

Nebraska Commission for the Blind
Public Meeting, Saturday, August 3, 2019
NCBVI Office, 4600 Valley Road, Room 4A, Lincoln, NE
and
Hemingford Public Schools, Special Education Room
Hemingford, NE
(Video Conference)

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 9:05 a.m. The meeting began with introductions.

Commissioners present: Mark Bulger, Chairperson, Designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Omaha; Robert Newman, Vice Chairperson, Omaha; Mike Hansen, Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska; Becky Rieken, Executive Secretary, Dakota City; Chad Bell, Alliance (attended via video conference).

Commission staff present: Carlos Serván, Executive Director; Carol Jenkins, Deputy Director; Connie Daly, Lincoln District Supervisor; Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant.

Public Present: Brad Loos, Lincoln; Barbara Loos, Lincoln; Jim Jirak, Omaha; Christine Boone, Pickrell; Joe Buda, Lincoln; Mandy Plog, Hemingford.

It was noted that public comments are welcome during the scheduled Public Comment periods regarding the agenda items or other relevant issues. Kathy Stephens recorded the meeting and the recordings are available on the website.

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meeting Act was available. The 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.

Chairperson Bulger turned the meeting over to Nancy Flearl to do a short presentation. Nancy Flearl reported that several years ago NCBVI began recognizing staff with keys for initiative, efficiency, belief and dignity. This recognition was developed for staff members, not including management staff. Therefore, Executive Director Serván was presented with a large key representing all four areas of performance based on his efforts to get more money to provide services to the blind.

Initiative – Director Serván took the initiative over a year ago to start talking to senators about NCBVI's budget situation and asked how the agency could get an increase.

Efficiency – Director Serván developed a plan to request more money from the state that had the best chance for success.

Belief – Director Serván believes in the consumers. He believed that NCBVI would get the funding needed because of the great work it does.

Dignity – Director Serván fights for blind people to get the training and support they need to live their lives with dignity.

Director Serván noted that he is humbled to be recognized and he thanked all his staff members for all the hard work they do because he could not do what he does without the support of the staff and commissioners.

Approval of the May 11, 2019 public meeting minutes

Commissioner Hansen moved to approve the Minutes of the May 11, 2019 Commission Meeting. Vice Chairperson Newman seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and it was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Focus Topic: Friends of the Commission

Vice Chairperson Newman noted that this presentation is a joint effort by members of the Friends of the Commission (The Friends). Vice Newman stated that The Friends is an organization that can do some great things. Vice Chairperson Newman began by giving a brief history of The Friends. Barbara Loos, Chris Boone and Joe Buda who are Board members of The Friends also presented.

The founding of the Friends of the Commission was a joint initiative by the former NCBVI Executive Director Dr. James S. Nyman, and the then director, Dr. Pearl Van Zandt. Many government agencies form a not-for-profit to be of support. Serving as such tasks ranging from an outside cheering section, to being a recipient of donations which would be un-touchable by the agency's governing body, and to generally provide supplemental and complimentary services. The Friends was established on May 4, 2001. At this time there were three officers: President, Michael Floyd; Secretary/Vice President, Dr. James Nyman and Treasurer, Dan Hurlburt.

There are currently nine Board members of The Friends. There are ten slots for Board members so they are looking for another person. If you are, or know of someone who may be interested, please contact Robert Newman. The email is - robertleslieneuman@gmail.com

The current members are:

The Board consists of ten positions:

Robert Leslie Newman, President - Omaha

Linda Menthing, Vice President - Columbus

Chris Boone, Secretary - Pickrell

Dan Hurlburt, Treasurer – Lincoln

Joe Buda, Board Member - Lincoln

Floyd Colon, Board Member - Lincoln

Barbara Loos, Board Member - Lincoln

John Wick, Board Member - Blair

Gwynne Widhalm, Board Member - Norfolk

Friends of the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (Friends of the

Commission) is a Section 501C3 not-for-profit organization, incorporated under the laws of the State of Nebraska.

The mission statement for The Friends is:

“To generate and use resources to enable blind and visually impaired persons to gain a dependence and self-sufficiency as ordinary participating members of society. This mission will be pursued by direct and indirect provision of relevant services and technical means to those individuals who wish to pursue a goal of independence. This assistance will supplement and compliment the efforts of the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired to carry out its mission of empowering the blind and visually impaired to reach their goals.”

In the beginning, The Friends, in terms of grants and general assistance to NCBVI, reflected “the times” of what was happening within NCBVI and the blind community. For example, The Friends did established a special initiative to be a resource for clients attending the Nebraska Center for the Blind. And so, some of the requests which were granted at this time, had a focus on needy Center students. This included such things as medication, food, and other small items. Also, for a non-Center client, we did loan money to a Randolph- Sheppard vender to attend a specialized training program, which could not be covered by NCBVI; the loan was paid back. In addition, for a staff person who was to attend a health fair, we loaned her a small amount of cash to be used to make change for the sale of small blindness products. There are times when NCBVI can do things for a client during different times of their program and there are times when NCBVI cannot do some things. During these times they could come to The Friends.

Joe Buda noted when The Friends was first started they did not have very much money. As a result, they invested a little money here and there. The Treasurer, Dan Hulbert did an outstanding job with this. Throughout the years The Friends has built up a pretty good bank account so they can help a lot of people who are referred to them by NCBVI. Joe Buda stated that it is very satisfying to see their bank account grow because the more it grows, the more they can help NCBVI pay for items that they are not allowed to pay for. Joe Buda stated that it has been a privilege for him to be on the Board of The Friends.

Barbara Loos talked about some of the initiatives of The Friends over the past five years. Barbara noted that she served as a NCBVI commissioner from 2000 through 2007 and she was the Chairperson of the Board. During this time they were glad to have The Friends available to pay for the kinds of things that NCBVI could not pay for. When she was approached to serve on the Board for The Friends she noted that she is not a good fundraiser, but she is good at spending funds. Barbara stated that she is happy to serve on Boards as long as they are doing something productive.

