

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Public Meeting, Saturday, November 4, 2023
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, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:14 a.m. The meeting began with introductions.

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

Staff present: Carlos Serván, Executive Director; Erin Brandyberry, Deputy Director of Services; Kat Carroll, Deputy Director of Finance; Cristal Dimas, North Platte District Supervisor; Timothy Jefferson, Omaha District Supervisor; Pam Rademacher, Lincoln District Supervisor; Angie Hoff, OIB Program Manager and OIB Counselor; Mickie Saltzman, Omaha Technology Specialist; Hugh Phan, Technology Manager; Alex France, Orientation Counselor.

Public present: Patti Schonbu, Melvin Forster, Kathy Jackson, Holly Williams, Kristal Platt, Donna Newingham.

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meeting Act was available in both print and Braille formats. 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 listserv.

Approval of the July 21, 2023 Public Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Bulger moved to approve the Minutes of the July 21, 2023 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Livingston seconded the motion.

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

Report from the Commissioners

Brent Heyen -

Brent reported that he works as an Interim General Manager at a hotel in Lincoln. He is hoping that this position becomes permanent in the next few months. Brent noted that he demonstrates the abilities of a blind person every day in the work he performs and he sets a good example of what a blind person can do.

Brent also reported that he wrote a book a number of years ago and he can happily announce that it is now in the process of being recorded by NLS, and hopefully, by the end of December it should be available for people to check out.

Miguel Rocha -

Miguel reported that he is currently attending UNO studying Management Information Systems and he is in his senior year. He has also attended the NFB of Nebraska quarterly Board of Directors meeting and the NFB Greater-at-Large Chapter meeting.

Mark Bulger –

Mark reported that he is the immediate Past President of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska. He also serves as the treasurer for the Omaha Chapter. They are already working on their state convention for April 2024. They will have a date announced soon. He serves as President for the Omaha Association of the Blind and he attends their monthly meetings. They are in their 101st year. Mark noted that he also spends quite a bit of time serving as a trustee for an apartment building that is for disabled and elderly people. Mark reported that he also serves on the Board of Directors for the Share-A-Fare cab subsidy for the visually impaired. Additionally, Mark reported that he serves as a Board member for Independence Rising. This group helps people with disability issues and independence issues.

Chair Heyen pointed out that this is Mark Bulger's last meeting as a NCBVI commissioner. He thanked Mark for his eight years of service.

Cheryl Livingston -

Cheryl noted that she is serving her first term as a NCBVI commissioner. Cheryl reported that she is a former employee of NCBVI and retired in March 2020. She has been a member of the National Federation of the Blind since 1975 and she is currently the NFBN State Treasurer. She has served in this capacity since 1988. Cheryl noted that the State Treasurer's are being asked to learn Quick Books so that they can better help the National office in keeping records. Cheryl noted that she also serves as Treasurer for the NFB Senior Division and in January, she was elected as Secretary for the NFB Lincoln Chapter. Cheryl added that she currently cares for two foster cats.

Linda Mentink -

Linda reported that she teaches music part-time at Bible Baptist Christian School in Columbus. Since our last meeting, she has attended two National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska (NFBN) board meetings, where she is a board member; three NFBN Senior Division meetings, where she serves as Secretary; two NFBN Historians Committee meetings; three luncheons with the former NFBN Columbus Area Chapter members; two Friends of Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired meetings, where she serves as Vice President; two Nebraska Business Enterprise Blind Licensee Committee meetings; and two Alumni Association of the Wisconsin School for the Blind and Visually Impaired meetings, where she serves as President.

Linda also reported that she also serves on the Friends Board. They had two members resign. At its meeting this past Tuesday afternoon, one member joined the board and one prospective member attended. Robert Newman was re-elected President. Jan Brandt is its representative on the Nebraska DeafBlind Interagency Team and its liaison with its webmaster. Friends now has a Google Voice Mail number. Friends continues to work on its website.

