

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Public Meeting, Saturday, May 07, 2022, 9:00 a.m.
Holiday Inn, 110 2nd Avenue, Kearney, 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

Mark Bulger, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. The meeting began with introductions.

Commissioners present: Mark Bulger, Chairperson, Designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Omaha; Brent Heyen, Executive Secretary, Lincoln; Cheryl Livingston, Lincoln; Linda Mentink, Columbus.

Commissioners Absent: Kimberly Scherbarth, Vice Chairperson, Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, Kearney.

Staff present: Carlos Serván, Executive Director; Carol Jenkins, Deputy Director of Services; Kat Carroll, Deputy Director of Finances; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Technician.

Public present: No one from the public was present.

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meeting Act was available in both print and Braille format. 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 February 5, 2022 public meeting minutes

Commissioner Livingston moved to approve the Minutes of the February 5, 2022 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Mentink seconded the motion.

Roll call: Ayes: Bulger, Mentink, Heyen, Livingston

Nays:

Motion Carried

Report from the Commissioners

Cheryl Livingston – Cheryl reported that she attended the NCBVI State Staff meeting in York on April 26 and 27. She noted that it was a good meeting with good training provided. Cheryl noted that she attended John Schmitt's retirement party on the evening of April 26. Cheryl also attended the NCBVI Commissioner Orientation training on March 12.

Cheryl reported that she has been active with the NFBN as their State Treasurer. They had their Quarterly Board meeting in April. The NFBN had their State Convention in March and she

attended this convention virtually. They had a representative from Washington D.C., Shawn Callaway, who gave a presentation.

Linda Mentink – Linda noted that she is also a member of the NFB and she attended the same meetings that Cheryl had attended. Linda reported that she is also on the State Board and is the president of the NFBN Columbus Area Chapter, which meets monthly.

Linda reported that she is the Vice President of the Friends of the Commission and they have had several meetings during this past quarter. Linda noted that Friends of the Commission is working on setting up a website and maintaining it. The organization is also working to get more grants for NCBVI. Linda noted that the Friends of the Commission applied for a Dr. Jacob Bolotin award. These awards honor individuals and organizations that are a positive force in the lives of blind people and are presented annually at the NFB National convention in July. If Friends of the Commission is one of the recipients, the organization will use the funds to help pay for its website.

Linda noted that she continues to work on learning how to use her new iPad.

Brent Heyen – Brent reported that he works as a blind manager at a hotel and he demonstrates the abilities of a blind person every day. Brent noted that for the past three weeks he has been the Acting General Manager for the hotel.

Brent also reported that he attended the NCBVI State Staff meeting on April 26 and 27 in York. Brent noted that he enjoyed the training on cortical visual impairment and he found the information to be very educational. Brent stated that he also attended John Schmitt's retirement party.

Mark Bulger – Mark reported that he currently serves as the President of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska (ACBN). Mark reported that ACB of Nebraska will be the host committee for the ACB National Conference which will be held in Omaha at the Hilton Hotel and the CHI Convention Center. The Conference will be held July 1-8, 2022. Mark noted that there will be individuals from all across the country coming to this Conference so it will be a big event. Mark noted that he is the Chair of the Host committee and they have been meeting weekly by phone to prepare.

Mark also reported that he serves as the President of the Omaha Association of the Blind and they will begin meeting in-person again this month. Mark also serves on the Board of Directors for the Share-A-Fare cab subsidy for the visually impaired.

Report from the Executive Director

I. Administration

I attended the National conference of CSAVR and the CSAVR Regional quarterly meetings. I also attended the NCSAB Executive Committee monthly meetings, the monthly calls with RSA as President-Elect of NCSAB, the NCSAB Planning Committee for the Spring National conference, the Statewide Special Education Council, the Nebraska Transition Committee, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners, the State WIOA Board, the Olmstead State Steering Committee, the Advisory Committee, the Education and Employment Committee, the NFB

State Convention, the Nebraska ADA Task Force, and the American Foundation for the Blind Leadership conference.

We completed our portion of the modifications to the Combined State Plan by the middle of March. We received the complete Federal Grant Awards on April 25.

There was a hearing on LB 1267 on February 23, 2022 and there has been no action on the bill since that time. This bill would give Commissions \$500,000 from the Federal American Rescue Plan. The purpose is to "address systemic public health and economic challenges that have contributed to the unequal impact of the pandemic".

We will have an OIB conference August 30 - September 1 in Grand Island. We are sub-contracting for this conference with Sky is the Limit - Eileen Rivera and David Denotaris. Both Eileen and David have nationwide experience running these kinds of programs. We contracted with them before for college workshops, an employment conference and Low Vision training for seniors.