One of the things that The Friends decided they wanted to do was to help in the area of working with children. In 2015 they started having some grants that they could make available. The first grant was the Blindness Education Enrichment (BEE) grant. The first year they had two applicants and they presented a grant to Camp Abilities for \$1,000 and they presented \$300 to the NFB Nebraska Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning. Both of these entities worked with children. In 2016 they had three applicants, but they awarded the grant of \$1,000 to the NFB Nebraska Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning. After this, they started hearing from a lot of seniors so they decided that one of the things they needed to do was to provide seniors with the assistance they needed. In 2017, they implemented the Access to Non-visual Technology for

Seniors (ANTS) grant. So far there have been two individuals who have worked with the iPhone. The instructors are skilled blind users that they contact with. They currently pay \$30 per hour.

Since 2016, The Friends have been providing t-shirts for the children and staff who attend Project Independence (PI). NCBVI cannot use state funds for this. When the children are out in public it is good to have them identified as a group. The Friends get good feedback from the children who attend PI. Barbara Loos noted that The Friends is always open to ideas on how they can help.

Chris Boone – stated that it has been an honor to be a Friend over the years. She stated that she became President of The Friends after Michael Floyd and she served until Robert Newman. One of the things that happened early on is that The Friends established an emergency grant to assist clients attending the NCBVI Training Center or people who were clients of NCBVI anywhere else in Nebraska. If these clients needed something, the executive director would bring this need to The Friends and the Friends could provide this. Chris noted that Treasurer Dan Hurlburt has invested their money very wisely. The Friends is a non-profit organization so they do not have to pay taxes. Once upon a time, in 2010, the IRS suddenly decided that Friends of the Commission was not a non-profit organization. They had no idea why, but Dan Hurlburt always faithfully filed their 990 forms and filed their taxes. Dan Hurlburt wrote a couple letters to the IRS and they did not change their mind. Chris Boone, being a lawyer, then wrote a letter to the IRS. A gentlemen from the IRS then called her and they had a conversation and their non-profit status was restored.

In more recent years, Friends of the Commission began to reach out and interact with other organizations to try to get more accomplished. One of the exciting things that they did this year was to work NCBVI and Nebraska VR to help with the Project Search job fair. Project Search is an operation that was started in Ohio and the project is designed to help people with disabilities to get paid internships. A lot of employers participated in Project Search. Project Search gives young people who are finishing high school an opportunity to see what types of jobs are out there. If a person is successful in completing their internship they will be offered a job by the organization for whom they are working. Project Search has a large job fair every year and it was at the Lancaster Event Center in Lincoln this year. Approximately 200 young people attended the Project Search job fair. These students were high school juniors and seniors with various disabilities. The students who attended received training in self-advocacy and they received some hands on experience with all the employers who were there. The job fair also includes mock interviews and there is a luncheon at the end. Because The Friends is non-profit, they are able to accept donations from many organizations and they can use those donations to fund the Project Search job fair which is very expensive. NCBVI and Nebraska VR can cover some of the expenses, but they cannot cover expenses such as food. The Friends is already working on next year's Project Search job fair which will be held in Omaha.

The Friends are embarking on a large fund raising campaign. Director Serván provided The Friends the name of a gentleman in Blair, John Wick, who is now a member of The Friends. John has experience with fund raising and he will be assisting with the fund raising. The Friends is building their fund-raising portfolio with the assistance of the staff of NCBVI. The portfolio consists of success stories from the Training Center, Project Independence and from the WAGES program which are examples of NCBVI's work and success. The Friends will use these success stories and the library of photographs and videos from NCBVI that show our clients doing really exciting things. Once the portfolio is assembled, The Friends will be approaching organizations of all kinds and requesting funding for NCBVI. The three areas for which they will be requesting funding are: Project Independence, WAGES and the Training Center activities. The Friends will also be raising

funds for technology. The Friends is hoping that this campaign will allow them to raise tens of thousands of dollars for the 2021 budget. This is The Friends most recent goal and challenge and they are very excited about it.

Vice Chairperson Newman asked if anyone had questions.

Commissioner Rieken asked if the employers have an entry fee for the cost of their booth at the Project Search job fair. Nancy Flearl noted that there is no charge. The employers are there because they want to be; they are willing partners.

Chairperson Bulger asked Director Serván what the biggest need that he sees that NCBVI cannot financially fulfill with the funds that the agency receives. Director Serván stated that one of the frustrations that the agency has is that we are mandated by the new Pre-Ets regulations to spend 15% of our budget on areas of Pre-Ets and it is very restrictive. We cannot count things such as tuition and room and board towards this amount. Director Serván noted that he has communicated this to The Friends. Chris Boone that this is really the impetus for their current fund raising. If The Friends had the funding they would like to help fund PI, WAGES and Training Center activities. They would also like to help fund tuition for clients.

Chad Bell noted that he also was on the Board for The Friends for a short period of time. He thanked The Friends for everything they do.

Vice Chairperson Newman reported that one unique service that a non-for-profit can provide is a depository; an organization that can accept donations that cannot or might not normally be given to a tax supported agency, like NCBVI. The first time The Friends had the privilege to serve in this capacity was in 2016. NCBVI and an ad-hock community group wanted to bring in as an inspirational speaker, Mr. Michael Hinkson. He is a blind gentleman who is a dog guide user. He was one of the few workers and guests who escaped from the north tower of the Trade Center, on the day of 911. Michael and his dog made it down from the 87th floor, and on the way served as an inspirational and calming presence.

