

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Public Meeting, Saturday, November 5, 2022
Omaha State Office Building, 1313 Farnam Street, Room 226, Omaha, 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 9:00 a.m. The meeting began with introductions.

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

Commissioners absent: Cheryl Livingston, Vice Chairperson, Lincoln.

Staff present: Carlos Serván, Executive Director; Erin Brandyberry, Interim Deputy Director of Services and North Platte District Supervisor; Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Specialist.

Public present: Robert Newman, Omaha; Bekah Jerde, RTBS, Omaha; Sandy Wright, Columbus.

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 July 29, 2022 public meeting minutes.

Commissioner Mentink moved to approve the Minutes of the July 29, 2022 Commission Meeting as posted on our website. Commissioner Bulger seconded the motion.

Roll call: Ayes: Bulger, Mentink, Heyen

Nays:

Motion Carried

Report from the Commissioners

Mark Bulger

Mark reported that he serves as the Omaha Association for the Blind (OAB) President and they are back to meeting regularly. They had an interesting program a few weeks ago about the upcoming elections. Brian Curtis (Mark – please verify his name) from the Douglas County Election Commission came to their meeting and demonstrated the new voting machines. Mark noted that the new voting machines look to be very accessible and very reliable. Those attending the meeting were able to try out the new machines. Mark stated that he hopes that all blind people exercise their right to vote. Radio Talking Book also presented on Radio Talking Book at their meeting.

Mark reported that he serves as the ACBN State President. The ACBN has been meeting regularly in person. The ACBN will hold their Annual State Convention in April 2023. It will be an in person convention and it will be held in Omaha. Additional details will be coming.

Linda Mentink

Linda reported that she is involved with the Columbus area Chapter of the NFBN and she serves as President. They meet on the second Monday of the month. Linda noted that all of their members are senior citizens.

Linda reported that the NFBN had a Board meeting on August 13 and they will have another Board meeting on November 12 in Omaha at 11:00 a.m.

Linda noted that she is also on the Friends Board. The Friends met last Tuesday via Zoom. The Friends Board is currently working on some grant writing and fund raising. The Friends Board has been talking about putting up a website. They had done some work with Doane University, but they will be doing a contract with a web designer out of California to help them get their website set up.

Linda reported that she is the secretary of the NFBN Senior Division. She noted that she has been the secretary for the NFBN Senior Division since approximately 2016. They meet via Zoom on the second Monday evening of each month at 7:00 p.m. Everyone is welcome to join the meetings. This month their presenter will be a man from New Hampshire who has a Legacy Technology Business. It started out as a place where blind people could get refurbished technology or send their technology to be repaired. The goal is to keep it so that blind people can afford technology.

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. Brent noted that he was recently considered for a general manager position for a hotel in Lincoln with the same company. Unfortunately, someone else got the position, but they also made it very clear to him that they have every intention of making him a general manager in the not so distant future.

Brent also reported that he attended the NCSAB Conference in San Antonio November 2-4. Brent noted that also in attendance from NCBVI was Carlos Servan, Kat Carroll, Brandy Harper, Adrienne Moody and Craig Kneifl. Brent noted that many blind consumers go to state and national conventions for ACB and NFB, which is mainly the consumer side of things. The NCSAB Conference covers the agencies side of things and what they deal with. Brent stated that he learned a lot at the conference and it was a big eye opener for him.

Focus Topic: Radio Talking Book Service – Presented by Bekah Jerde, RTBS Executive Director

Bekah Jerde thanked the Commission for the opportunity to come to the meeting today and speak about Radio Talking Book Service. She also thanked NCBVI for all the great work they do across the state to help people stay connected. Lastly, Bekah thanked NCBVI for their years of collaboration with Radio Talking Book Service.

Radio Talking Book Service (RTBS) provides human-voiced information choices to individuals who have disabilities that prevent them from reading. They will ensure that every disabled person has equal access to current, local print information necessary to lead a self-directed, productive life.

RTBS currently has four staff members. They are: Bekah Jerde, Executive Director; Ryan Osentowski, Program Director; Cami Cavanaugh Rawlings, Communications Director; and Michael Halula, Board Operator.

RTBS has a Board of Directors. The Board represents a cross-section of their community and has a passion for their organization and those they serve. The members work hard to ensure long-term sustainability of the organization and oversee that the funds raised directly affect those in need.

RTBS was able to continue to provide programming through the pandemic, including COVID specific programs, by utilizing our cadre of volunteers as remote readers. In 2021, they reopened the studios and will be utilizing a hybrid of in-studio and remote readers moving forward.

RTBS continues to increase the amount of on-demand programming available on their podcast channels, which can be accessed on their website or iTunes.

New programming: NE Virtual Newsstand featuring local online news publications NOISE, Nebraska Examiner, Flatwater Free Press, and Nebraska Sunrise News; Nebraska Southeast Newspapers including Pawnee City, Nebraska City, Falls City, and Beatrice; Mind Your Business with Midlands Business Journal and Strictly Business-Lincoln and Omaha; Sioux City Journal; Bookshelf will focus on Nebraska authored fiction and nonfiction; and more. RTBS offers a total of 17 regional newspapers.

