

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Public Commission Meeting

February 9, 2008; 9:00 a.m. Omaha, NE

Approved Minutes

Call to Order and Introductions:

Nancy Oltman, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and she welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Announcements Concerning Public Comments, Meeting Recordings, Lunch Arrangements and other Logistics:

Commissioner Walla read the agenda items and introductions were made. It was noted that public comments are always welcome regarding the agenda items. Students attending Teenage Adventures in Blind Skills (TABS) provided lunch. Hubert Paulsen recorded the meeting.

Commissioners present: Wes Majerus, Darrell Walla, Jim Jirak, Julie Johnson and Nancy Oltman.

Commission staff present: Dr. Pearl Van Zandt, Executive Director, Lincoln; Bob Deaton, Deputy Director-IL, Lincoln; Carlos Serván, Deputy Director-VR, Lincoln; Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor, Omaha; Bill Brown, Business Manager, Lincoln; Dave Robinson, Personnel Officer, Lincoln; Robert Newman, Voc. Rehab Counselor, Omaha; and Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant, Lincoln.

Public Present: Sherry Manthe, Mark Bulger, Amy Mason, Hubert Paulsen, Myrna Hanson.

Minutes of the November 17, 2007 Commission Meeting

Commissioner Jim Jirak moved to approve the Minutes of the November 17, 2007 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Walla seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Material List - The use of the Material List was discussed. This is basically a list that shows the subject line of communication between executive director and board. It was the consensus of the commissioners to discontinue the use of the Material List.

Focus Topic: Workings of NCBVI Business Office

Bill Brown, Business Manager and Dave Robinson, Personnel Officer were present to talk about the workings of NCBVI Business office. Prior to the meeting, two documents were forwarded to the commissioners. The first was regarding Business Office Organization and the second was in regards to the Budget Process.

NCBVI "Business Office" consists of a Business Manager, a Personnel Officer who also serves as an accounting clerk (supervised by the Business Manager) and the agency Administrative Assistant who also serves as the Executive Director's Administrative Assistant (supervised by the Executive Director.) Also a part of the Business Office is the Agency Staff Assistant II who works with business responsibilities in the Social Security Reimbursement, Statistical Reporting, and is spearheading our efforts to implement the eForce computer data system. The Staff Assistant II's other primary duties are clerical support for the agency Deputy Directors. Nebraska Business Enterprise accounting is handled by a .55 FTE Accounting Clerk II.

The Business Office charge at NCBVI is to manage the Budget, Finance, Accounting, and Personnel areas of the agency. It is the job of the Business Office to see to it that money is available to NCBVI and it is spent in an orderly fashion.

Among other things, the Business Manager works with the state budget, grants, and the operating plan.

Bill Brown asked if the commissioners had any specific questions. Nancy Oltman stated that she is thankful that staff does such a good job handling budget issues and managing the business office. Oltman asked if NCBVI had received the Reimbursements from the Social Security Administration yet. Bill Brown reported that there are a number of claims still out there. Bill reported that significant Social Security reimbursement funds were received in October. Dottie Wilmott spends a lot of times capturing those funds and identifying clients who no longer need social security services. The Social Security Administration will reimburse NCBVI the amount spent by the agency for the vocational rehabilitation of each client who becomes employed and is no longer receiving Social Security payments.

Darrell Walla asked what the process is for reimbursement of expenses and payment of per diem for commissioners. Dave Robinson stated that his goal is to have them out within one week to ten days. NCBVI commissioners receive \$70 per meeting which is paid on the regular bi-weekly payroll. After a meeting, Kathy Stephens sends to Dave Robinson a memo informing him which commissioners were present at the meeting. Auto deposit can be set up for commissioners who would like their per diem checks automatically deposited in their bank. As far as the processing of expense reimbursements, after Dave Robinson gets done with processing the expenses, it goes to Kathy Stephens for pre-audit and then to Bill Brown for approval. Once approved, the expenses are submitted to NIS (Nebraska Information System) electronically. Therefore, ten days is about the earliest the reimbursement can occur.

Nancy Oltman asked if there are guidelines for overnight stay and inquired as to if there is a list of reimbursable expenses when traveling. Bill Brown will provide the commissioners with a document of expenses that require receipts. Bill Brown spoke about expense rates in different cities. Jim Jirak mentioned that there is a GAO Website that lists per diems for different states and cities. Pearl Van Zandt encouraged commissioners to contact Kathy Stephens or Dave Robinson if they need a hotel because she may be able to set it up with a direct bill to NCBVI. The commissioners thanked everyone for the information and stated that they found it to be very helpful.