Focus Topic: OIB and IL Services – Presented by Angie Hoff

Angie Hoff from the NCBVI Panhandle office began duties as the OIB Program Manager on Nov. 28, 2023, taking over these duties from Erin Brandyberry who now serves as NCBVI Deputy Director. The focus of the OIB Program manager position is to monitor, encourage and maintain the consistency and continuity of services by implementing older blind group teachings across the state, coordinating a yearly OIB conference and providing ongoing training materials and support to field staff who provide direct services to this population.

As the population of Nebraskan's age, we can expect the needs of our older blind residents to continue to increase. With the youngest of the baby boomers hitting 65 by 2029, the number of people with visual impairment or blindness in the United States is expected to double to more than 8 million by 2050. With these projected increases, the number of individuals over the age of 55 needing blindness related services could easily supersede the number of those under 55. The need to focus on the ever-changing needs of the OIB program will continue to become more evident and necessary. According to our 7OB reporting data during this past year, the number of individuals served in VR services was 477. The number of individuals served in OIB was 674, compared to the previous year of 519, which shows an increase of 155 clients served. The primary goals of our OIB services are to provide the training and tools necessary for older Nebraskans to regain or retain their independence, lessen their need for outside supports, in-home or facility care, and increase quality of life. Our success in this area was defined in other recent numbers from the 7OB report as 457 clients served remained in their private residence (house or apartment) 85 resided in a Senior independent living facility, 74 in an assisted living facility, and only 58 of 674 clients served resided in a nursing home/long-term care facility.

NCBVI currently employs 6 full time dedicated staff who primarily serve OIB/IL clients but who also provide home teaching instruction to VR clients and 7 full spectrum staff who serve both VR and OIB clients which includes 2 Accountant 1's who provide office support to OIB/IL staff and clients. Our training Center Served 9 OIB clients this past year: There were 5 OIB clients who toured, and 4 who completed a 3-day stay. Out of the 3-day stays, 2 attended and completed training, 1 decided not to attend due to feeling that the program was too fast-paced, and 1 was unable to attend due to worsening health.

One of the facets of the OIB Program Manager's position is to attend monthly meetings with other program managers from nearly every state across the nation. In learning about the services and policies of other states, it is not only apparent how the need for OIB service is shifting, but how Nebraska continues to provide highly regarded, comprehensive services meeting the needs of this ever growing population. Another important aspect of this position is to collect, organize and submit necessary data to the yearly 7OB report which refers to the annual report of OIB Grant activity required by RSA. In Nebraska, work on this report is a collaborative effort among the program manager, deputy director, administrative programs officer and the deputy director of finance. Promising data from this year's collection is that all OIB consumers receiving services from NCBVI received Assistive Technology Devices and Services and Independent Living and Adjustment Training Services. The percentage of individuals completing a plan of services who reported an increased ability to engage in their customary daily life activities in the home and community was 87%. The percentage of individuals receiving one or more independent living and adjustment training services who demonstrated improvement in functional capabilities during the reported timeframe was 93%, and the percentage of individuals receiving assistive technology devices and services who demonstrated improvement in one or more functional capabilities during the reported FFY consistent with the objectives for receiving such devices and services was also 93%.

In 2021 NCBVI participated in Intensive Technical Assistance with the OIB-TAC out of Mississippi State University. Nearly all areas of our agency's OIB program were evaluated and 7 goals were set. Some examples of things that were improved upon were satisfaction surveys, accuracy of documenting service delivery, and a method for tracking staff time per service and this was a new requirement for the federal report. NCBVI was able to meet all goals set and implement changes within one years' time. This past year, in partnership between the Nebraska Library Commission and NCBVI, we were able to provide a 20" ONYX Deskset HD CCTV (electronic video magnifier) to each public library location in Nebraska at no cost. Libraries were given the option to house this technology or not. 260 libraries across the state took advantage of this program and as of the start of 2023 these libraries have all received the equipment to provide as a tool for the low vision community in their area. CCTV equipment and a LYRIQ (document reader) were also updated in Workforce Development sites across the state. NCBVI created a reference card which explains the simple controls on the attached remote. Most people should be able to sit at the device and use it without any assistance. In many cases, it is as simple as turning on the power button and using the

+ and – buttons to zoom in and out giving thousands of Nebraskans the necessary technology they need right in their community. A segment on this monumental project was aired on the Nebraska Public Library website and can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEXI30NuYcg>