KIOS update: If you had a traditional RTBS radio, you would not have had any reception from May until early November. RTBS attempted to reach everyone and replace radios while KIOS underwent transmitter issues. Those issues now seem to be resolved and RTBS is back on the air. Individuals are asked to contact RTBS if they have any issues with the radio from RTBS.

RTBS developed an Alexa skill. If you already have an Alexa, simply say "Alexa, enable the Radio Talking Book Nebraska skill" and follow the prompts.

RTBS is now offering Alexa Echo Dots as a receiver option to eligible listeners.

Commissioner Bulger noted that non-profits can be a challenge especially now with the current economy conditions. Mark asked where RTBS gets its funding from.

Bekah stated that RTBS 62 percent of their funding from private foundation grants, about 18 percent from individuals, and about 19 percent from OIB, Lions Club, and other such entities.

Commissioner Heyen asked how a person would go about recommending some books from Nebraska authors.

Bekah stated that a person could email her or give her a call.

The commissioners thanked Bekah for her presentation.

Public Comment

Robert Newman – Robert noted that RTBS also has a Board and he asked what the process is for getting on that Board.

Bekah stated that the individual should contact her and she can connect them to the nominating committee.

Robert asked what the process is for filling the NCBVI Commissioner vacancy for former Commissioner Kimberly Scherbarth's position.

It was noted that all applications for Executive appointments go through the Governor's office. Anyone interested in being considered for an appointment to a Board or Commission must submit an Executive Appointment application and submit it to the Governor's office. It was noted that completed applications and additional application material that is provided may be subject to public information requests.

Commissioner Mentink asked if the person to replace Kimberly Scherbarth needs to be a NFB Designee. Linda noted that NFBN President Jamie Richey put out notice on the NFB membership list to encourage people that were interested to apply. Linda noted that she and Cheryl Livingston were put on the NCBVI Board as members and not the NFB Designee.

Commissioner Bulger noted that in regards to appointments to Commission Boards, he has heard that there is a backlog of appointees. Mark noted that our current Governor is going to be term limited out shortly and he assumes that the responsibility will be passed to the new Governor.

Carlos noted that he contacted the Governor's office about a month ago to inquire about a commissioner appointment for NCBVI. He was informed that the Governor has about 200 Boards and Commissioners to make appointments for. Carlos stated that he pointed out that the appointment should be an easy one because the person needs to be a NFB designee. The person at the Governor's office read the part of the Commission bill that relates to commissioner appointments. She noted that the law says that one member shall be a member or designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska; one member shall be a member or designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska; and one member may be a member of another consumer organization of the blind. She also noted that the NCBVI Board already has two NFB members.

LB 352, the Commission Bill reads,

71-8604

Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired; created; per diem; expenses.

1. The Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired is created. The governing board of the commission shall consist of five members appointed by the Governor with the approval of a majority of the members of the Legislature. All board members shall have reasonable knowledge or experience in issues related to blindness which may include, but is not limited to, reasonable knowledge or experience acquired through

membership in consumer organizations of the blind. No board member or his or her immediate family shall be a current employee of the commission. At least three board members shall be blind persons: One member shall be a member or designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska; one member shall be a member or designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska; and one member may be a member of another consumer organization of the blind.

Break A break was taken at 9:58 a.m. The meeting resumed at 10:08 a.m.

Report from the Executive Director

I. Administration

During the last quarter, I attended the following meetings:

NCSAB Executive Committee monthly meetings: We decided to have the fall NCSAB conference in person, no virtual alternative. I worked on the planning committee and also Chair the nominating committee.

We also talked about the ongoing situation of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations along the interstates. States are required to present a plan on how they will build the stations, every 50 miles on the interstates, not in the cities. NCSAB drafted a letter to be sent to the U.S. Secretary of Education regarding the importance of providing an official opinion on EV charging stations being a part of Randolph-Sheppard.

NCSAB also put together a working group to deal with the EV charging stations issue. Department of Transportation (DOT) will not give an opinion on issues for programs from the Department of Education. The Department of Education's lawyers are working on this issue and hope to send an opinion by the end of 2022 or by early 2023.

NFB is asking the U.S. Congress to increase the OIB funds from 33 million to 295 million. NCSAB wrote a letter of support that was sent to the House and Senate Appropriation committees. I was part of the committee who wrote this letter.

Monthly call with RSA: RSA included in their budget request an increase of 500 million dollars for training to BEP from the private sector. This request from RSA was not consulted with consumers or NCSAB. Therefore, no support was shown. The House and Senate Appropriation recommendation did not include this increase.

The Deputy Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education mentioned that around 300 million dollars that was not used for VR services went back to the federal government. This is mainly because of the inability to hire rehabilitation professionals. Agencies for the blind returned around 10 million. Around 263 million will be used for disability and innovation grants.

The Fiscal Unit head clarified that states could use VR funds for public service announcements, but not for promotional items.

The National Association of Blind Merchants and NCSAB had a call with RSA and Deputy Assistant Secretary to talk about some of the funds sent back being used to innovate BEP across the nation. The request is for 10 million. Some of the areas where these funds can be use are more micro markets, more vending machines, and a National Summit for blind vendors.