As far as the human resources component of NCBVI, the Commission is a small agency and the business office also handles all the human resource duties. When there is a position opening at NCBVI, the supervisor will advise Dave Robinson that they have a job opening. The position will first be advertised internally and then a job order will be sent to State Personnel and the newspaper. After the applications are received they are screened and interviews are scheduled. Another component of human resources is open enrollment which is held each year.

It was noted that this process is a lot easier with the NIS system. Wes Majerus helps out with tips and tricks for open enrollment using JAWS. All agency disciplinary issues go through Dave Robinson to ensure they follow the steps that are outlined in the Union contract.

Julie Johnson inquired as to NCBVI staff retention and turnover rate. Bill Brown reported that this information is located in Personnel Almanac and noted that NCBVI has a low turnover rate. Bill Brown will send this information to the commissioners.

Darrell Walla inquired about the responsibilities of NCBVI commissioners. It was noted that a job description for commissioners is posted on NCBVI website and it is located in the Board packet. Dave Robinson reported that NCBVI encourages employees to follow chain of command before going to commissioners with personnel issues. It was noted that if a complaint rises to the level of executive director, the board will be notified.

The commissioners thanked Bill Brown and Dave Robinson for their report.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

Report from Chairperson:

Nancy Oltman thanked NCBVI staff for sending reports to the commissioners and she noted that the copies of the anniversary letters they receive are very enlightening as they point out accomplishments of staff. Nancy Oltman also thanked Fatos Floyd for sending them a copy of the client evaluations as they are very interesting. It was also noted that when clients complete Center training they write an article about their experiences.

Fatos Floyd had relayed to the commissioners changes that were made in the Center such as client dress code. Clients are to dress as if they are going to work. The new dress code will provide clients with confidence. Personal leave was also instituted for the clients. If clients go over their allotted leave, Fatos Floyd will stay after hours with them in order that they may make up time.

Nancy Oltman stated that she was impressed with Robert Newman's article about the trip to Turkey to work with blind students and she also enjoyed Fatos Floyd's comments at

the November meeting. It was suggested that Robert's article be added to the website. Nancy Oltman stated that she will also send the article out to everyone again.

It was reported that the new Commissioner packet was received by board members. It was noted that a lot of the information contained in the packet was taken from the website.

Nancy Oltman reported that the Blind Services Virtual Networking Group, for State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and Commission Board Chairs, held a conference call on Monday evening, February 4, 2008. All commissioners are welcome to participate in conference calls. During the conference call they talked about upcoming SRC Forum in St. Louis on June 25-27, 2008. During the call they also discussed the issue of Virginia's legislature trying to consolidate again. Nancy Oltman reported that in April there will be a meeting of the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). Getting involved with CSAVR was discussed. It was noted that general or combined voc rehab agencies may try to get rid of stand alone Commissions for the Blind; therefore, it might be good to know what is going on with them. The NCSAB will hold a Spring Training Conference in Bethesda, MD on April 23-25, 2008. It was noted that NCBVI staff members Pearl Van Zandt, Bob Deaton, Carlos Serván and Deanna Jesse will attend this training. The commissioners discussed whether or not a commission board member should attend. It was noted that it is a good opportunity to discuss what is going on throughout the nation. Pearl Van Zandt stated that the virtual networking group would like more involvement of the consumers to attend this meeting. While the Virtual Networking Group did not schedule a meeting prior to adjournment, the decision was made at a previous meeting that the group would meet the first Monday evening, every two months. Based on this, the next meeting is April 7, 2008.

The commissioners discussed attending conference calls of the virtual group and attending the training in Bethesda, MD and specifically who should attend what? Julie Johnson pointed out that the Board has a financial responsibility to prioritize what conferences and trainings they attend.

The commissioners discussed attendance at the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) conference in St. Louis on June 25-27, 2008. This training is specifically for members of Rehab Councils and Commission Boards. It was decided to make a decision on the attendance of these conferences after the lunch break.

The commissioners discussed the participation in the senator breakfast that is being planned by the NEOC (Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission) on March 27 at 8:00 a.m. This would be an opportunity for a representative from the agency to give a brief presentation on NCBVI and bring materials to share with the senators. The cost of the breakfast would be split between the participating agencies. It was the consensus of the commissioners to participate in the breakfast for the senators.

It was noted that a gentleman has requested NCBVI to place his information "Bargains for the Blind" on their website. It was the consensus of the commissioners to not honor this request.