We continue to work on the corrective action plan for RSA. The third quarterly report was due by the end of April. However, RSA is not being clear when providing guidance and writing comments that contradict themselves. We had a conference call with the RSA monitoring team on April 28 to talk about this issue and will complete our third report by May 9. The team is Julie Buren, Kat Carroll, Carol Jenkins and I.

Erin has worked on the new NCBVI website to have a more user-friendly website. We hope to put it into the live environment within the next few weeks.

Kat and Julie completed several federal reports. Kat also did the paperwork to apply for a Late Liquidation Request for the FFY 2020 VR grant. This request was granted and it is to continue work on the AWARE customization projects, the inability to get furniture ordered last summer from Cornhusker State Industries, and the inability to get Vending Machines ordered in July/August.

Kat Carroll and Erin Brandyberry worked on the Client Services Business Practices document and will provide training to staff in this area.

Kathy Stephens is working with hotels in Omaha and New Orleans to get direct billing set up for the National consumer conventions. To date, we do not have a direct bill set up.

We are still short of staff in most areas - Omaha, Lincoln, the Center, NBE and the Business office. However, due to our employee's dedication, we were able to provide quality services to our clients and we continue to grow.

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

Total number of OIB clients was 401.

Total number of IL clients under 55 was 76.

Total number of VR clients was 441.

This quarter we had clients get jobs as:
Administrative Service Manager

Adult Basic/Secondary Education/Literacy Teacher
Automotive Service Technician/Mechanic
Counter Attendant/Cafeteria/Food Concession/Coffee Shop
Eligibility Interviewers/Government Programs
Food Preparation/Service Related Worker
Fundraising Manager
Janitor/Cleaner
Nursing Assistant
Printing Press Operator
Production Worker
Proofreader/Copy Marker
Randolph Sheppard Vendor
Stock Clerk/Order Filler, and
Teacher/Instructor

II. Human Resources

Laurie Jacobson retired on March 30 and John Schmitt retired April 28, 2022. Cathie Guida resigned in the middle of March. Mike Rains will be retiring July 15, 2022.

We hired Craig Kneifl for the VR position for Omaha and he started his training on February 28.

We are still recruiting for the technology manager position, the NBE position, the VR counselor for Norfolk, the orientation counselor for Omaha, the two orientation counselors for the Center (one for Mike Rains position and the other for Laurie Jacobsen's positions), and the front desk position in Lincoln.

Our training on Team Building for the leadership and supervisors took place on April 25 and we will have a follow-up training in August. This training will also be provided to all staff.

We had our State Staff meeting on April 26-27. It was great to finally meet in person. Commissioners Livingston and Hayen attended.

Several field staff attended the Annual Transition conference in February. Some staff also presented at this conference.

Jessica Bartenbach, the Center supervisor, participated in the first quarterly training with the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute (NRLI). Several of our staff attended the virtual NFB state convention and the CSAVR conference in March.

We are looking at the possibility to increase the wages for most of our staff who are not making enough compared to Nebraska VR. Unfortunately, State Personnel denied our request. We also submitted a request with the Bargaining Union to consider the reclassification of several of our jobs, but the negotiation process does not start until August.

III. Field Services

Due to a large increase of COVID-19 cases by the beginning of the year, we started to provide hybrid services. However, gradually we went back to provide face-to-face services. In addition, several staff either were out sick or had family members at home sick, and therefore, were out during the last several weeks. However, they all show the team spirit and supported each other.

Staff continue networking with stakeholders all over the State to build trusting relationships and thus, find training and placement opportunities. Some of them are being part of transition committees, Project Search, WIOA Local Boards, NCECBVI Vision Partners meetings, retirement homes, clubs, youth programs, and businesses to mention a few.

Staff from the three districts coordinated Winnerfest and it was a great success. We had 14 participants. The focus was on Steam careers. We contracted with Hoby Wedler - a blind chemist from the Widdlen Group - to provide instruction in completing a number of science experiments. One of the experiments was to use nitrogen to make ice cream.

The Lincoln District planned a zoom job fair that took place on April 13. We had around 20 clients who participated. We had presentations about the American Job Center, how to fill out applications, and how to prepare for a job interview, including how to disclose your disability. Hy-Vee, Amazon and BOSRS came to share information about the types of positions that they are hiring for. We hope to have the next job fair in person.

Connie Daly was invited by Nebraska VR to be part of a committee to develop core competencies for counselors serving clients with Traumatic Brain Injuries.

We are starting to look for summer employment for students. We have a number of clients that will attain jobs in their home community.

The Omaha district have staff attending transition meetings and end of the year IEP's.

Several staff are on the planning committee for Project Independence, which will take place the week of July 24-29, 2022 at Camp Calvin Crest. The program will have a technology focus and the theme will be "Tech it Out". We have been doing outreach to the Teachers of the Visually Impaired to make sure they know the details of this program.