StarTran: One of the focuses of the meeting was the departure of the Director, Mike Davis, and the 20 million dollars grant awarded to Lincoln to build a new multi-module transit center, which will be ADA compliant. At the last meeting, the focus was on the increase of fees for rides.

The Olmstead Steering Committee highlights: Now that we have the goals, we are working on developing strategies to achieve these goals. Coming up with strategies where all partners can agree has been a challenge. We are still developing strategies for each of the goals on different areas.

Olmstead Advisory Committee: We continue working on developing strategies to advise the Steering Committee. We also talked a great deal about how unfriendly WebEx is and that Zoom should be used instead. The discussion was expanded to put more pressure on the Governor's office, legislators, and heads of agencies to have technology be accessible to all disabilities.

Commissioner Heyen and I attended the NCSAB Fall Conference in San Antonio.

We got RSA's response from our fourth quarterly report, in which they are asking a few follow-up questions regarding the finance area.

Kat worked on the Internal Budget Projection for FFY 2022. This Projection has been presented to Leadership and supervisors on a monthly basis to ensure we are planning for the best use of our available funds.

Kat also completed the Biennium budget request, which was due on September 15.

NCBVI is in a very strong financial position. We anticipate carrying over all of the FFY 2022 VR grant plus \$1.5 million of reallocation and social security reimbursement that was received the last week of September. 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 are carrying over most of the FFY 2022 grant and some Social Security funds that were transferred from VR.

November financial reports to the Commissioners will be delayed due to Kat and Brandy attending the NCSAB Conference November 1- 4, 2022.

The Year-End fixed assets inventory report was completed and sent to Administrative Services before the August 31, 2022, deadline.

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

OIB clients was 526. Last year was 489.

IL clients under 55 was 93. Last year was 86.

VR clients was 478. Last year was 477.

This quarter we had clients get jobs as:

Administrative Service Manager
Secondary Education
Automotive Service Technician/Mechanic
Cashier
Civil Engineer
Computer and Information Systems Manager
Cook
Counter Attendant/Cafeteria/Food Concession/Coffee Shop
Customer Service Representative
Eligibility Interviewers/Government Programs
First-Line Supervisor (Retail)
Food Preparation/Service-Related Worker
Fundraising Manager
Interviewer
Janitor/Cleaner
Maid/Housekeeper Cleaner
Nursing Assistant
Preschool Teacher
Printing Press Operator
Production Worker
Proofreader/Copy Marker
Randolph Sheppard Vendor
Receptionist/Information Clerk
Secretary/Administrative Assistant
Security Guard
Stock Clerk/Order Filler
Substance Abuse/Behavioral Disorder Counselor, and
Teacher/Instructor

II. Human Resources

Our Deputy Director for Services, Carol Jenkins, left NCBVI to head the agency for the blind in Connecticut. She will be missed and we wish her the best. We know Carol will make a positive impact in her new role heading services for the blind in Connecticut.

Kimberly Scherbarth started Center training on August 10. She will be a VR counselor for the Kearney area.

Mark Coleman started Center training on August 29. He will be the apartment resource staff person.

Alexander France started Center training on October 3. He will be the orientation counselor in Omaha.

Since 2020, we hired 13 new staff. It has been a challenge recruiting and training new staff, and at the same time continuing with quality services, especially during the pandemic.

We are still recruiting for the technology manager position, the NBE position, the VR counselor position and technology specialist position for Omaha, the orientation counselor position for the Center (the position Mike Rains vacated) and we will post a new orientation counselor position for the Lincoln district.

All staff received training on RSA approved policies.

Jessica Bartenbach participated in the third NRLI session.

Nancy Coffman is participating virtually in the Rehabilitation Teaching for the Blind graduate certificate program offered by Louisiana Tech University. She will then complete a 300-hour internship at the Center where she is cross-trained to teach other classes. Her tuition is paid for by a grant from RSA.

The NCBVI Fall State Staff meeting was held September 27 - 29 in Kearney. Commissioners Bulger and Livingston attended.

III. Field Services

As we are short of staff in several areas, the supervisors are taking on extra work. Nancy and Connie are carrying extra cases until staff finish their training and/or we hire new staff. Erin Brandyberry is taking most of the Deputy Director for Services duties as Carol Jenkins moved to Connecticut. We are contracting with Doug Boone to help us with Shop training at the Center.

Several staff attended the Senior Blind conference, Silver Summit, in Kearney. The conference was well attended and several clients were exposed to blind role models for the first time. Several OIB clients were very happy with the conference and already started to think about getting more training and be independent again. Commissioners Bulger and Livingston attended the conference.

We also had a College Workshop where parents were invited. Students received very good information about being competent in college, dealing with student discrimination and being in control over life in college.