Public Comment :

Amy Mason - she asked for specifics regarding the dress code that was implemented by the Center.

It was reported that the dress code is "business casual" meaning that clients should dress as you would for work in many jobs. Center staff got the idea from a conference they had attended on residential training centers across the country. Because the dress code was newly implemented, money was provided to clients and they were taken on a shopping trip to purchase clothing. It was noted that new clients to the Center can plan ahead and begin purchasing proper clothing before they begin their Center training. If clients do not have the funds to buy clothing NCBVI will assist them. It was noted that part of the Rehab Act allows NCBVI to provide clients with money for purchases such as work clothing or other things needed to be successful.

Sherry Manthe - asked for specifics on what is meant by "dress casual." Specific examples of "business casual" dress for men and women were given.

Executive Director Report:

Pearl Van Zandt reported that the State Auditor's Office recently completed their audit report for NCBVI. NCBVI reviewed its policies and procedures based upon the Auditor's findings concerning the Time Distribution Record form used by FLSA (Fair Labor Standards Act) exempt employees. A new Time Distribution Record form was developed and has been approved by our federal partner, the U.S. Department of Education/Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). The new form allows for daily recording of hours worked for the Agency's federal grants. The new Time Distribution Record form was officially implemented beginning January 21, 2008. All FLSA exempt employees now complete the form based on the grant worked on during each work day. NCBVI believes that this adjustment will bring the agency into compliance with the criteria noted in the report.

Field Services Report as of 1/31/08:

Total Persons Served: Voc Rehab total 419; 17 successful closures since 10/1/07 and 15 unsuccessful closures.

Independent Living total 398; 57 successful closures since 10/1/07 and 4 unsuccessful closures.

It was noted that when a case is unsuccessfully closed it often means that the client decided that they wanted to discontinue using NCBVI's services.

Staff Update:

Mitzy Buchanan and Kathy Stephens finished Center training.

Eric Sandberg and Shawn Djernes left NCBVI.

Sahar Hussein began her new position as the Braille instructor.

Fatos Floyd began her role as full time director of the Center.

Jeff Poore is new apartment resource person. He began his employment on January 28, 2008.

Cindy Holness started in December as the new Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in the Kearney office and is currently in Center Training. (This announcement is not on the recording, but was provided to the Board after the meeting.)

Center Report:

The Center has had 157 full time clients complete training from 1996 to November 2007.

92 of those clients have found competitive employment, 20 are homemakers and 34 are students.

Results: Of the clients who have completed training and schooling.

91 percent are employed (competitive employment and homemaker).

75 percent have competitive employment and 16 percent are homemakers.

21 percent are students.

7 percent are not working.

Center Activities:

Peggy King who is in charge of Boards and Commissioners at the Governor's Office took tour.

Center Staff attended the residential training in Baltimore.

Had a holiday party and a secret Santa gift exchange.

Are planning a "Giving Back to Bus Driver" event for Valentine's Day.

A training day for staff will be held on February 19, 2008 wherein one half day will be training in shop and one half day will be training in home management. These training activities will be under sleep shades for sighted staff and as a refresher for blind staff.

Paul Kincs, a graduate student in Mental Health Counseling, is meeting once a week with clients of the Center to work on assertiveness and self confidence training among other things. He is also working with Center staff on learning counseling techniques and distinguishing when a professional mental health counselor might be needed for a client. Mr. Kincs is doing this as a part of his graduate study.

Administrative Activities:

Kathy Stephens has been working in her position since the end of December and has been training in different areas that she will be performing work in. Kathy has also been working with having many items sent to surplus and has been assisting with the move of the offices among other things.

Carlos Serván has been working on some changes to Chapter 1 of the Rules to be more consistent with the Federal Regulations and to promote more placements. The agency has been working on the certification for the vocational rehabilitation counselors for the blind guidelines. They are working with field staff in the different offices on placement goals and to get individuals employed.

NCBVI has a Placement Committee which is chaired by Vicki Rasmussen. This is a committee of NCBVI.

They will be hosting a workshop for clients who are in status 20, which means ready for employment. Buna Dahal, a placement consultant, will be coming to work with this group in August.

Bob Deaton and Deanna Jesse have been meeting with different agencies across the state including Area Agencies on Aging, Community Action, Independent Living Centers, Health and Human Services and Senior Centers. Bob and Deanna have also been busy collecting statistics on many different issues that relate to blindness.

It was reported that the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) had a very busy quarter. The previous vendor at the State Capitol, Dave Samson, left to attend school in radio. Melvin Forester is the new vendor for the Capitol facility.