One of the primary OIB projects each year is what is now called the “Silver Summit”. NCBVI has provided OIB consumers with many different forms of peer support and interaction throughout the years. The Silver Summit is a highbred of these activities where OIB customers have opportunities to try their hand at a number of important daily living skills and to test various types of low-tech, mid-tech and high-tech assistive technologies. During this 4-day event, attendees are able to participate in small group learning stations, learn about resources and tools available in regard to blindness and low vision and experience a concentrated environment of peer support. The May 2023 event was attended by approximately 100 consumers, approximately 48 caregiver/guests, 26 Nebraska Commission for the Blind agency staff, 4 ambassador/mentors, 9 exhibitors and 9 STLC (The Sky’s the Limit) staff. Our next Silver Summit will be held May 13-16 in Kearney and is an option presented to all active OIB clients. With the appointment of a dedicated OIB Program Manager and in keeping with our on-going, conscientious efforts to best utilize our program funding, the decision has been made to bring this event completely back in house rather than contracting with an outside agency for organization and implementation of the program. Which also allows NCBVI to offer another opportunity for agency collaboration and team building. The Silver Summit and similar programs offered by NCBVI have been life changing for our older blind Nebraskan’s and supporting attendees. This year a promotional video for this program was filmed and can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6E-zuXE6zts>.

Our clients truly appreciate the fact that they are able to have this very unique type of program offered in their state. A few of the survey results and participant comments from the 2023 Silver Summit are:

Did the Silver Summit encourage and empower older people who are experiencing blindness or low vision? 100% yes response

Would you participate in a similar event in the future? 100% yes response

Would you recommend the Silver Summit to other individuals experiencing vision loss? 100% yes response

Silver Summit survey comments:

“The number of attendees was amazing, the hotel staff were helpful, and the food was great! The clients seemed to enjoy the "silver buckets" and learning what was provided. The environment was positive and energetic with motivating speakers. Kearney was centrally located, which was appreciated for those traveling from the eastern part of the state.”

“The NCBVI staff and STLC Crew all seemed to genuinely care for the customers. The overall optimism of the customers was evident throughout the conference.”

“I enjoyed all the workshops although in the cooking one I questioned the cleanings of every dipping and using the same utensils in making the energy snack. I did however appreciate the demos of utensils. I also loved the class showing us the use of the gadgets we were given! That was my favorite.”

“The interaction and peer support aspect of the experience for OIB Clients. Basic skills training, and role modeling, especially by the Center students.”

“I heard a substantial amount of positive feedback from attendees, including comments indicating that some had learned a lot while there. From a staff perspective, I appreciate the ability to network and to learn more about what the agency is doing outside of the NCBVI.”

“It was my first conference and I learned a lot and had a very good experience.”

“The summit got the participants to ask more questions, to ask for help when needed, and to start exploring new things on their own.”

“Your staff is amazing! Cannot thank You enough for having us.”

OIB Program Manager Future Goals:

Implementation of regularly scheduled small group teachings throughout each district (some areas are well into the implantation of this).

Develop a working format for increasing peer support opportunities throughout the state.

Maintain the high standards and outreach of the Silver Summit

Increase consistency and continuity of services across all districts

Provide resources, learning materials and skill specific training to staff who serve the older blind population.

IL Services:

While OIB is a federally funded independent living program, it is restricted only for those who are age 55 and older, and NCBVI does not receive any federal funding for independent living services, so NCBVI has created an exclusively state funded program for consumers who are under 55 but do not have a vocational goal. We have some adults who receive these service because they are not interested in working (such as homemakers) or if they are unable to work because of their state of health. We also serve our youngest of consumers with this program, up to the age of 14. Historically this program had fairly limited funding, but in recent years the state removed the earmark on our state funds that differentiated the IL and OIB programs, so now we are better able to consistently provide quality services for this case type.