Staff continue to be engaged on different Boards and committees. They attend stakeholder meetings and such to find training and placement opportunities. These include meeting with the following: Transition committees, Project Search, WIOA Local Boards, NCECBVI Vision Partners, retirement homes, clubs, youth programs, the Coalition for Older Adult Health Promotion (COAHP), Employ LNK, Employ Oma, Royal Oaks Assisted Living, Mutual of Omaha, American Job Centers, Nebraska VR, Region 22 Emergency Management, Integrated Life Choices, Panhandle Public Health District, employers of ASC, Scottsbluff Public schools, the Kearney Housing Authority, Well-Life in Kearney, Stone Hearth Estates in Gothenburg, and the Ainsworth Senior Center to mention a few.

The Lincoln District had its first GATE program in over two years. We had six participants. They arranged the classes so that they would have more time in technology. Phone technology is more complicated than it used to be. These trainings are scheduled every month.

Lincoln also had its first Pre-Ets group in over two years and scheduled more of these sessions once per month. Lincoln is working with the students at NCECBVI twice a month. They are working with the teachers to support their goals. Their first few sessions have been related to hygiene, and how this is critical to develop friendship and employment.

Omaha staff have participated in a Transition meeting with Special Education directors and TVI's. They also attended a Parent Information Night focused on Transition. Furthermore, they are participating in several job fairs. Metro Community College did one to recognize Disability Awareness Month on October 25. Heartland Workforce Solutions had Spooktacular on October 27.

The Omaha District has partnered with Mutual of Omaha to provide a training with their IT staff on the importance of Accessibility. This event was held on October 6. Jonathan Ross did a large part of the presentation and Connie Daly stepped in to help as Nancy was on vacation. She addressed other points regarding accessibility, touching on the HR side. It was noted that their work impacts applicants and/or an existing employee that might start losing their vision. Connie mentioned there were at least 270 participants and that the comments in the chat were that they recognized the importance of the training. One comment was that accessibility starts from the ground up.

Cristal presented on a panel discussion at UNK to discuss ADA/disability awareness.

We are contracting with JB&K, Jessica Beecham, to administer the WINNERFEST program.

IV. Training Center

The Shop Instructor position has been posted since mid-February. To date, only three applications have been received. Two applicants were offered the opportunity to interview, and both declined, one citing the low salary as the reason. The third applicant was not offered an interview due to not possessing relevant experience.

We are contracting with Doug Boone to teach Shop at the Center and work with clients and their teachers in schools around the state as needed. He is also helping us with recruitment by contacting colleges with Industrial Arts programs, but there are very few programs remaining. We are contracting with Laurie Jacobson to work with students at the apartments until Mark Coleman is done with his Center training.

Currently the Center has zero clients attending training. Since the last quarterly update, one student has taken a leave of absence for medical reasons, another student has withdrawn from training for medical reasons, and another student graduated from the Center. There are currently three clients on medical leave who are eligible to return to the Center once their health has improved; however, two of these do not plan to return at this time.

There have been eight tours this quarter. Most of these clients are interested in completing a 3-day stay, but they have had very little blindness skills training and need to master some of the prerequisite skills before a 3-day stay is scheduled. These prerequisites are necessary for the safety of the clients and include skills such as being able to independently and nonvisually administer medications, manage personal hygiene, basic cane travel and orientation (including ascending and descending stairs), dialing a phone and answering a phone call, survival cooking (such as heating a TV dinner in the microwave), and setting an alarm to rise independently.

With the staffing shortage in each district, it has been difficult for clients to gain these prerequisite skills.

The Center currently has four staff trainees.

There were two vocational seminars this quarter. The topics were notetaking and setting SMART goals. Invitations are sent to counselors to share with their VR clients.

Two activities were held. The staff trainees took a tour of the Homestead National Historic Park with a ranger guiding the tour and they had a picnic lunch in the park. Another activity was to take the city bus to Gateway Mall to practice indoor orientation skills and learn to use escalators. The staff trainees also learned how to travel through roundabouts as a pedestrian and toured the Talking Books and Braille Services in Lincoln.

To help recruit students for the Center, Jessica has presented at a staff meeting for each district. In addition, Jessica participated in a panel discussion at the College Success Seminar for both parents and students to talk about the benefits of attending blindness skills training.

In October, Nicole and Jessica visited the Colorado Center for the Blind for Nicole to shadow the Home Management instructors and Jessica to shadow the leadership team as part of our coaching and continuous improvement plan with Gemini Research and Training. Jack Mendez also came to Lincoln to mentor Nancy as part of this project. It is hoped that all Center staff will have the opportunity to travel for a week of immersion at another Structured Discovery Training Center, and have a mentor visit them in Lincoln.

V. Nebraska Business Enterprise

State Sites:

The SLA installed ten new Vendor 621 machines on the CCCL campus. These machines fulfilled the new contract with NDCS to provide beverage service at this location. The sub-contractor who services NDCS sites in Lincoln has requested additional machines due to high demand in some locations. NBE is working to get these machines purchased and installed.

NBE LICENSEE UPDATE

The NBE program currently has thirteen blind vendors. There are several individuals who are interested in the NBE program. The SLA will be working this fall to set these individuals up with job shadow experiences and begin the application process.