Tim and Adrienne have been having regular meetings with Amazon. Amazon is opening a distribution center and the City of Omaha is working on transportation, as there is no current bus service available in this area.

Tim has also been attending Employ/Oma and other partner meetings. Heartland Workforce Solutions is planning a Job placement for June 11. Omaha staff have participated in a committee working on a "Secret Shopper" evaluating Heartland Workforce Solutions services to customers and employers.

We are sub-contracting with Kent Taylor of Taylor Productions. He is working on developing PSA's regarding the different aspects of NCBVI Services. In March, Kent did some filming of the Winnerfest Program, to capture footage of students conducting the Nitrogen experiment. He will be doing photos and video of each of our programs. The goal is to develop a general PSA on NCBVI Services.

The North Platte district completed a pilot project of electronic signatures using an apple pencil and an iPad, which started at the beginning of March. The feedback from staff and clients has been positive. All staff have reported that they are more efficient in gaining client signatures, and it saves valuable time spent in the office. It eliminates needing to print many documents, thus saving on ink/toner/paper. Counselors are able to update forms or complete tasks in AWARE right with the client, and get a signature right away, whereas these tasks would have previously taken multiple visits, plus office time, to complete. The accessibility of forms is maintained with an electronic signature, and staff who use voiceover have been testing this method out as well, with great success. No clients have had any issue with electronic signatures. We have also tested and found success with using writing guides on the iPad. This pilot project has shown us that this method of electronic signatures has met our needs and increased efficiency significantly. Therefore, this will be expanded to the other districts.

The North Platte district staff participated in several networking events, such as: completing the employer outreach with Target, Olive Garden, Ampride, Runza, Country House, and Eileen's Cookies. They also assisted with a reverse Job Fair in Grand Island; participated in the ESU 10 Transition Event where we had a booth and presented to students, their families, and school professionals; they also presented at a stepping up class at an Assisted Living Facility in Hastings, and at Kinship Pointe, an Assisted Living Facility in Kearney; They also had employer outreach at Monument Rehab and Care and CAPWN. The North Platte district staff also provided multiple in-services at retirement communities, and provided a presentation to a Lion's Club in Scottsbluff.

IV. Training Center

We are contracting with a graduate of the Center to work approximately 10 hours per week with students on cooking and cleaning skills at the apartments until the position can be filled.

During this quarter, there were five tours of the Center and two 3-day stays.

Two activities were completed. Students attended the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska's state convention in March. The Center also participated in a virtual job fair sponsored by NCBVI.

Seminars continue to be held weekly. We have now returned to meeting for seminars face-to-face. Most seminars were planned and led by students with staff assistance.

The monthly job-readiness seminars will be held virtually and will be coordinated by staff at the NFB Jernigan Institute. Topics will include items such as requesting reasonable accommodations in the classroom and on the job, writing a resume, completing an informational interview and job shadowing experience, applying for jobs, self-advocating, notetaking, and soft skills for success in educational and employment settings. These sessions will be open to clients of the agency also.

V. Nebraska Business Enterprise

Most vendors are starting to see sites return to higher levels of occupancy for the first time in two years.

FEDERAL SITES:

Due to new RSA regulations, we are no longer allowed to sub-contract when serving Federal buildings. However, blind vendors are allowed to sub-contract these sites. Under this new regulation, the Omaha main post office has been awarded to a blind vendor. Canteen will continue servicing the site until at least January of 2023, with commission going to the blind vendor.

NBE has been in communication with GSA about a new USDA office in the Lincoln area, which is scheduled to be open in the summer of 2023.

Due to a retirement, the Denny Federal Building in Lincoln and the VA Regional Office are now being served by a new blind vendor.

We will be receiving the contract for beverage machines at the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, Community Correction Center Lincoln location. The contract will begin in late summer.

Finally, NBE is setting up a Master Agreement with our credit card provider. This will allow NBE greater flexibility and more control over the readers on our machines.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Newsline® Update

This past quarter, NFB Newsline continued to provide instructions for COVID-19 in home testing. A Newsline report was presented at the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska 2022 State Convention. Newsline also streamed the “We’re With U” benefit concert on April 16, 2022 to help support the blind of Ukraine. As of the end of April 2022 NFB Newsline has 2134 Nebraska subscribers. There are some discrepancies as far as total subscribers and new subscribers for the past few months. I have updated January’s numbers to reflect the newly reported numbers. I hope to receive clarification from the National Federation of the Blind, National Office before our next NCBVI board of commissioners meeting. There is also a significant increase this month in our Magazine accesses, 36 in March and 97 in April. Some subscribers have asked about using the Google Home to access Newsline and at this time, the only method to do this is to call NFB Newsline with the Google Home and use the same numeric commands to navigate.