Commissioner Rieken asked what kind of fund raising the Friend of the Commission has done in the past. Vice Chairperson Newman stated that Dan Hurlburt put The Friends name in the Lincoln Gives campaign and they received about \$1,200. He has also received other donations from groups that he belongs to. Also, a few years back they received some money from an entity who helps inform corporations about non-profits so they can give to the community. They also did the Swan Foods fund raiser. Dr. Nyman routinely would donate to The Friends and even when he passed away several memorials came to The Friends. They have not done a lot of big fund raising efforts in the past.

Chairperson Bulger thanked everyone who serves on The Friends.

Public Comment

Jim Jirak – Jim noted that he was a member of The Friends for a few months.

Jim asked the commissioners to talk about what they have been doing to promote a positive image of blindness for the past quarter.

Commissioner Bell – noted that this last month an older woman from the community contacted him and said that she currently uses a flip phone but is going to have to switch to an iPhone. She was looking for someone to help her learn how to use the iPhone. She had heard that he was an

iPhone user so she asked him for assistance. Commissioner Bell noted that he went to her home and showed her how the iPhone works. While he was at her home he called Angie Hoff and they are now getting things set up so she can become a client and NCBVI can provide her with services. He is also getting ready to work with his blind student for the upcoming school year.

Commissioner Rieken – reported that she is preparing for her students for the upcoming school year. She has done a lot of research on technology over the summer. Commissioner Rieken also noted that she worked a day at Project Independence.

Chairperson Bulger – reported that he serves as the ACB State President and in this role, he and Jim Jirak had an opportunity to speak to the participants in the WAGES program. He attended the NBE Blind Licensee Committee meeting and he is excited to see how the program has grown in the last several years. Chairperson Bulger noted that he is the President of the Omaha Association of the Blind and they held their summer banquet and they had the same speaker that spoke at the Older Blind Conference in Kearney. Chairperson Bulger reported that Director Serván also came to this banquet and he shared the theme of “Good News”. Chairperson Bulger also serves on the Nebraska State-wide Independent Living Council and he recently was selected for the Advisory Committee for the Olmstead Plan. He also serves on the Omaha Vision Coalition and Stakeholders Committee for the transportation system in Omaha.

Vice Chair Newman – reported that he attended the Older Blind Conference in Kearney as a presenter in several of the classes. As a NFB member and Senior Division president, he talked about the senior division and NCBVI. He was a speaker at the Omaha Association of Activity Directors. There were people in attendance from Nursing homes as well as extended care. A lot of literature was handed out and individuals were made aware of many services that are available. Vice Chair Newman also reported that he does some personal counseling and instruction with individuals across the nation via the phone.

Commissioner Hansen – reported that he has spent some time with Carlos working with State government on the Technology Access Clause and the state’s adherence to it. He has been a participant in NCBVI’s mentoring program working with three gentlemen in Nebraska. Commissioner Hansen noted that his term on the Commission Board is nearing an end. Therefore, during the past several weeks he has been spending time talking to some potential quality candidates for the Commission Board. He is also documenting some of the tasks that he is responsible for so he may pass them along. Commissioner Hansen serves on the NFB State Board and they are in full swing of planning their 2019 State convention which will be held in October. He also worked with the students of the Nebraska Association of Blind Students in an advisory role.

Christine Boone – stated that she believes that NCBVI does incredible work and she thinks the Commission Board also does incredible work. She thinks it would be good if more people knew about the Commission Board and NCBVI. Christine noted that she does not know how many people routinely attend Commission meetings, as she has only been to a few and attendance has always been very light. Christine stated that she thinks it would be a really good thing if the Commission Board had their meetings on a weekday. She stated she knows that people have jobs and she knows that that if someone serves as a Governor’s appointee on a Commission Board, employers are very happy to let them carry out that service without the need for vacation time. If the Commission were to meet on a weekday it would be easier for more people to attend and it is easier to get transportation during the week. More importantly, she feels that NCBVI staff

could also attend the meetings more easily and they could learn more about their commissioners and what the Commission does to keep the agency moving. Christine asked the commissioners to take this into consideration.

Chairperson Bulger suggested that this topic be added as an agenda item at a future meeting so commissioners could come prepared with some thoughts on the issue. Chairperson Bulger stated that he is for anything that will encourage people to attend.

Commissioner Hansen stated that while he does not know what all the logic was for having the meetings on a Saturday, but some of the logic was with the same intent, allowing people to come who could otherwise not attend. While an employer may be happy to let a Board member off work to attend a meeting, they may not let a regular employee off work to attend. Commissioner Hansen noted that he agrees that transportation can be an issue on the weekends and a lot of Commission Boards do meet during the week. However, if an employee would elect to take vacation time to come to a meeting during the week, he would hope that they could also come on a Saturday.

Barbara Loos – noted that the day of the Commission Board meeting was experimented with back in the day. A pattern was never developed so perhaps they did not experiment long enough. She noted that more often than not it is the agenda topics that drive the attendance rather than the day of the week. Barbara agreed that it would be good for the Board to revisit this issue.

Commissioner Hansen asked Director Serván about staff's ability to attend Commission meetings if they are held during the week. If staff would attend the meeting would they be able to attend on work time or would they have to use their own time? Director Serván noted that it gets tough since we are short of staff. Staff could attend on work time if they are presenting at the meeting; however, we would be flexible during the week so they would not have to use their vacation time. Director Serván noted that sometimes when he discusses issues with the supervisors they convince him to change his mind because staff members sometimes do have compelling reason to want to attend a Commission meeting. Some consumers and staff do not attend the meetings because they can listen to the recording of the meeting at a later time.

Chairperson Bulger stated that since the Board tries to meet at different locations throughout the state, perhaps when we are meeting at an office location the staff in that location could attend if they have a compelling interest. Commissioner Bulger noted that this issue will be an agenda item at a future meeting.

Break

A break was taken at 10:25 a.m.
The meeting resumed at 10:40 a.m.