CANTALOUPE

NBE is currently working with Cantaloupe to set up trial periods for Vendors who wish to try out Cantaloupe's Vending Management System (VMS), Seed Cashless Plus (SCP). VMS allows Vendors to track what their machines need regarding product from their computer and/or phone. According to national data, 45% of vending machine service providers across the country (not just BEPs) find that using VMS on their machines is a great investment and shows a positive return on the investment (ROI).

NEW MACHINES

The second part of some Vendor 621 machines that were ordered this past summer are now in. These machines will be placed this fall.

Newsline® Update

Kimberly Scherbarth

NFB Newsline Coordinator for Nebraska

NFB Newsline released version 3.1.1 of NFB Newsline Mobile on September 8, 2022. This new release contains bug fixes related to articles not loading properly. Page tabs were also added across the bottom of the app, allowing the user to select the tab for KNFB Reader Basic, Information Source, Highlights, or settings. You no longer have to use a 3-finger swipe to move through these pages. There is also an awesome global search feature on the Information Source page. You may type in a topic and a list of articles will be pulled from various sources.

As of September 30, 2022, there are 2,163 Newsline subscribers in Nebraska, Twenty-three new subscribers during July-September, twelve of which subscribed during the Silver Summit held in Kearney at the end of August, for NCBVI’s OIB clients. NFB Newsline had a table set up during the exhibit hall portion of the event and I took part in a panel discussion, sharing information about NFB Newsline with those in attendance.

There were 13,089 total call minutes we have not seen for the past several months, February through July were all between 9,000 and just over 11,000 minutes per month. There were 11,798 total online accesses, which includes web sessions, NFB Newsline Mobile, In Your Pocket, email and other online sources. Subscribers accessed Nebraska Newspapers 3584 times and National Newspapers 1,452 times.

2022 NFB Newsline Stats

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

Telephone Usage:

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

Online Usage:

Web Sessions:	5726	4956	6069	6391	6813	5801	5930	5919	6475
NFB-NEWSLINE Mobile Sessions:	487	445	547	491	439	427	505	554	389
In Your Pocket Deliveries:	1474	1388	2023	2438	6179	4892	4428	3402	4376
Email Deliveries:	556	496	587	560	587	608	591	563	558

Total Online Accesses:	8243	7285	9226	9880	14018	11728	11454	10438	11798
<u>Total Content Accesses:</u>	5072	4158	5042	5566	9266	7990	7363	6087	7113
Content Access Frequency(Minutes)	8.8	9.71	8.85	7.76	4.82	5.41	6.06	7.33	6.07
Nebraska Newspapers:	3627	3377	3339	3310	3942	3365	3706	3574	3584
Nebraska Local Channels: Local Weather and Emergency Alerts:	42	24	24	21	27	15	35	19	20
	179	139	238	239	286	255	210	186	146
National Newspapers	1220	969	1105	1178	1538	1575	1345	1248	1452
International Newspapers:	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
My Newspaper:	75	70	41	88	72	78	73	34	102
Breaking News Online	218	187	177	159	765	448	410	314	388
Nmagazines:	33	41	36	97	340	254	193	163	392
TV Listings	464	301	372	287	306	337	301	279	241

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.

Carlos Serván reported that Jerry Bryan, the CAP Director, is resigning from his position.

New Business

Date/Time/Location/Focus Topics for 2023 Board meetings

Saturday, February 4, in Lincoln. Focus Topic – Dashboard Information

Saturday, May 6, in Columbus. No Focus Topic since the Annual Evaluation of the Executive Director will take place.

Friday, July 21, in Lincoln. Focus Topic – The NCBVI Center

Saturday, November 4, in Omaha. Focus Topic – OIB and IL Services

Public Comment

Robert Newman – Robert reported that he is also on the Friends Board. The Friends Board has room for ten members and they currently have seven. The Friends Board is seeking new members who want to be producers. The Friends Board is looking for opportunities for grants. They are currently focusing on adults who do not have a vocational goal, but still have technology needs. The Friends Board is trying to get additional money to pay for these needs.

Mark Bulger – Mark noted that he is a big consumer group advocate. Mark stressed the importance not only belonging to a consumer group, but also being a producer and a provider because consumers cannot expect NCBVI to do everything.

Final Announcements

The next NCBVI Commission Board meeting will be held on February 4, 2023 in Lincoln. The Focus Topic will be Dashboard Information.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:21 a.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the February 4, 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 November 5, 2022 Commission Board Meeting

Lincoln District Activity Report – Connie Daly

Gracie Swim is currently in Center training. She will finish Center training right before Thanksgiving and she will be the VR counselor in the Norfolk area. At this time, the district supervisor is covering this area. Kathy Navrkal is seeing OIB clients in the Norfolk district. We are starting the hiring process for an OC II position that we still had vacant in the Lincoln District. Our OIB caseload numbers are very high in the Lincoln area.

Charli is continuing to network through the Coalition for Older Adult Health Promotion (COAHP). The VR counselors frequently attend Employ LNK. I remain on the Greater Lincoln Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Board. We attend monthly partner meetings for our One Stop.

Kathy Navrkal and Jeff Scheer attended the Silver Summit in Kearney to assist the participants. We had several clients attend.

