several touch-pad style machines left in stock, and has held them exclusively for NBE and a few other customers. The touch-screen style machines have a 'talk' feature that NBE will be exploring for when the touch-pad machines are no longer an option.

LOOKING AHEAD

NBE, in conjunction with the Committee of Blind Vendors, is looking at holding a retreat style event for Vendors in the spring.

Business Office Activity Report – Kat Carroll

This past quarter, I have worked on the following projects:

- Submitted our 5th quarterly Monitoring update and we were notified by RSA that they have determined that NCBVI has met the criteria for establishing that the corrective actions have been effective for all the findings. As this is the case, the CAP has been successfully completed, and no further action by NCBVI is necessary.
- Completed the Federal Fiscal Year reports due for September 2022.
- Worked on the Final Federal Fiscal Year reports due for September 2022 by January 31, 2023.
- Continued training the new Accountant II Tammie Dunn. Tammie is a very quick learner and is already providing a great deal of relief to my workload.
- Replaced the very old furniture at the front desk.
- Continue to improve the Internal Budget Projection for FFY 2023 that shows budgeted, year to date expenditures, projected fixed expenditures for the remainder of the year, and remaining funds to spend on client services and extras such as vending machines and technology. Present this information to Leadership and Supervisors on a monthly basis to ensure we are planning for the best use of our available funds.
- Continue testing new resources for tracking and projecting expenditures for grant funds which were provided to us by VRTAC at the monthly Fiscal Forums.
- Continue improving client supply inventory tracking and the items kept in client supply.

- Continue work on improving communication between the Business Office team as well as communication between the Business Office and the Field Supervisors. Business Office Staff attend the monthly Supervisor's meetings for the first hour to continue this work.
- Although the Federal Fiscal Year end numbers are not complete yet due to the number of programs held late in the fiscal year, NCBVI is in a very strong financial position. We carried over all the FFY 2022 VR grant plus \$1.5 million of Reallotment and have received \$159,382 in social security reimbursement so far this Federal Fiscal Year. In addition, the preliminary estimates from RSA for FFY 2023 grants show a 6% increase in grant funds for the new fiscal year. For OIB we carried over most of the FFY 2022 grant and some Social Security funds that were transferred from VR.
- Began working on evaluations and SMART Goals for all staff. Also working on classifications for Business Office staff to position them so they can better help the Field Staff.

Kathy Stephens – Highlights

2022 Annual Report was completed and sent to the Governor and the senators. It is on file with the Unicameral.

Worked on updates to the NCBVI Website. Updated NCBVI.commission-board email group to include Miguel Rocha.

Worked with the OCIO to get Miguel Rocha a SFTP account set-up.

Worked with the Ramada hotel in Columbus on a contract for May 6 NCBVI Commission Board meeting.

Worked with NBE to surplus some outdated/non-working vending machines.

Assisted in scheduling interviews for the new CAP director position.

Worked on getting some new business cards for staff.

Worked on new driver contracts for Sandy Wright and Kimberly Rocha.

Completed CVRCB Certificates for new staff and updated certification status for current staff as needed.

Moderated Zoom meetings for Friends as needed.

Sent letters of congratulations to senators-elect and returning state senators.

Sent updates to TSB on leased vehicles parked at staff homes as needed.

Registered Angie Hoff for Ski for Light event.