Those interested in subscribing to NFB Newsline may continue to complete the online application on the nfb.org website, call the National Federation of the Blind, call the National Talking Book and Braille Library Services, or I am also able to directly add qualified subscribers.

2022 NFB Newsline Stats

	January	February	March	April
Number of Subscribers:	2139	2140	2133	2134

New Subscriptions:	4	1	1	2
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Telephone Usage:

Total calls:	1033	671	692	740
Average call length: (Minutes)	14.41	15.56	13.44	14.77
Percent local calls:	39.8	55.35	50.13	49.34
Total call minutes:	14880	10440	9301	10928

Online Usage:

Web Sessions:	5726	4956	6069	6391
NFB-NEWSLINE Mobile Sessions:	487	445	547	491
In Your Pocket Deliveries:	1474	1388	2023	2438
Email Deliveries:	556	496	587	560
Total Online Accesses:	8243	7285	9226	9880

Total Content

<u>Accesses:</u>	5072	4158	5042	5566
Content Access Frequency(Minutes)	8.8	9.71	8.85	7.76

Nebraska

Newspapers:	3627	3377	3339	3310
Nebraska Local Channels:	42	24	24	21
Local Weather and Emergency Alerts:	179	139	238	239
National Newspapers	1220	969	1105	1178
International Newspapers:	0	1	0	0
My Newspaper: Breaking News	75	70	41	88
Online	218	187	177	159
Nmagazines:	33	41	36	97
TV Listings	464	301	372	287

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Complaints or issues

A client from Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) contacted the Client Assistance Program indicating she had not been contacted by NCBVI regarding assistive technology assistance she requested. CAP reached out to the office supervisor to gather more information regarding the client's issue. Upon further investigation, it was reported due to staff shortage NCBVI was falling behind in completing these services. The office supervisor indicated she would reach out to the client and explain the situation which appears NCBVI was able to re-establish communication and set up times for the client to receive the help needed. The client was satisfied with this decision and has had no further issues.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Break

New Business

Discuss and act on the approval of The Executive Directors time certification

Commissioner Livingston moved to continue with the current method being used for the Director to submit his Personnel Activity Report to the Board of Commissioners. The Director submits his Personnel Activity Report via email to the entire Board for their review. It is an automatic approval unless a question or concern is raised by a Commission Board member.

Commissioner Mentink seconded the motion.

Roll call: Ayes: Bulger, Mentink, Heyen, Livingston

Nays:

Motion Carried

Discuss and act on the approval of employee in-state and out-of-state travel

State law requires all travel of staff of state agencies to be pre-approved. This includes travel in-state and out-of-state. Currently for out-of-state travel all staff must complete a form that says where they are going, why they are going there, the cost, how it will be funded, etc. and this must be pre-approved by their immediate supervisor and by the executive director. This is done by all staff for out-of-state travel.

Supervisors manage in-state travel by getting itineraries from staff and reviewing them on an on-going basis. However, staff is not required to check with their supervisor every morning to get an okay for in-state travel as this would not be manageable. Discussion was held with Administrative Services to determine how the agency could comply with the law regarding in-state travel. Administrative Services recommended that each year the Board of Commissioners would have a motion to pre-approve travel that is related to the purpose of the staff person's position.

Commissioner Livingston moved that the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired Board of Commissioners approve all employee in-state business travel and/or out-of-state business travel within 60 miles of the border of Nebraska in any adjoining state, which relates directly to the provision of services to a client, i.e. employer visit, medical appointment, service referral, employment interview, etc. All other out-of-state business travel is approved if granted

approval by the Executive Director of the agency. This motion is in effect until the next meeting of the Board of Commissioners after April 1, 2023.

Commissioner Mentink seconded the motion.

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

Vote to enter Executive Session

Commissioner Heyen moved to go into Executive Session at 10:33 a.m. to conduct the annual evaluation of the Executive Director.

Commissioner Livingston seconded the motion.

(Ref. Open Meeting Act; 84-1410. Closed session; (d) Evaluation of the job performance of a person when necessary to prevent needless injury to the reputation of a person and if such person has not requested a public meeting.)

Executive Session to conduct the Executive Director Annual Evaluation

An Executive Session was held.

Vote to leave Executive Session

Commissioner Livingston moved to come out of Executive Session at 11:06 a.m.

Commissioner Mentink seconded the motion.

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

Act on the retention of the Executive Director and his Salary

Commissioner Livingston moved to retain Carlos Serván as the Executive Director of NCBVI.

Commissioner Mentink seconded the motion.

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

Commissioner Heyen moved to give the Executive Director a 4.5% raise effective May 1, 2022.

Commissioner Mentink seconded the motion.