We had our first GATE program in over two years. We had six participants. We arranged the classes so that they would have more time in technology. All of the skill areas are important. Phone technology is more complicated than it used to be and we needed to allow time for that. We have these trainings scheduled every month. Charli Saltzman and Kelly E. Coleman are taking the lead.

We had our first Pre-Ets group in over two years. We made Halloween snacks and played games such as Jenga and Hula Hoop. We also kicked the soccer ball to each other. We had three participants. We have this scheduled every month. Jeff Scheer and Amy Buresh are taking the lead.

Kelly E. Coleman and Jeff Scheer are working with the students at NCECBVI twice a month. They are working with the teachers to support their goals. Their first few sessions have been related to hygiene. Each of the participants was given some trial size items in a kit. They discussed the importance of hygiene as you become a teenager. They also talked about the importance of hygiene in developing friendships and employment.

We had clients get jobs as a mental health counselor and retail salesperson. We assisted clients with maintaining employment as a plumber.

Omaha District Activity Report – Nancy Flearl

We hired Alexander France for the Orientation Counselor position in Omaha. He started Center training on October 3.

Staff have participated in several events at ESU #3. The first being a transition meeting with Special Education directors and TVI's in the Omaha Area. The other event was a Parent Information Night focused on Transition.

We are participating in several job fairs. Metro Community College is doing one to recognize Disability Awareness Month on October 25. Heartland Workforce Solutions will have Spooktacular on October 27.

We had several students attend the College Workshop and found it to be very helpful. Likewise, we had a number of people attend the Silver Summit for Older Blind. One person said it was life changing and that his counselor had visited them about the importance of skills. He was able to meet strong and confident blind individuals that presented and coordinated the program. He noted that he now realized that he was the one standing in his way of being independent.

Adrienne has been doing a group teaching at Royal Oaks Assisted Living. To date, she has provided two sessions and has one more to go.

We are continuing to participate in Partner Meetings at Heartland Workforce Solutions. We attend on site Employer Spotlights to meet with Employers to learn of their hiring needs. We also attend other networking events such as EmployOma.

Heartland Workforce Solutions hosted a clinic with Legal Aid to help individuals set aside criminal history. We had three consumers sign up for this clinic.

We have partnered with Mutual of Omaha to provide a training with their IT staff on the importance of Accessibility. This event was held on October 6. Jonathan Ross did a large part of the presentation and Connie Daly stepped in to replace me. She addressed other points regarding accessibility, touching on the HR side. It was noted that their work impacts applicants and/or an existing employees that might start losing their vision. Connie mentioned there were at least 270 participants and that the comments in the chat were that they were recognizing the importance of the training. One comment was that accessibility starts from the ground up. I have been approached by other businesses to provide this training.

Kelly is working on the PI committee to plan quarterly meetings for Project Independence.

Craig will be working on the committee to coordinate Winnerfest.

Craig and Adrienne will be attending NCSAB in November.

This quarter we had someone hired as a warehouse associate and another as a food service worker.

We are grateful to work with such a wonderful team here at NCBVI. Staff are always there to support one another.

North Platte District Activity Report – Erin Brandyberry

Networking: Angie worked closely with Nebraska VR, Region 22 Emergency Management, Integrated Life Choices, and Panhandle Public Health District on bringing together a Disaster Prep Workshop that was presented in October. Angie networked with the employers of ASC and Scottsbluff Public schools. Fritz and Aaron S. have provided Agency Outreach presentations at the Kearney Housing Authority, Wel-Life in Kearney, Stone Hearth Estates in Gothenburg, and the

Ainsworth Senior Center. The North Platte district has seen an increase in referrals as a result of these outreach efforts. Cristal networked with Country Market grocery store and Grand Island YMCA, and participated in a Disability Fair for Grand Island Project Search.

Projects: Aaron S. worked with the Tech Committee on a technology presentation at State Staff where he covered the topics of Seeing AI, FaceTime, be my eyes, and Aira. Erin B. coordinated the Silver Summit (OIB Conference) with Blind Savvy USA, and Angie, Fritz, and Cristal worked the conference. Angie has been assessing a platform called “Clusiv” to assess if it would benefit the clients NCBVI serves.

Training: Fritz attended a webinar on Blindness and Diabetes. Cristal presented on a panel discussion at UNK to discuss ADA/disability awareness. Erin B., Cristal, and Angie attended training coordinated by Easter Seals. All District staff attended NCBVI staff training on RSA approved policies including: Contracts, Contract Monitoring and Rate Settings; Case Management, Documenting the Record of Services in AWARE; Federal Performance Reporting, Data Collection and Validation with attached Reporting Credential Attainment and Measurable Skill Gains; Period of Performance and Carryover. All staff also attended the NCBVI State Staff meeting where we received training on Self-Employment, the Urgency of Awareness (biases and sensitivity training), Technology Apps, and ADA/Reasonable Accommodations.

Client Outcomes: We had many clients attend the Silver Summit and have seen great progress in terms of what goals they are now setting for themselves. Cristal had one client successfully complete Center training in August, and had one client close her case successfully as a cashier/assistant manager at a gas station. Angie had a client do a virtual Center tour and Cristal has a client completing a 3-day stay at the Center. Angie had a client complete an OJT at a daycare and the client was offered employment at the end of the experience. Angie had another client gain employment at ASC (factory line worker).