Braille Menus have been placed on several snack machines. The menus are just below the number pad on the snacks so that persons in wheel chairs might also have access to the Braille menus.

BEP has started to put vending into the Zorinski Building in Omaha. It will be the end of Summer before all the agencies have moved back into the newly remodeled building.

BEP started vending services at the Shizuki Plant in Ogallala. The Plant is not currently bringing in as much revenue as hoped. The Plant runs two shifts but the workers receive relatively low pay; therefore, many of them bring their meals and do not use the vending machines.

Vending machines have been placed in the new jail facility in Grand Island.

Bill Brown has been very busy working with the Lincoln office remodeling project.

Office Solutions will be coming Thursday and Friday of this week to install the work stations in the new space for the Lincoln District. The Lincoln District will be moving next Tuesday. The carpet installation and painting are almost completed. Work on The Center remodeling will begin soon and should be completed within the next 30 to 45 days.

Bill is also continuing to work on the eForce progress. While some headway is being made, the individual he is working with on the project will be on vacation for 10 or more additional days. They are scheduled to meet again on February 22, 2008.

State government will be changing email to firstname.lastname@nebraska.gov . This change will happen within the next few weeks. NCBVI has no say in this change.

NCBVI Placement Committee will be putting together a Disability Awareness training package for employers. They will also be educating some temporary staffing agencies about the Committee as well as do employer recognition.

It was reported that the vacant Program Specialist/Technology position in Omaha will be posted on February 15, 2008 after 8:00 p.m. An internal announcement will be made to staff before the position is posted to the

public. Position announcements are also sent to the Commission Board, President of the American Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind as well as posted on Newslines and Listservs.

Public Comment:

Bob Deaton asked the Chair how she would like to be addressed. Nancy Oltman stated that she has no preference.

Sherry Manthe asked if there is an estimate as to when there will be a technology staff person in Omaha.

Carlos Serván stated that it will be perhaps a month before they begin and four months before they start their job.

Sherry Manthe stated that she is having a problem with her Pac Mate and she is wondering what she should do. Pearl Van Zandt advised Sherry to go ahead and contact local office whenever there is a need as another staff person may be able to help. It was noted that NCBVI also has technical staff in the North Platte and Lincoln offices. Also, NCBVI can contract with other local resources such as Accessibility.net when the need is there.

Old Business:

Budget Update:

Pearl Van Zandt reported that expenditures have been below budget this past quarter. Staff have been successful at providing what people need at a reduced cost focusing on the employment goal.

It was reported that NCBVI has spent additional funds from Social Security Reimbursements which has allowed space to be added in the Lincoln offices and new work stations to be purchased. Additional money is also being spent on sending staff to training. It was noted that the funding is being spent on one time expenditures and these are not ongoing costs. Overall NCBVI is on target with the budget.

Darrell Walla asked if money is budgeted for commissioner training. Pearl Van Zandt reported that commissioner expenses are paid for. While there is not a set budget for the commission to do training, the operations of the commission board is a part of the whole plan. Part of having a board means providing the tools to do the job.

Website Update:

There was discussion regarding the commissioner's preference for receiving NCBVI web stats. After discussion, it was the consensus of the commissioners to receive the web stats on a monthly basis.

Pearl Van Zandt noted that keeping the postings on NCBVI website is an ongoing challenge.

Pearl Van Zandt reported that Nebraska.gov has invited NCBVI to showcase its on-line services provided to the State of Nebraska at this year's Partner Event to be held in the State Capitol Rotunda on March 26, 2008 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. A total of ten state agencies were invited to participate.

Wes Majerus inquired as to if the digital recordings of the Commission meetings can be placed on the agency web-site. Hubert stated that he will burn the recordings of the meetings to a CD in order that they can be placed on NCBVI webpage.

Friends of the Commission:

Pearl Van Zandt reported that the only item to discuss is NCBVI logo and it is on the agenda for a later discussion.

NIS:

Pearl Van Zandt reported that the main change with NIS is that they are no longer printing pay stubs for state employees. The pay stubs can be accessed electronically and printed. Wes Majerus has developed steps to go through when accessing the pay stubs with JAWS.

NFB Newsline Update:

Nancy Oltman stated that she forgot to request a NFB-Newsline report from Jamie Forbis. She will send an email requesting the report. It was also requested that Jamie Forbis send the commissioners information of how many hours per month the NFB Newsline is being used by subscribers to the service.