Report from the Executive Director

I. Administration

The Unicameral fully supported our budget request, including the funding for senior blind (\$541,000) and the increase of the portion of salaries and benefits that the Federal Government does not cover (around \$75,000). As a result, we will be able to accept senior blind clients at the

Center, provide field services without limit to six or eight visits, and provide group teaching and follow-up training. Where the offices are closed, we will be working with churches or senior centers.

The Unicameral also passed LB220, the amendment to strengthen the NBE program. The intent is that we won't need to spend extra time on submitting bids, or that the state has to write RFPs. However, the new management from the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) is now saying that we still need to submit bids. I had a meeting with Senator Wishart, Doug Carlson, Deputy Director for DAS, the head of Building Division and one of their attorneys. Doug Carlson assured us that NDCS will put an RFP out very soon. We have since received an email listing the dates of events.

LB123 was also passed. This bill added an exemption from the Transparency Act for certain contracts. It exempted NCBVI from requirements to publish information about contracts with individuals receiving services in a public data base under the Taxpayer Transparency Act. The requirement was in violation of confidentiality policies.

Back in June, Commissioner Hansen and I had a conference call with Rick Becker who works with CIO and is assigned to watch over the technology clause and to see the implementation of it. We also continue to communicate with the OCIO about accessibility. As you know, Administrative Services was working to move to a new financial system called FusioN, but this was terminated about a year into the making. We now need to start from the beginning.

Some of the other events/meetings I attended were the WIOA Partners meetings, ADA Task Force meetings, NCSAB spring conference, Olmstead state plan advisory committee, the ACBN State Convention, National conventions of the ACB and NFB, Omaha Association of the Blind annual banquet in Omaha, and an international conference in Mexico on issues regarding education and services for the blind where I was the keynote speaker and presented on several breakouts. I took vacation time for this event. The NCSAB Board, where I am a member, continues to work with RSA so they can be more flexible with the interpretation of the Pre-Ets regulations.

With the WIOA local boards, we negotiated new rates for the portion of our contribution and will be paying considerably less money, around 90% less.

On July 16-17 the director of the South Dakota agency for the blind came with the supervisor for VR services, supervisor for IL services and the Training Center supervisor to learn from us on how we run business.

The amendment for our Rules were approved and we will wait to see if further changes need to happen on LB220 for the amendment of Chapter 3.

As a result of some extra training from RSA and the Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure, we asked several of our staff members to fill out a conflict of interest form to protect them from any misunderstanding when providing services. RSA wants this in our internal control policy and the Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure expects all agencies to do this. Some consumers and staff approached me after this process because they heard a different version of why we are doing this now and questioned why we did not do it before. Where there is some conflict of interest, the supervisors will take that extra responsibility to avoid any conflict of interest so we can protect our staff and the agency.

We did a great deal of sending items to State Surplus as a result of the Lincoln office move. We were able to work with State Surplus to sell many of our unneeded items from the other offices to other state agencies and political subdivisions.

Staff from Scottsbluff, North Platte, Kearney, and Norfolk are now telecommuting. Omaha office will reduce space and they should be done by the middle of August. Staff have worked very hard to get to this point and have maintained great communication so that we can work towards making this a positive work environment. It is a work in progress during the adjustment period, but things are moving in the right direction.

II. Human Resources

Cindy Zimmer is still on medical leave. Steph Baldwin is teaching the Home Management class until she moves to Colorado by the end of October. We followed the proper state re-employment work plan procedures and Larry Roos was able to get back to the Lincoln District as a vocational rehabilitation counselor. Sahar Husseini resigned and after interviewing several candidates, Charli Saltzman was hired and will start her new position on August 5. We are reclassifying the Rehab Tech position to one that will reflect the support they provide to our staff and then we will advertise the position.

Adrienne Moody left her Rehab Tech position in Kearney as she was hired as an Orientation Counselor. Her Center training will be completed by the end of August and she will start working in Omaha the week after that. We reclassified the Rehab Tech position Adrienne vacated to an Accountant I to help the Business Office as Adrienne was doing that before.

As I reported last May, we made some changes on staff duties, all within the 40 hours, and staff are gradually getting familiar with them.

Kat Carroll and Greg DeWall attended the first three sessions of the NRLI Leadership seminar. NRLI gave Kat and Greg scholarships for the second, third and fourth sessions as a result of our partnership with them for the past several years.

In the past, we could not serve blind seniors at the Center because of the lack of funds in this area. With the new Senior Blind funds, our cost allocation percentage will allow us to charge approximately 18% of overhead expenses to OIB/Senior Blind, freeing up VR funds that had covered those expenses in the past. This frees up some basic support funds to serve those on the wait list. Up to the end of June we had 19 clients on the wait list and by the end of July we had 3 more. All of these clients are receiving services now. We will still be in order of selection (OOS) until we manage our new budget for several months. We will then see if we can get out of OOS.

III. Field Services:

The Lincoln District continues to work with HR managers to educate them about the capability of the blind. As a result, the District will work with the Chamber of Commerce to put together a video.

Group teaching for OIB and Pre-Ets began in Omaha and Lincoln so we can use the funds assigned to this population. Blind and Socially Savvy provided training to transition clients and several staff help at this program.

We helped with work-based learning opportunities for several Pre-Ets students during the summer and our staff helped to assist clients find the jobs as well as the job trainers. Transition clients also attended STEM Camp in Baltimore and Camp Abilities. We had WAGES, PI and the NFB Mentoring program.

We had a statewide OIB conference and we are following up with individuals that attended and want additional services.

Our staff continues to meet with businesses and attend networking events and business focused meetings with several stakeholders.

Several staff worked at the Sizzling Summer Camp that we partnered with NCECBVI on this summer.

IV. Training Center

The Center has eight students; one is a senior blind client. I had a conversation with a consumer about the decision of combining the communication class and Braille as it could be perceived by others that we are not providing quality Braille to students at the Center. Students are getting Braille every day.