Center Activity Report – Jessica Bartenbach

The Shop Instructor position has been posted since mid-February. To date, only three applications have been received. Two applicants were offered the opportunity to interview, and both declined, one citing the low salary as the reason. The third applicant was not offered an interview due to not possessing relevant experience. The position continues to be posted until filled. Interested applicants can apply through the Government Jobs web site by searching “shop instructor.”

We are contracting with Doug Boone to teach Shop at the Center and also work with clients and their teachers in schools around the state as needed. His contract allows him to work with VR, IL, and OIB clients on Shop and Cane Travel. He will be providing some additional instruction in the field to help clients prepare to attend the Center. Doug is also helping us with recruitment by contacting colleges with Industrial Arts programs but there are very few programs remaining, and they have low enrollment with students having jobs lined up prior to graduation.

Circular saws with a metal track have been purchased for each district as a low-cost alternative to the table saw for clients who want to learn woodworking, or continue woodworking. Using the hand-held electric circular saw that runs along a metal track, and two collapsible sawhorses, clients can make accurate and smooth cuts. Doug will provide training to field staff who are interested and available, and each district will have this equipment available to demonstrate to clients.

Mark Coleman has accepted the Client Resource Counselor position and his first day with NCBVI was August 29. He is currently completing staff training at the Center. We are contracting with Laurie Jacobsen to work at the apartments while Mark completes his training.

Currently the Center has zero clients attending training. Since the last quarterly update, one student has taken a leave of absence for medical reasons, another student has withdrawn from training for medical reasons, and another student graduated from the Center. There are currently three clients on medical leave who are eligible to return to the Center once their health has improved, though two of these do not plan to return at this time.

There have been eight tours this quarter. Most of these clients are interested in completing a 3-day stay but have had very little blindness skills training and need to master some of the prerequisite skills before a 3-day stay is scheduled. These prerequisites are necessary for the safety of the clients and include skills such as being able to independently and nonvisually administer medications, manage personal hygiene, basic cane travel and orientation (including ascending and descending stairs), dialing a phone and answering a phone call, survival cooking (such as heating a TV dinner in the microwave), and setting an alarm to rise independently.

With the staffing shortage in each district, it has been difficult for clients to gain these prerequisite skills. In a couple of cases there are additional disabilities, or childcare arrangements which require additional preparations. Some of these clients found out about the Center by participating in the Silver Summit. It was the first time they saw an independent blind person and they received their first cane.

There have been four 3-day stays since the last Commission meeting. One client needs some additional training in the field. One client wants to begin training as soon as possible but is the primary caregiver for a school-aged child and needs to make childcare arrangements. Another client wants to wait until the spring to begin training. The fourth client will likely begin training soon as long as the 3-day stay goes well the first week of November. Another client who completed a 3-day stay in the past is now ready for training, and just needs a little refresher instruction to ensure that he possesses the prerequisite skills required to attend the Center.

There were two vocational seminars this quarter. The topics were notetaking and setting SMART goals. Invitations are sent to counselors to share with their VR clients, but so far, no clients outside of the Center have attended.

Two activities were held. The staff trainees took a tour of the Homestead National Historic Park with a ranger guiding the tour and they had a picnic lunch in the park. Another activity was to take the city bus to the Gateway Mall to practice indoor orientation skills and learn to use escalators. They ate lunch at the mall, which provided an opportunity to practice locating a restaurant and locating an empty table in a crowded and noisy food court. A couple of the staff trainees also learned how to travel through roundabouts as a pedestrian, and toured the Talking Books and Braille Services in Lincoln.

TDL's covered bed bug prevention and deep cleaning the stove and oven.

To help recruit students for the Center, Jessica has presented at a staff meeting for each district. In addition, Jessica participated in a panel discussion at the College Success Seminar for both

parents and students to talk about the benefits of attending blindness skills training. The parents and students participating in that seminar also took a tour of the Center led by Shane and Nancy. Shane assisted the Lincoln District with a group home teaching in October, and Jeff has worked with a potential Center student in her home community to help her prepare for a 3-day stay. Doug will also be working with a couple of clients in the panhandle region to help them prepare for the Center. Center staff are also planning to assist with other group home teachings when scheduled, including quarterly Winnerfest.

Jessica attended the third session of the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute which was held in San Diego September 26-30. In October, Nicole and Jessica visited the Colorado Center for the Blind for Nicole to shadow the Home Management instructors and Jessica to shadow the leadership team as part of our coaching and continuous improvement plan with Gemini Research and Training. Jack Mendez also came to Lincoln to mentor Nancy as part of this project. It is hoped that all Center staff will have the opportunity to travel for a week of immersion at another Structured Discovery Training Center, and have a mentor visit them in Lincoln.