The Omaha area has also received a grant the past several years through the Enrichment foundation that has been designed to assist with providing services to the independent living population under 55 in Douglas and Sarpy counties. For the last two years, NCBVI has received \$15,000 each year and has reapplied for this grant again. We were also very fortunate to have the Friends of the Commission assist with providing funds for our youth in IL this year as we received \$25,000 that went towards programming at our summer camp Project Independence and also for the purchase of technology for youth. NCBVI will receive an additional \$25,000 next year which will complete the funds that were raised through the grants.

NCBVI served 110 consumers in IL this year. The prior year NCBVI served 93, so there was an increase of 17 consumers served in this program.

Melvin Forster, Kathy Jackson and Holly Williams were present and they talked about the OIB services they have received from NCBVI.

Holly Williams – Holly stated that she has been a client of NCBVI for about six or seven years now. Holly noted that through her journey of losing sight she has received a tremendous amount of support from NCBVI. She reported that she has attended two of the Silver Summit conferences, which were great. She also enjoyed the goodie bags. Holly stated that her counselor, Kelly, has been a tremendous support along with the other staff at NCBVI. Holly noted that she struggles with transportation, the expense of technology items and paperwork. She had been struggling with housing, but Kelly helped her find a waiting list that she could get on for senior housing and she is now in her new apartment. Holly stated that she appreciates the help she receives from everyone and she looks forward to continuing in the good services that she has.

Kathy Jackson – Kathy stated that Alex has been her knight in shining armor. She stated that she had no idea about all the services she could receive. She noted that Alex has really made her struggles so much easier and she is happy for all the help he has provided to her. Kathy reported that one thing that Alex introduced her to is audio books and she is really enjoying these. He also introduced her to other items that talk to her, which has helped her in cooking her own meals. Kathy stated that she is tremendously thankful for all the support she has received from NCBVI.

Melvin Forster – Melvin stated that he has been blind since 1981 and NCBVI has done a lot to help him through his blindness journey. Melvin noted that he started out in Oklahoma and while they had services at the time, they were not much. They sent him to Arkansas for blindness training. He then moved back to Nebraska and got in touch with a NCBVI counselor. After a short move back to Oklahoma he then moved back to Nebraska and got in touch with NCBVI counselor Dan Hill. He then decided to attend the NCBVI Training Center where he learned a lot and had fun. Melvin stated that he has received tremendous support from NCBVI and the VA. Melvin reported that he has attended the Silver Summit conference the past two years and he has learned a lot at the conference.

Commissioner Rocha congratulated Angie on the successful OIB program and he thanked her for all her work.

Commissioner Bulger noted that he also attended the past two Silver Summit conferences as a mentor for the ACB and he thought they were outstanding. It was neat to see some people come to the conference with some fears, but go home with hope. It is all about helping people who are visually impaired and blind to remain independent. Independence starts with an attitude and having people exposed to things helps them realize that they can do things and they can live independently. Mark noted that he liked each of the client's stories.

Commissioner Bulger reported that eight years ago when he started on the NCBVI Board of Commissioners, the most frustrating thing to him as ACB President was seeing older people not being able to get the services and support they needed to be independent. This was because no funding was available for OIB. NCBVI had about \$200,000 from the federal government and that was it. It is hard to see other people who have vocational rehabilitation goals to receive help, but there was not much help available for older people. He remembers that shortly after Carlos Serván became NCBVI executive director he came to an Omaha Association of the Blind meeting, which consisted mostly of older people, and they kept asking him why they can't have the services and support they need. Mark noted that Carlos walked away from that meeting and devised a strategy to go to the state and ask them for funding for OIB. The dream was to ask for and get \$500,000 for OIB with the realization that we may only receive \$250,000. Mark noted that Carlos did such a good job in talking to the state senators and soliciting help from other people that NCBVI did get \$500,000 funding for the OIB program. This extra funding has gone a long way to help the older blind in Nebraska.

Commissioner Bulger thanked the NCBVI staff for the work they do.

Commissioner Mentink thanked the clients for sharing their stories and she thanked Angie for her great work with the OIB program.

Public Comment

Kristal Platt – Kristal asked what STLC stands for. Angie informed her that it stands for Skys the Limit Communications. This is the group that NCBVI contracted with to help provide the training during the Silver Summit conference.