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

Final Announcements

The next meeting of the NCBVI Board of Commissioners will be Friday, July 29, 2022 in Lincoln, Nebraska. The Focus Topic will be Transition.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:10 a.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the July 29, 2022 Commission Board meeting, please email it to the NCBVI Commission Board at ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens, Administrative Technician
NCBVI

Mark Bulger, Chairperson
NCBVI Board of Commissioners

Staff Quarterly Reports for May 7, 2022 Commission Board Meeting

Lincoln District Activity Report – Connie Daly

John Schmitt's last day was April 28. We have posted his position. We have interviewed one candidate and we are arranging a second interview. Kathy Navrkal is in training to become an OC II in the Norfolk area.

Winnerfest was a great success. We had 14 participants. The focus was on Steam careers. We contracted with Hoby Wedler to provide instruction in completing a number of science experiments. They used nitrogen to make ice cream. Kelly E Coleman assisted with completing an Art project. Jeff Scheer and John Schmitt also worked the program.

The Lincoln District planned a zoom job fair that took place on April 13. We had around 20 clients who participated. We had Dave Samson as a keynote speaker. We had presentations about the America's Job Center, filling out applications, and how to prepare for a job interview. Tim Jefferson provided a great presentation on how to disclose your disability. Hy-Vee, Amazon and BOSRS came to share information about their workplaces and the types of positions that they are hiring for. Kelly E., Jeff, Amy and Charli were all involved in lining up speakers and handling logistics. We hope to have the next job fair in person.

Jeff Scheer attended the NFB of Nebraska convention in March. I was invited by Nebraska VR to be part of a committee to develop core competencies for counselors serving clients with Traumatic Brain Injuries. I have not attended a meeting yet but I am excited to learn more. Jeff, Kelly E and Amy attended the Transition Conference in Kearney. Amy attended training on assistive technology for attending meetings virtually using platforms such as Microsoft Teams.

We are starting to look for summer employment for students. We have a number of clients that will attain jobs in their home community.

We had clients get jobs as a Customer Service rep, Sales Associate, and Economic Assistance worker.

Omaha District Activity Report – Nancy Flearl

Staff:

We have hired Craig Kneifl for the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II position and he started training on February 28. We have continued to post the Orientation Counselor II position; we have had very few applicants.

Kelly has been handling the majority of the new referrals as we have had many older blind individuals choosing to apply. I continue to get feedback from consumers on how much they appreciate her services. She is also on the interview committee for the Orientation Counselor II Position.

Larry has been helping out with the points of sales at Offutt Cafeteria. He has been meeting with many new consumers and providing technology assessments. He has likewise been providing more direct training in technology.

Adrienne was on the planning committee for Winnerfest and worked that program in March. She was the point of contact for coordinating the filming of the science experiment during Winnerfest.

Transition:

We have staff attending transition meetings and end of the year IEP's. We have also been networking with teachers and paraprofessionals about the opportunity to be a job coach this summer for Work Based Learning Experiences.

Programs:

We have staff on the planning committee for Project Independence that will be the week of July 24-29, 2022 at Camp Calvin Crest. The program will have a technology focus this year. The theme will be "Tech it Out". We have been doing outreach to the Teachers of the Visually Impaired to make sure they know the details of this program.

We have worked with the Friends of the Commission to keep updated on the Soil to the Sky: Stem Camp with Doane University. We have shared the flyer with the Teachers of the Visually Impaired within our district.

Employment/Services to Employers:

We have continued to work with placement activities and outreach to business.

Tim and Adrienne have been having regular meetings with Amazon. Amazon is opening a distribution center and the City of Omaha is working on transportation, as there is no current bus service available in this area.

Tim has also been attending Employ/Omaha and other partner meetings. Heartland Workforce Solutions is planning a Jobpalooza for June 11th. Tim is on this planning committee and will work the event along with another counselor from NCBVI. This is a large hiring event on a Saturday with a wide array of job opportunities.

We have participated in a committee working on a "Secret Shopper" evaluating Heartland Workforce Solutions services to customers and employers.

I had mentioned last quarter that we are working with Mutual of Omaha to do a company-wide training for their IT staff on accessibility. This will be on October 6, 2022 at 11:30. They are also inviting other area businesses to participate, and they are putting together a platform for this to be a virtual training.

We had clients attend the Zoom to Employment Conference hosted by the Lincoln District. Last week Amazon was one of the employers that participated in the virtual job fair.

We have had the following placements this quarter: Retail Sales Supervisor, Randolph Sheppard Vendor; Massage Therapist, Cook and Food Service Worker. Consumers are getting a lot of interviews.

Public Service Announcements (PSA):

We are working with Kent Taylor of Taylor Productions. He will be working on developing PSA's regarding the different aspects of NCBVI Services. In March, Kent did some filming of the Winnerfest Program, to capture footage of students conducting a Nitrogen Experiment. He will be doing photos and videos of each of our programs. The present project is developing a General PSA on NCBVI Services.