V. Nebraska Business Enterprise

- Deterrence Diner

After working very hard with USSTRATCOM, the blind vendor, the teaming partners, and several of our staff members, we had a successful food sample at our first large military cafeteria, Deterrence Diner on July 2. The Diner opened for limited menu services on July 8. Carol Jenkins, Nancy Flearl, Larry Oleson, and Kathy Stephens worked for over a week helping at the cafeteria. The USSTRATCOM building will gradually have more staff moving in and by November 1 they should have 3400 employees in that building. We plan to be providing full cafeteria service at this time. We have received a lot of positive feedback from employees at USSTRATCOM. It has been very rewarding. A 3 Star General made a comment during his speech as follows, "The quality and flavor of this cafeteria is setting the new standard at Offutt".

Vending machines are slowly being installed as employees move into the new USSTRATCOM building. All vending machines will be installed by November 1, 2019 when all USSTRATCOM employees have moved in.

We have received a fully executed permit for the Veterans Administration (VA) in Lincoln, which is a part of the VA permit in Omaha. These two fully signed permits fulfill the arbitration requirements we filed against the VA.

Carol Jenkins, Dave Robinson, and Erin Brandyberry toured the cafeterias at the YRTC's in Kearney and Geneva at the end of July and determined that these locations were not lucrative enough for us to take on.

Newsline@ Update

Kimberly Scherbarth, Outreach Coordinator
Good Morning!

As I'm sure you are aware, Bryan Baldwin is no longer the Outreach Coordinator for Nebraska. He has started a new position with the Colorado Center for the Blind. He will definitely be missed here in Nebraska. I hope to continue on his good work.

In May we saw no new subscribers, and people were viewing our content, on average, about every seven minutes with an average of about 75 percent local calls. Mobile sessions were at 555. We had 13 Alexa sessions, which is consistent with April's numbers. Alexa numbers will likely increase as there have been recent training sessions, one via the Zoom platform and also, sessions during the NFB National Convention during July. May also saw the addition of the Mueller Report to NFB-NEWSLINE.

June saw two new subscribers as well as an average of 451 mobile sessions. We also saw 981 web sessions during June. The calls are in the average range at 886 with content being viewed every 8.49 minutes. In Your Pocket deliveries were at 2032. Subscribers experienced some stability issues with the phone service during June. Stability/connectivity issues were resolved this month with the replacement of server equipment. The 2019 National Federation of the Blind National Convention agenda was also made available on NFB-NEWSLINE.

In July, we had one new subscriber. Calls were at the average of 802. The web sessions were at 1038, Alexa sessions were at 8, Mobiles sessions were at 553 and In Your Pocket Deliveries were at 1490. On July 2, 2019 NFB-NEWSLINE Mobile 3.0 Beta + KNFB Reader Basic, for iPad and iPhone was made available to subscribers. Downloading this app will overwrite the users existing NEWSLINE app. This allows users to utilize the basic core functions of the KNFB Reader together with NEWSLINE Mobile.

Thank you all and have a great meeting!

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 time.

Jerry Bryan attended the NCBVI Supervisor Meetings.

Director Serván noted that there is an issue that is still pending. This involves a client who for over a year, and almost two years, did not have any contact with NCBVI so we decided to close her case since she was living in a different state. Now she is demanding to keep her case open because she wants us to pay for extra credits that go beyond the school's requirements for her chosen bachelor's degree. NCBVI has already paid for her bachelor's degree. The counselor is gathering some documentation to send to CAP.

New Business

Public Comment

Barbara Loos – asked what CIO stands for. Commissioner Hansen noted that CIO stands for Chief Information Office.

Officer Elections

Commissioner Hansen asked Chairperson Bulger if it is his intent to seek a second term from the Governor. Chairperson Bulger stated that he is planning to seek a second term as the ACB Designee.

Chairperson Bulger turned the Chair over to Vice Chairperson Newman.

Commissioner Bell moved to elect Commissioner Bulger as Chairperson. There were no additional nominations. Commissioner Bulger accepted the nomination. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners present voted in favor of the motion.

Chairperson Bulger resumed the Chair.

Chairperson Bulger stated that it has been an honor and a privilege to be a part of the Commission. The more he is involved, the more he appreciates what the Commission does and the importance of the Board. NCBVI is truly a consumer driver state agency and he sole appreciates Director Serván's openness, transparency and ability to listen and speak. He noted that he also appreciates the Board and everything they do.

Commissioner Bell moved to elect Vice Chairperson Newman as Vice Chairperson. There were no additional nominations. Vice Chairperson Newman accepted the nomination. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners present voted in favor of the motion.

Vice Chairperson Newman thanked everyone and he noted that he appreciates being a part of the Board and NCBVI. Chairperson Bulger noted that one of the primary roles of the Vice Chair is to put the agenda together and he does an exceptional job of doing this.

Commissioner Bell moved to elect Commissioner Rieken as Executive Secretary. There were no additional nominations. Commissioner Rieken accepted the nomination. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners present voted in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Rieken stated that she appreciates the Board members and NCBVI staff. Chairperson Bulger noted that while Kathy does a good job in preparing the detailed minutes each quarter, Commissioners Rieken and Newman proofread the draft minutes very well to make sure that NCBVI produces a quality product.

Final Announcements

The next NCBVI Commission Board meeting will be Saturday, November 2, 2019 in Omaha, Nebraska. The Focus Topic will be Radio Talking Book. It is requested that the commissioners come prepared to talk about the dates and locations for 2020 Commission Board meetings.

Chairperson Bulger thanked Commissioner Hansen for the good job he does in keeping the Commission Board information up to date and for putting together a good resource library to help them navigate the law and take care of Commission business.

Chairperson Bulger thanked Vice Chairperson Newman for spearheading the Focus Topic and he thanked Chris Boone, Barbara Loos and Joe Buda for presenting the Focus Topic.