Client Assistance Program (CAP):

Pearl Van Zandt reported that since October 1, 2007 there has only been one CAP case. In this case, the individual had questions about their case closure and discussed reapplying for additional services. The case was resolved to the client's satisfaction.

Pearl Van Zandt also reported that the Ombudsman Office received one complaint this past quarter from an individual. In the follow-up to the case, it was discovered that the

individual basically wanted a better job. NCBVI is currently working with this individual to find other employment.

Public Comment:

Sherry Manthe stated that she knows a lot of older individuals in Omaha who prefer to use Radio Talking Book over Newsline.

Pearl Van Zandt stated that when NCBVI staff go out to talk to individuals, they are informed of many resources that are in their area. It was noted that NFB-Newsline Update is an agenda item because it is a required service by law. Nancy Flearl added that the agency also maintains supplies of Radio Talking Book receivers, etc. and sets up the equipment for individuals as requested.

Bob Deaton added that money for the older blind project has not seen an increase since 2000. With all increases in other things, this has limited what the agency can fund. It is not that the agency feels it is unimportant, but a lack of resources.

A lunch break taken at 12:32 p.m.

The meeting resumed at 1:12 p.m.

New Logo:

Pearl Van Zandt reported that Friends of the Commission sponsored a logo contest for NCBVI logo. Several designs were submitted and one was selected. The winner of the contest will receive \$100 from the Friends of the Commission. A print copy of the logo was available and Pearl Van Zandt gave a verbal description of it. The agency will look into getting a copy of the logo in raised print as well. Pearl noted that there was one individual who designed four logos which NCBVI may use on posters. It was the consensus of the commissioners to approve the new logo.

State Plan for Federal Fiscal Year:

Pearl Van Zandt reported that she will be working on the State Plan for FY 2009 over the next few months. The basic information for the Plan is due July 1, 2008. The components to be submitted are similar to that of prior years. It was noted that the State Plan covers a wide range of things. The 2008 State Plan is currently located on NCBVI website and in the Commissioner Board packets.

The commissioners were asked to review the State Plan for ease of reading and for content. It was noted that the Commission Board will need to approve the 2009 State Plan before it is submitted. Pearl Van Zandt stated that she will have a draft of the Plan ready for the May 10 Commission meeting.

State Staff Meeting:

Pearl Van Zandt announced that NCBVI State Staff Meeting is scheduled to be held April 1-3, 2008. Bids from four hotels have been received (Grand Island, South Sioux City, Columbus, and Nebraska City). One of the topics will be "Meet the Commissioners." Additional information will be provided to the commissioners once it is available.

Election of Executive Secretary:

The main duties of a Commissioner Executive Secretary are to take notes if they go into executive session, to report back to the public what was discussed in executive session and to keep track of policy changes in order that they get incorporated into the Commissioners packet.

Darrell Walla nominated Jim Jirak as Executive Secretary. Jirak respectfully declined. Darrell Walla then nominated Wes Majerus. The motion was seconded by Jim Jirak. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Dates, Locations and Focus Topics for Upcoming Meetings:

The following dates, locations and focus topics were selected for 2008.

May 10, 2008, Lincoln, Topic: The Center

August 9, Kearney, Topic: Senior Blind Specialist position

November 22, Lincoln, Topic: Working with Employers/Focus on Employment

It was decided that in order to cancel a Commission Board meeting it must be done 30 days in advance with a written notice to the board and the executive director. An exception would be a blizzard or other weather conditions. A majority of the board must concur in order to have the meeting cancelled.

Public Comment:

Sherry Manthe suggested that NCBVI hold its Board meetings in Lincoln and Omaha during the months of November and February and hold them outstate in May and August. It was the consensus that this is a great plan and the Commission will strongly consider this when scheduling the 2009 meetings.

Bob Deaton stated he wanted to mention PILBO - Promoting Independent Living for the Blind in Omaha. Bob Deaton acknowledged Nancy Flearl for spotting the opportunity to apply for that grant. NCBVI was granted \$30,000 last year. The agency reapplied and again received funding. This is great opportunity for us to partner with other resources.

Mark Bulger thanked the Board for their service. He stated that it was great to see the kids serving lunch. Mr. Bulger reminded everyone that the Commission is here to serve our clients.

Final Announcements:

The commissioners inquired as to when staff surveys will be sent out. Agency staff will check to see when they went out last year. Commissioner Julie Johnson volunteered to compile the answers.

Adjourn:

The February 9, 2008 Commission Board meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens

Administrative Assistant

NCBVI

Nancy Oltman

Chairman

NCBVI Board of Commissioners