General Update:

We have received our new office furniture. It was quite a process, but well worth it.

We continue to appreciate our NCBVI team and how the Lincoln and North Platte offices have worked to support us.

North Platte District Activity Report – Erin Brandyberry

Electronic Signatures:

The North Platte district is completing a pilot project of electronic signatures using an apple pencil and an ipad, which started at the beginning of March. The feedback from staff has been extremely positive, just noting a small learning curve and learning a routine for the new method. All staff have reported that they are more efficient in gaining client signatures, and it saves valuable time spent in the office. It eliminates needing to print many documents, thus saving on ink/toner/paper. Counselors are able to update forms or complete tasks in AWARE right with the client, and get a signature right away, whereas these tasks would have previously taken multiple visits, plus office time, to complete. The accessibility of forms is maintained with an electronic signature, and staff who use voiceover have been testing this method out as well, with great success. No clients have had any issue with electronic signatures, and many have expressed how neat it is. We have tested and found success with using writing guides on the ipad. This pilot project has shown us that this method of electronic signatures has met our needs and increased efficiency significantly.

Networking:

Cristal completed employer outreach with Target, Olive Garden, Ampride, Runza, Countryhouse, and Eileen's Cookies this quarter. She also assisted with a reverse job fair in Grand Island, and participated in the ESU 10 Transition Event where she had a booth and presenting to students, their families, and school professionals. Fritz has mailed letters to doctors' offices with the new NCVBI brochure, and we have received requests for more brochures from offices that we had not previously been connected with. Fritz and Aaron Sands presented at a stepping up class at an Assisted Living Facility in Hastings, and Aaron Sands presented at Kinship Pointe, and Assisted Living Facility in Kearney. Angie had employer outreach at Monument Rehab and Care and CAPWN, provided multiple in-services at retirement communities, and provided a presentation to a Lion's Club in Scottsbluff.

Projects:

Fritz has received feedback from many clients about desires to start a support group in areas where there is not one already established, so he took the initiative to send mailings for a potential support group in those areas so that peer support can be provided autonomously. Angie worked with ESU 13 to host an event for a braille challenge in Scottsbluff for the students in the panhandle of Nebraska. Angie was on the committee for Winnerfest, and she and Ashley worked the program. Angie has been on a committee for planning a Job Expo through ESU 13 in May, and

she is on a planning committee for Disability Disaster Preparedness Training where she will also be a presenter. Ashley is on the PI Committee. Cristal and Erin B have been working closely with a client who is in the final stages of a business plan for opening an Aesthetics business in Kearney. Erin has worked with Julie on the project for implementing multiple service documentation in AWARE, and provided training to staff for this new process that went live on May 1. Erin has also worked through the process for electronic signatures and provided the staff training. Erin has worked with Nebraska Interactive on the NCBVI website, and the website is being accessibility tested, with hopes of launching the website in May. We gained access to office space in the state office building in North Platte and have been working on developing the space so it is useful. Erin worked with the business office and the supervisor's team to develop a Client Services Business Practices guide that streamlined processes, and gave staff a resource to refer to. As a part of this project, we revised procedures for Client Supply, and were able to keep common devices and aids on hand, which is a huge service to be able to provide clients with technology at the same appointment where we are demonstrating it. Erin has been working with the OIB Technical Assistance Center on remaining changes to make to the OIB program.

Training:

Angie attended the Windmills training (VR). Cristal and Ashley attended the Nebraska Transition conference that was held in Kearney. Erin attended the CSAVR conference, and the supervisors team building training. All staff received training on electronic signatures, documenting multiple services in AWARE, and the state staff meeting in York.

Client Outcomes:

We had one client take a tour of the center, and another client complete a three-day stay. Our district had six clients attend the Winnerfest program, and have six clients signed up for WAGES. We had one student successfully complete a WBLE in a dietary department, and another client start an OJT at Runza. One client graduated from the Project Search program. We had a client become a licensed vendor in the NBE program. We had one successful closure of a client as a security guard, and had clients gain or retain employment in the following careers: carpenter, activities assistant, customer service representative, salesclerk, and sales representative.

Center Activity Report – Jessica Bartenbach

Several Center staff have been out on medical leave this quarter. The other staff pitched in to help cover classes in the absence of a substitute instructor. They demonstrated great flexibility in adapting to the changing schedule as we switched from in-person to remote training, then remote to hybrid training, and finally back to in-person training on February 28. On one day this quarter, there were only two instructors at the Center, so the travel instructor and Center supervisor worked with half of the students on bus travel and indoor orientation skills at Gateway Mall while the home management instructor worked with the other half of the students to make homemade bread and cinnamon rolls. The students switched activities at lunchtime. This demonstrates the flexibility that staff have shown over the past few months while continuing to provide high-quality blindness skills training.