Commissioner Bell noted that he is not going to seek a second term as NCBVI Commissioner and his current term expires on December 31, 2019. His last meeting will be in November 2019.

Director Serván mentioned earlier that he wanted to thank all the staff members and commissioners for their support in getting the extra funding, but he also wants to thank all the consumers who testified and wrote letters on behalf of NCBVI.

Chairperson Bulger also thanked Nancy Flearl for running the video conference and running the microphone around. He also thanked Connie Daly for all her contributions to the meeting and he thanked Kathy Stephens for the reports that she prepares.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:38 a.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the November 2, 2019 Commission Board meeting, please email it to the NCBVI Commission Board at ncbvi.commission-board@nebraska.gov.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant
NCBVI

Mark Bulger, Chairperson
NCBVI Board of Commissioners

Lincoln District Activity Report – Connie Daly

We have hired Larry Roos back. Yay! He is taking the position vacated by Steph Baldwin. Steph is working in home management as a staff person who is out on medical leave. She will be leaving the agency on October 25, 2019. Charli Saltzman has been spending most of her time in the Center teaching Braille and Technology. The Norfolk office closed and John Schmitt is working from his home.

We provided training to HR professionals at the Chamber of Commerce. The focus of our session was hiring disabled individuals. They asked for a resource they could share with their hiring managers. They said that it is tough to convince them to think outside the box when it comes to staffing. I told them about On the Job experiences or On the Job training. They said that the hiring managers don't want to do those. They asked for a video that they could share with managers. They would require them to watch them if they are going to be on the hiring team. We are working with EmployLNK on getting something up and going on their website.

We have some summer work based learning experiences that will end the middle of August. These experiences have been going well. We have clients working at the Butler County Health Care Center, Canine Design, The Ambassador, Pizza Hut, Taco Johns, Level Seven Computer Repair, Lancaster County Humane Society, and Anytime Fitness. We had several clients that attended WAGES.

We have had some group teaching with OIB and Pre-Ets clients. Lincoln staff worked WAGES and Blind and Socially Savvy. They will also work Project Independence starting next week.

We are assisting someone to set up her business as a Braille Transcriptionist, We are assisting another client with expanding their vending sites. A client worked the WAGES program over the summer. We had clients get jobs as a Child and Family Protection worker, Technology Manager, Orientation and Mobility trainer and Social and Community Service Manager.

Omaha District Activity Report – Nancy Flearl

We have been busy with assisting the Cafeteria and Vending at Offutt. We have been working with the Blind Licensee for vending on getting machines set up, troubleshooting supplier's and gaining access to the Air Force Base.

We had staff working Blind and Socially Savvy both sessions in May and June. They also worked the first week of WAGES and will be working Project Independence.

Aside from the students we had attending WAGES we had eight students working in the community. A majority of these are being paid by the employer and some students will continue working during the school year.

We had two students attend STEM Camp in Baltimore in July. Two others will attend Camp Abilities at the end of July. A few counselors from the Omaha District will attend donor day and visit Camp Abilities to see firsthand all the sports and exercise options that students are exposed to at this camp.

We are working on providing follow up from the OIB conference to individuals that attended and wanting additional services as a result of what they gained from this conference. We have one older person starting the center and three others that are preparing that have toured or will be touring. But all three have expressed an interest in attending the training.

We have several others VR clients that have had 3-day stays and tours of the Nebraska Center for the Blind.

Staff have been pitching in and helping with referrals and are anxiously awaiting Adrienne Moody to start in August.

I continue to meet with businesses and attend networking events and business focused meetings at Heartland Workforce Solutions.

We have been working with Heartland Workforce Solutions and DOL to learn more about their apprenticeship programs and to keep disability at the forefront. Businesses that discuss the struggle to hire qualified applicants do not consider individuals with disabilities. It has to be a collective effort for us to change these perceptions in our community.

North Platte District Activity Report – Erin Brandyberry

At the end of June, we closed the North Platte and Scottsbluff offices, so everyone in the North Platte district is now telecommuting. Staff have worked very hard to get to this point, and have maintained great communication so that we can work towards making this a positive work environment. It is a work in progress during the adjustment period, but things are moving in the right direction.

Networking:

Cristal has been an active member/co-organizer for Tri-Cities Service Provider meetings in Kearney, Grand Island, and Hastings. Cristal did a presentation about NCBVI's services to Hastings Partner group in which 15 people were present. Cristal made business connections at Hornady, Xpansion/tour, Verizon, and the Veteran's home. Cristal is partnering with the NE VR offices in Kearney and Grand Island to do business outreach and attends Employ meetings at Kearney and Grand Island.

Deanna has continued to attend community connections meetings, aging coalition meetings, senior services advisory board, and elder issues meetings. Deanna had a booth at the Day of Caring in Hastings and presented an in-service on fall prevention in Hastings. Fritz attended monthly Lincoln County Interagency meetings.

Angie presented an in-service on fall prevention in June, is an active member in the WIOA partner meetings and the Integrated Employment Services team. Erin provided the West Central Area Agency on Aging and attends monthly Employ North Platte meetings.

Projects:

Angie has been working with the Scottsbluff area's new bus service on how to make the online scheduling accessible for our clients, and she is working with the Mayor of Valentine on accessible street crossings at their request.

Fritz and Cristal worked the first two days of WAGES. Cristal and Jan worked at the Sizzling Summer Camp that we partnered with NCECBVI on. Fritz played a major role in helping a client relocate for the NBE opportunity at Offutt. Erin and Deanna met with South Dakota Services for the Blind to discuss OIB practices. Erin joined Carol and Dave on tours of the YRTC cafeterias in Kearney and Geneva to evaluate if it would be a good opportunity for an NBE vendor.