Nancy is also participating in the Rehabilitation Teaching for the Blind graduate certificate program offered by Louisiana Tech University. Louisiana Tech is the only University in the country that offers master's degrees and graduate certificates for professionals working in Structured Discovery rehabilitation. She will virtually participate in classes in Rehab Systems and Issues, Braille, Orientation and Mobility, and complete a 300-hour internship at the Center where she is cross-trained to teach other classes. Her tuition is paid for by a grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration which requires two years of work in the field of blindness rehabilitation for every year of grant support received.

Nebraska Business Enterprise Activity Report – Eric Buckwalter

VENDING SITE UPDATE

NDCS

The SLA installed ten new Vendo 621 machines on the CCCL campus. These machines fulfilled the new contract with NDCS to provide beverage service at this location. Previously, NBE only held the snack/food contract. Like the snack/food contract, VVS will be servicing this site for the Licensed Vendor assigned to the location.

The sub-contractor who services NDCS sites in Lincoln has requested additional machines due to high demand in some locations. NBE is working to get these machines purchased and installed.

NBE LICENSEE UPDATE

There are currently 13 Licensed Vendors actively servicing sites in the NBE program. There are several individuals who are interested in the NBE program. The SLA will be working this fall to set these individuals up with job shadow experiences and begin the application process.

VENDING SITE COMPLAINTS

In the third quarter of the calendar year NBE received complaints regarding expired product in vending machines. Vendors were reminded that expired product, or product past its 'best buy date', in vending machines is not acceptable; and that they are responsible for keeping track of these dates so that this does not occur. NBE Vendors were reminded that while they do own and

operate their own businesses; they also represent the NBE program as a whole, as well as the abilities of the blind across the State of Nebraska.

CANTALOUPE

NBE is currently working with Cantaloupe to set up trial periods for Vendors who wish to try out Cantaloupe's Vending Management System (VMS), SeedCashless Plus (SCP). VMS allows Vendors to track what their machines need regarding product from their computer and/or phone. This allows Vendors who do not have storage at the location(s) to know what product to take along when servicing a site ahead of time. Eliminating the need for multiple trips to a site and/or taking along more product than is needed. There is a fee per credit card reader for Vendors who wish to continue using the service once the trial period is over. According to national data, 45% of vending machine service providers across the country (not just BEPs) find that using VMS on their machines is a great investment and shows a positive return on the investment (ROI).

NEW MACHINES

The second part of some Vendo 621 machines that were ordered this past summer are now in. These machines will be placed this fall.

OTHER UPDATES

Electric Vehicle Charging Stations

There has been much ongoing discussion in the last year about the federal program to place electric vehicle (EV) charging stations across the country. Much of this discussion as it affects BEPs is whether or not EV charging stations placed at interstate rest areas will fall under the Randolph-Sheppard Program. The federal Department of Education is still making determinations as to whether or not EV charging stations will be considered 'vending machines'.

LOOKING AHEAD

NBE staff, in conjunction with the NBE Committee, is working on planning a retreat-style event in the month of May.

The Orientation Counselor II position that will work exclusively with NBE is posted on the state jobs website.

Business Office Activity Report – Kat Carroll

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

- Continued updating existing policies and writing new policies in response to the Monitoring visit in September 2020. Submitted our 4th quarterly update and received a response last week from RSA. Continue working on the next quarterly update while we were waiting to see what we need to fix from the 4th quarter.
- Completed the Federal Fiscal Year reports due in July 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 and Vanessa Kunz on front desk duties.
- 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.

- Begin testing new resources for tracking and projecting expenditures for grant funds which were provided to us by VRTAC at the monthly Fiscal Forums.
- Closed out the two remaining AWARE customization projects.
- 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. Monthly meetings will be held to continue this work.
- Continue work on Team Building with the Business Office Team as well as throughout the Agency.
- Completed and submitted the next Biennium budget request due on September 15.
- 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 anticipate carrying over all of the FFY 2022 VR grant plus \$1.5 million of Reallotment and social security reimbursement that was received the last week of September. 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 are carrying over most of the FFY 2022 grant and some Social Security funds that were transferred from VR.
- November financial reports to the Commissioners will be delayed due to Kat and Brandy attending NCSAB November 1-4. We anticipate sending them out the following week.

Kathy Stephens – Highlights

The Year-End fixed assets inventory was completed and sent to Administrative Services before the August 31, 2022 deadline.

Worked on updating some of the fixed asset listings in E1 for technology as items are moved around from one staff member to another.

Assisted the NBE Program in the surplus sale and destruction of vending machines. Also surplused some outdated technology items.

Completed staff CVRCB Certificates for new staff as their applications were approved and completed CVRCB re-recertification documents for staff as their Certificates were about to expire.

Completed travel arrangements, room reservations and registrations for staff attending the Fall NCSAB Conference in San Antonio, among other trainings.

Made updates to NCBVI website as needed.

Attended Zoom meetings with the NCSAB Conference Planning Committee.

Attended NCBVI Policy Training regarding Pre-Ets, Quality Insurance, Time Sheet, Period of Performance and Contracts.

Attended the Fall State Staff meeting in Kearney. Worked with the Comfort Inn and Suites and the Younes Conference Center in Kearney to set up room reservations and conference room reservations for staff and commissioners who attended.