Laurie Jacobsen retired on March 31 after 9.5 years as the Apartment Resource Technician. It is hoped that the position she vacated can be reclassified as a full-time Orientation Counselor to allow the person in that position to substitute for instructors at the training Center and provide some additional support to students dealing with personal issues outside of the Center which impact their participation in Center training. The reclassification request is with state personnel and is awaiting their decision. In the meantime, we have contracted with a graduate of the Nebraska

Center for the Blind to work approximately 10 hours per week with students on cooking and cleaning skills at the apartments until the position can be filled permanently.

Mike Rains announced that he will be retiring on July 15. His position was advertised on the Government Jobs web site starting on February 15. The position closed on March 15 with no applications received, so the position has been re-posted and will remain open until filled. To date, only two applications have been received. One applicant was offered an interview and initially accepted, then withdrew from consideration due to the salary. The second candidate was not offered an interview due to not possessing relevant experience.

Since the last Commission Board meeting, one Center student has graduated, and one new student has started training. The Center currently has six students: five VR, one Pre-ETS, and no OIB clients. There is one VR client on the waiting list who will begin training in mid-May after receiving some additional skills training in the field to prepare for the Center.

In addition, the Center is working with two staff trainees, one who was hired on January 31 and will work as an Orientation Counselor in Norfolk and is expected to complete training in early June. The other who staff trainee started on February 28 and will be a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in Omaha after completing training in early July. In addition, one individual from the business office and one from the front desk completed a week of training to learn about the Center.

During this quarter, there were five tours of the Center. One additional tour was scheduled but was cancelled by the client due to health reasons. There were two 3-day stays this quarter. One of those clients is scheduled to begin training on May 16 and the other is contemplating returning for the full training program.

One commencement meal was completed during this quarter and was served in-person. No mini meals were scheduled.

Students participated in drops once this quarter, and everyone successfully returned to the Center. The goal is to schedule drops once per month.

Two activities were scheduled this quarter. Students attended the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska's 51st annual convention held virtually March 25-26. The Center also participated in a virtual job fair sponsored by NCBVI. Topics covered applying for jobs, writing resumes and cover letters, disclosing blindness during the application process, tips for a successful job interview, and we also heard from some employers about their current openings and the process to apply for positions.

TDL's were held once this quarter. Students identified and cleaned the items located in the storage closet at the apartments. Now that the risk of contracting COVID-19 is reduced, more frequent activities, drops, and TDL's will be scheduled.

Seminars continued to be held weekly with most sessions taking place over Zoom. We have now returned to meeting for seminars face-to-face. Most seminars were planned and led by students with staff assistance. A few seminars were led by staff and focused on adjusting to blindness and structured discovery philosophy.

In addition, a contract has been drafted and is awaiting signatures. Once finalized, monthly job-readiness seminars will be held virtually and will be coordinated by staff at the National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute. Topics will include items such as requesting reasonable

accommodations in the classroom and on the job, writing a resume, completing an informational interview and job shadowing experience, applying for jobs, self-advocating, notetaking, and soft skills for success in educational and employment settings. These sessions will be open to clients of the agency, not just students attending the Center. It is anticipated that the first session will be scheduled this summer or early fall.

We implemented a new A/B weekly schedule in January to reduce the number of office days and make it easier to schedule staff meetings, TDL's, drops, progress checks, and activities. This did not work well due to the frequency of staff absences and a prolonged period of time in remote and hybrid training. Beginning in May, the Center will return to the previous schedule with staff having one office day per week. This allows staff to substitute for absent instructors more easily, and also provides an equal amount of Braille and Communications class time compared with Home Management, Shop, and Cane Travel. Activities, drops, progress checks, seminars, TDL's, and vocational seminars will be scheduled in a way that does not have a disproportionate impact on one class.

Nebraska Business Enterprise Activity Report – Eric Buckwalter

VENDING SITE UPDATE

GSA – Lincoln

NBE has been in communication with GSA about a new USDA office in the Lincoln area. Currently, this site is not scheduled to open until summer of 2023.

Main Omaha PO

Under the new RSA regulations for federal sites the Omaha main post office has been awarded to a blind vendor. Canteen will continue servicing the site until at least January of 2023, with commission going to the blind vendor.

Denny Federal

Due to a retirement, the Denny Federal Building in Lincoln is now being served by a new blind vendor.

VA Regional Office

Due to a retirement, the VA Regional Office in Lincoln will be served by a new blind vendor. Vending service has yet to return to this building due to low occupancy levels during the pandemic. Service will return soon.