Training:

Deanna and Cristal met with NanoPac to view new technology and receive training. Jan attended the NFB National convention which included sessions from Freedom Scientific, HIMS, Humanware and Microsoft, and the computer science and assistive technology division meetings.

Client Outcomes:

The North Platte district had four clients participate in WAGES, three students attend the NCECVI joint summer camp, and three students attend PI camp. We had two additional students doing WBLEs in their local communities this summer. We had one student graduate from nursing school and gain employment at Good Samaritan Hospital, one client gain employment at a daycare, one client gain employment at a seed store in a temporary position that is looking to turn into permanent employment, and one client start an OJT in the dietary department at a nursing home. We had one client go on a Center tour, and have another client in center training.

Center Activity Report – Greg DeWall

Currently: Seven Students

Adrienne Moody is the current staff trainee. She will be finishing up the last week of August.

Eight 3-Day Stays

Three students had Mini Meals

There were two commencement meals

Tours: Six tours with agency consumers, one Tour with the Director of Nebraska Transition College, one Tour with four staff members from South Dakota Blind field services.

Observations: No observations this quarter.

Volunteer Activities: There were no volunteer activities.

Student Requested Activities: Unfortunately the outdoor activities which were scheduled were rained out this quarter. The students did improvise and spent a day exploring the mall. This included visiting many types of stores and the food court.

Guest Speakers: Erica Sousak, from Department of Labor, has come monthly. She has discussed interviewing techniques. In addition, Erica has assigned home-work for the students. Home-work included researching potential employers of interest for each student. Aser Tolentino discussed accessible on line gaming with the students. He introduced the students to various podcasts and gaming websites for the students to explore.

Center Staff: The Center's travel instructor, Jeff Altman, continues to attend the Star-Tran monthly meetings. Instructors are regularly working on projects to improve their classes. Center students are very fortunate to have Steph Baldwin step in as home-management instructor. Steph brings a positive energy to the Center team and she demonstrated her leadership abilities when orchestrating putting together refreshments and a lunch for Center staff and the visitors from South Dakota.

Center Supervisor: After one year, I feel I am settled in to my new position. Recently I attended the third NRLI seminar in Washington DC. This third of four seminars focused on making of policy and advocacy. I am looking forward to the final seminar in September, which will again be hosted on the San Diego State Campus. Since the budget cuts and lay-offs, I have tried to be mindful of spending and am always entertaining new ideas on where to help the Center save money while still providing quality services to blind Nebraskans. We are looking to make changes in how purchases of supplies are made in home-management. These changes will allow us to save money by purchasing items in bulk, and creating a more consistent lesson plan for students. I am eager to hire a permanent communications instructor. Once we are fully staffed, the students will benefit from having a regular instructor and more continuity.

Additional Notes: In efforts to keep the apartments full, and serve more blind Nebraskans, we are going to begin accepting Older Blind consumers into the apartments and into the Center.

The Center currently has seven students. There are no students who need one-on-one attention. This allows for students to be more evenly spread out in classes, and get the necessary attention from instructors. We are looking forward to celebrating the completion of one of our students in August, and welcoming three more before Labor Day. On August 5, we will be welcoming our first Older Blind student into the apartments and at the Center.

The total number of students attending the Center doesn't include staff trainees because they don't stay in the Center Apartments. We have 10 Center Apartments and so 10 students can attend the Center regardless of how many staff trainees we have. Nebraska consumers always have priority when attending the Center when it comes to consumers from other states.

Transition Activity Report – Shane Buresh

I cannot believe it but as I write this quarterly report, WAGES is already in the books and Project Independence is only one week away. Much of this report will focus on these two prominent programs in our agencies calendar each year, but there are a few other offerings as well.

This summer WAGES had its familiar structure, traditional schedule and usual programmatic highlights, along with several new employers, activities, a two weekend workshop from the International School of Protocol on social integration and additional seminar offerings mixed in. We had 17 participants registered, 14 students who completed the program and 9 first time attendees. While many of our employers have been engaged with the program for more than 15 years, hosting a student annually, businesses such as, the UNL Child's Center, Lincoln City Libraries and Nebraska Games and Parks, provided some new work based learning opportunities for our youth. Many consumers, consumer groups and NCBVI connected individuals also provided several of the seminar offerings, which in some cases were new to the program. In general,

WAGES was a success I believe, based on the number of participants who asked me when leaving the WAGES banquet with their parents if they could attend again next year.

Throughout this summer, youth who have additional disabilities to their blindness, or other circumstantial situations, have also been completing work in their home communities through a series of work based learning opportunities. Some of these continue to involve the partnership between NCBVI and NCECBVI discussed in previous reports. Still other youth from each of our districts are engaged in "On the Job Experiences" (OJE's) through the guidance of NCBVI staff. I look forward to reporting to you in future quarterly submissions about the success stories from these ventures as I learn about them as summer concludes.

Beginning on July 28 and wrapping up just prior to your meeting, Project Independence will be commencing again this year. We have 12 youth between ages 8 and 13 who will be attending, four of which are new. Our theme is "Independence is Epic". Even though, due to budgetary constraints, we are shortening the program by half this year we believe it will remain "EPIC". Beyond the customary learning sleep shade training; we will again be playing beeping kickball and human foosball, making our own tie dye t-shirts, running our own PI Pizzeria business, visiting with a blind adult and guide dog user, and much more.

Speaking of going forward, The NFB Career Mentoring Program continues to progress. With the renewal of the contract, a shift has occurred whereby the NFB has hired an independent Nebraska based coordinator to oversee mentor/mentee recruitment, day-to-day mentor/mentee relationship strengthening and paperwork submission and local event planning. As of this writing we have 14 mentees engaged in the program. Four of these individuals attended the 2019 NFB national convention in Las Vegas earlier this month. Monthly calls continue for both mentors and mentees. We will be holding two more face-to-face events in this program as this year progresses, so stay tuned.