Kristal also asked how the survey was distributed and how many responses were received. Angie noted that the survey was sent to about 87 individuals, which was everyone who attended. The survey was a google doc that was sent out via email.

Break

A break was taken at 10:05 a.m.
The meeting resumed at 10:20 a.m.

Report from the Executive Director

I. Administration

During the last quarter, I attended the following meetings and activities:

NCSAB monthly meetings. Some of the areas discussed were:
Going over the Fall conference agenda and other items. The NCSAB Fall conference took place in Savannah, Georgia, from November 1-3.
Setting goals for the organizations Randolph-Sheppard issues.
Training supervisors from US Post Office on Randolph-Sheppard, and equipment versus supplies new interpretation. We wrote and sent a letter to Assistant Secretary of Education concerning the Dear Colleague letter changing the interpretation of State Recipient. This new definition could create future problems on the ability to capture Federal Reallotment. The purpose of the letter was also to remind RSA that NCSAB should be engaged when RSA is working on changing policy. As a result, The NCSAB Executive Committee officers had a conference call with Assistant Secretary of Education Gallo and RSA Deputy Commissioner Dobak.

At the StarTran monthly meetings some of the issues discussed were the new building for the Multimodal Transportation Center, mobile ticketing, revenue from advertising, and removal of shelters from the bus stops due to the increase of the homeless using them.

At the end of August, I attended a Performance Management National conference held in Vermont. The main message was "Words without data is just words." Presentations of strategies to implement change and the importance of using data to support our services.

On September 13, I was the keynote speaker for the annual International Association of Industry Accidents Boards and Commissions (IAIABC). This group of professionals are experts on workers compensation and they would like to learn about employees going back to work after injuries. I addressed the importance of believing in the capabilities of people with disabilities before trying to work with them.

On September 27-29, I attended the National Conference of Blind Merchants, BLAST, held in Atlantic City, NJ. I also gave a national NCSAB report on the area of Randolph-Sheppard. The issue of priority for military dining was a highlight. The military want to use their policy guidance and are not able to site the law.

On October 5, I attended the Nebraska Boards and Commissions meeting at the Governor's mansion. The focus this month was the budget. The state has in reserve

around 800 million dollars, last year was 400 million. Auditors will look at agencies to check expenses on consultants. They will start with DHHS.

On October 12, I attended the WIOA Partners meeting. It was mainly a networking meeting where each of us gave an update on what our agencies are doing. The Department of Education received a large grant and is able to provide funds to 11 organizations for mentoring. The focus will be reading for elementary school-age students. Lincoln Literacy informed us that around 40% of job seekers in Lincoln are English learners.

On October 25, I attended the Enrichment Foundation Partner Agency Reception in Omaha. This is the entity that provides \$15,000 for IL services for the Omaha area.

Our media campaign has been a success so far. We noticed around 40% increase in new referrals compared to last year.

I was named as one of the Hispanic leaders of Nebraska Telemundo recognized for the Hispanic heritage of the year. The report aired on Telemundo Nebraska on September 26. This was due to my work serving blind individuals in Nebraska and being recognized as a national leader in the rehabilitation profession.

We will start a pilot project to provide supportive service provider (SSP) for deaf-blind Nebraskans. This will help them to be independent and feel more integrated in society. One of the main disadvantages for a deaf-blind person is to be able to socialize, which builds self-esteem and advocacy skills. NCBVI is working with Friends on this project.

We will also work with Tactile Images 3DPhotoWorks to bring accessibility to the blind in art and science. This allows blind people to touch the 3-D image and listen to the description at the same time. This was developed with the input of blind consumers across the country.

Kat Carroll completed the Federal Fiscal Year End 09/30/2023.

Kat is training Tammie on all her Deputy Director duties, as she will retire February 29, 2024. She also completed the Federal Fiscal Year End 9/30/2023.

Kat continues to improve the Internal Budget Projection for FFY 2024 that shows budgeted, year to date expenditures, projected fixed expenditures for the remainder of the year, and remaining funds to spend on client services.

The Year-End fixed assets inventory was completed by Kathy Stephens and sent to Administrative Services before the August 31, 2023 deadline. She also worked on updating some of the fixed asset listings in E1 for technology as items get moved around from one staff member to another.