NDCS – Central Office

Due to a site relinquishment, the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services Central Office is now being served by a new blind vendor.

NDCS – CCCL

NBE recently received word that we will be receiving the contract for beverage machines at the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services Community Correction Center Lincoln location. The contract will begin in late summer. NBE already holds the snack and food machine contract for this location.

Federal Sites

Due to new RSA regulations, SLAs are no longer allowed to directly sub-contract federal sites. NBE is working to have blind vendors take on the locations where NBE currently has this arrangement. Blind vendors are allowed to sub-contract these sites.

COVID-19

Most sites served by NBE blind vendors are starting to see sites return to higher levels of occupancy for the first time in two years. While it has yet to be seen if all sites will return to pre-pandemic occupancy levels, this return is welcome for the profitability of blind vendors businesses.

NBE LICENSEE UPDATE

The NBE program currently has thirteen blind vendors. One vendor retired. One vendor received their license. NBE is aware of two current clients who have an interest in the NBE program.

VENDING SITE COMPLAINTS.

NBE received no direct complaints since the last report. There was one suggestion from a site about price displays on glass front beverage machines. NBE is working on solutions to this request.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

New Machines

All sixty-four machines that were purchased last August have now been delivered and installed. Eleven more new machines have already been ordered this year; to fulfill the new NDCS CCL contract that is starting in August.

Cantaloupe

NBE has been working closely with Cantaloupe to set-up the Master Account; this process is almost complete. Once completed, this will allow NBE staff access to solve many credit card reader problems in house. It also gives NBE a dedicated support person to contact with issues; who has immediate access and knowledge of our account.

Once the Master Account project is complete, NBE will look to begin trials of Cantaloupe's vending management software (VMS) with several blind vendors. If the trial goes well, vendors will have the option to add this tool to their accounts. There is a small monthly fee involved.

LOOKING AHEAD

NBE is still looking to add a third person to join the agency in a dedicated NBE Counselor role. The job is posted on the State of Nebraska jobs website.

RSVA will be holding their annual meeting in conjunction with the ACB National Convention in July in Omaha. NBE staff members and several NBE Vendors have been asked to be part of a panel on July 2.

Business Office Activity Report – Kat Carroll

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

- Updating existing policies and writing new policies in response to the Monitoring visit in September 2020. Submitted our quarterly update and are waiting for RSA to respond. Continue working on the next quarterly update while waiting to see what we need to fix from the first quarter.
- Completed the Federal Fiscal Year reports due in January 2022.
- 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.
- Continue training Suzette Casillas on front desk duties.
- Working to fill the front desk position previously held by Cathie Guida, who left without notice on 3/11/22.
- Continue to improve the Internal Budget Projection for FFY 2022 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.
- We've received two sets of Grant Award Notifications for our Federal Grants so far under Continuing Resolution. Congress has passed a budget for the Federal Fiscal Year, but we have not yet received the remainder of our grant funds.
- Work on the RSA 17 quarterly reports for the quarter ended 03/31/2022.
- Work on the FFY 2021 RSA 15 with the assistance of Dave Robinson and Eric Buckwalter. The deadline of this report has been extended many times and is now due the end of April due to RSA confusion of where to report the FRPP funds.
- Amend the FFY 2020 RSA 15 due to errors made by NBE staff last year.
- Applied for and granted a Late Liquidation Request for the FFY 2020 VR grant due to continuing work on the AWARE customization projects, the inability to get furniture ordered last summer from Cornhusker State Industries, and the inability to get Vending Machines ordered in July/August. These delays are due mainly to the Global Supply Chain issues. All vending machines have now been received and paid for, we are making progress on the two remaining AWARE customization projects, and the Omaha furniture was received and scheduled for installation last week.
- Implement improvements to 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.
- Continue work on Team Building with the Business Office Team as well as throughout the Agency.
- Worked with Erin Brandyberry on the Client Services Business Practices document and training.

Kathy Stephens – Highlights

I am working on the surplus of additional vending machines, vending equipment, Omaha office file cabinets and technology.

I have been working on year-end inventory for the technology items that NCBVI has in E1. This is an on-going project. Our year-end inventory report needs to be submitted to DAS Material Division before August 31 each year.

Working with staff on keeping up maintenance for NCBVI state leased vehicles. I scheduled the maintenance, as needed, on our Lincoln vehicles.

I posted some Spanish and French translations regarding NCBVI services to the NCBVI website. Also added some resources to our website.

I attended the Diner Advisory Board meeting at the Deterrence Diner with Executive Director Carlos Serván.

I completed registrations for the NCBVI leadership team and supervisors to attend the NCSAB and CSAVR Spring Conferences as requested.

I am working with hotels in Omaha and New Orleans to get Direct Billing set up for the National consumer conventions.