I will conclude my quarterly highlights now, wish all of you a great rest of summer, and look forward to the fall when things should transition back to a slower but steady pace for all the staff and youth involved in our transition efforts.

Nebraska Business Enterprise Activity Report – Carol Jenkins

Legislation Update

Governor Ricketts signed LB 220 into law at the end of May 2019.

Vending Sites Update

Department of Corrections

The Department of Corrections has informed NCBVI that they disagree with LB 220 and will be putting out an RFP for the vending site. Carlos Servan and Carol Jenkins will be working with Senator Wishart and the Department of Corrections to resolve the issue.

Nebraska State Building Division

NCBVI is still in permit negotiations with the Nebraska State Building Division. Carol is still attempting to obtain a group insurance policy for the NBE program in order to lessen the cost of insurance for vendors. This is the portion of the permit still being negotiated with the State Building

Division. Once a permit has been fully executed, Carol will set up a training for relevant NCBVI staff, NBE staff, and licensees who will be responsible for carrying out the permit.

Offutt

The new Deterrence cafeteria in the USSTRATCOM building had a catering event on Tuesday, July 2, 2019 prior to its grand opening on Monday, July 8, 2019. NCBVI staff, Carol Jenkins, Nancy Flearl, Kathy Stephens, and Larry Oleson worked this event as well as the first week Deterrence was open. Deterrence has had glowing reviews and has been off to a wonderful start! Deterrence will be fully operational by November 1, 2019. The vending machines are slowly being installed as employees move into the new USSTRATCOM building. All vending machines will be installed by November 1, 2019 when all USSTRATCOM employees have moved in.

Omaha Traveling Route

NCBVI was unable to find a blind vendor or a subcontractor to take on an existing traveling route of primarily post offices in Omaha due to the lack of profit. Thus, NCBVI gave notice and gave up eight locations at the end of May 2019.

Other Potential Vending Site Expansions

NCBVI has received a fully executed permit for the VA in Lincoln, which is a part of the VA permit in Omaha. These two fully signed permits fulfill the arbitration requirements filed against the VA for RSA.

NCBVI will be touring the existing cafeterias at the YRTC's in Kearney and Geneva at the end of July to determine if these two locations will be a possibility for the NBE program.

Licensees Update

The NBE Blind Licensee Committee held elections this year for the five Board Member positions. The new board members are Sandy Alvarado, Chairperson, Ross Pollpeter, Vice-Chairperson, Andrea Chizek, Secretary, and Chris Nolan and Alex Curtis, Board Members.

Vending Site Complaints

The categories of complaints that have come in to NCBVI this quarter have been as follows: vendors not coming often enough to stock machines and having moldy products in machines. This is a reminder that NCBVI has all of the contracts with the various owners of facilities, and licensees are representing themselves, other licensees, other blind consumers, and NCBVI statewide.

Additional Notes

Department of Transportation (DOT) Interstate Project

DOT has agreed to remove the enclosures around the vending machines along I-80 by the end of August. NCBVI will then work with Coca-Cola to determine a timeline of when the soda machines to be replaced.

NBE Vendor and NCBVI Staff Training

Greater America informed NCBVI that they would no longer be able to provide training to agency staff nor blind vendors due to the cost involved. NCBVI looked internally at NBE licensed vendors who were able to provide this training to other blind vendors as well as agency staff. Sandy and Ross have agreed to provide this training.

Looking Ahead

Due to the budget deficit, NCBVI has no plans to expand the NBE Program at this time. However, NCBVI will continue to work on previously agreed to projects for the NBE Program.

Business Office Activity Report – Kat Carroll

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

- Looking for additional ways to save the agency money without harming client services.
- Adjusted to the Reduction in Force policy.
- Kearney office closed 3/31/19, Norfolk and Scottsbluff and North Platte offices closed 6/30/19. We are reducing the size of the space in the Omaha office.
- Major reorganization of Business Office, including hiring and training a new Accountant I (Michelle Rogers), transitioning from having Dave and Adrienne in the business office, planning how to maximize efficiency and internal controls with only Michelle and me involved. This is a major challenge and still a work in progress.
- Preparing to hire a part time or full time data entry clerk.
- Attended the third week of NRLI Training in June.
- Work on redesigning agency Business Units to simplify and eliminate unnecessary complications.
- Inactivate grants that hadn't been closed since the inception of E1 in 2003.
- Work with procurement and installation for USSTRATCOM cafeteria equipment, process multiple large equipment orders, and work with Nancy Flearl on tagging and inventory set up of new fixed assets.
- Planning for conversion of our phone system from Windstream to Allo for the new phone system.
- Continue work on redesigning financial reports to simplify data entry, ensure better accuracy, and provide the right level of detail for a variety of users.

Kathy Stephens –

I worked with Surplus Property to have items from the Lincoln office hauled to State Surplus. I also worked with Surplus Property and Erin Brandyberry to have items from the Scottsbluff office and the North Platte office sold to other State agencies and Political Subdivisions. I also worked with Surplus Property and Dave Robinson to have items from the Norfolk office sold to other State agencies. The Scottsbluff, North Platte and Norfolk offices closed on June 30, 2019. It was important to get the items sold in order to avoid the cost of having all the items hauled to State Surplus in Lincoln.

I worked at the new Deterrence Cafeteria at USSTRATCOM on July 2 to help with a catering event. I also worked at the Cafeteria July 8 through July 11 for the opening week. Staff members Carol Jenkins, Nancy Flearl and Larry Oleson also worked the events. We received a lot of positive feedback from employees at USSTRATCOM. It was very rewarding.

I worked with USSTRATCOM to get many employees and contractors vetted so they could get access to the Offutt base and the STRATCOM building.

I worked with a couple of vendors to tag and verify some of the fixed assets (vending machines) they have at the State Office Building and the White Hall Campus.

I helped with some hotel reservations, registrations and flights for staff attending the National Conventions and other events.