Kathy also completed staff CVRCB Certificates for new staff as their applications were approved and completed. CVRCB re-certification documents for staff were also processed as their Certificates were about to expire.

NCBVI made a request to the State Transportation Services Bureau (TSB) to lease a seven-passenger van to be housed at the Lincoln office. We were informed that TSB does not have any vans available to permanently assign to agencies. Therefore, they are making an exception for NCBVI to purchase an agency owned van. This van is needed as NCBVI has recently hired a staff member who is 6'9" tall and will be traveling to provide services in clients' homes approximately four days per week, throughout the Lincoln and northern Nebraska region.

The van will also be used to transport clients for group activities; clients with multiple disabilities who need extra room for extra adaptive devices, and more.

In the area of technology, Hugh Phan continues to provide staff with day-to-day technology support. We now have up-to-date and ongoing documentation on agency staff computer inventory, software and technologies. The agency 3D printer has been setup for opportunities for education, exploration and learning. NCBVI has acquired Envision AI glasses for agency demo and opportunity to AI technology. In addition, new laptops have been ordered for staff whose devices are out of warranty as well as new iPads for staff.

II. Human Resources

I want to congratulate Angie Hoff and Eric Buckwalter for being our recipients in the Excellence in Leadership Award for 2023.

Staff Up-Date:

In the Lincoln District: Pam Rademacher finished Center training on August 17 and is now working on the field as the Lincoln district supervisor. Charles Andersen finished his training on October 26 and is working as the technology specialist for the Lincoln District.

Jeff Sheer decided to change positions to work for the NBE program, leaving a VR position vacant in the Lincoln District. Kaitlyn Hilligas was hired as a VR counselor for Kearney, but now she will be working in Lincoln. With this new hire, the Lincoln District will be fully staffed.

In the Omaha District: We are pleased to get Tim Jefferson back to our agency. He began his duties as the Omaha District Supervisor on August 10.

Tammy Thomas left NCBVI in August and Adrienne Moody decided to take a supervisory position with Health and Human Services. This leaves the Omaha district two counselors short of staff.

In the North Platte District: We hired Grace Garza who started Center training on October 16. She will be the VR counselor for the Western part of Nebraska. We still have two positions open, the VR position that Cristal Dimas vacated when she became the North Platte district supervisor, and the Technology Specialist position vacated several months ago.

In the Training Center, Nicole Gothier left on November 3, leaving the Home Management position vacant. We are contracting with Lucy, the previous New Mexico Center Director to substitute from November 13 through the middle of December. In addition, with Jeff Altman retiring in 2025, we want to make sure there is adequate time to recruit and train his replacement. Thus, we hired Sarah Vrana who started Center training on October 16. On top to her 600 hours of sleep-shade training with us, she will be taking an additional 800 hours of sleep-shade training so she can be certified as an O&M instructor. This will give us enough time for Jeff to train Sara before he retires.

In NBE: Jeff sheer will start his new duties in December and NBE will be fully staffed.

In Administration: We promoted Tammie Dunn to Deputy Director of Finance as Kat Carroll is retiring February 29, 2024. Brandy is helping to take some of Tammie's duties and Vanessa is helping Brandy, as we move into this new transition. We also have a temporary employee from the State SOS helping the front desk, as Vanessa is helping Brandy.

We continue to consult with Mark Schultz to help us facilitate our strategic and succession planning. He met with the NCBVI Succession Planning Committee the last week of August in person and twice again remotely. We are about to complete our succession planning for now.

Training Opportunities:

All Field staff and one Center staff attended a Social Security Work Incentive training held in September in Kearney. This training was provided by Michael Dalto.

Angie continues to attend monthly OIB program manager meetings via zoom, and she participated in a webinar on Charles Bonnet Syndrome.

Gracie attended an in-person training about Self Talk Suicide Prevention at the Norfolk Public Library. She also completed webinars, including Nano Pac and Eschenbach Envision Technologies, Supervising Justice Involved Women – The Pathway in and out of the system, and Stress, Trauma, and Resilience Training.

The Field supervisors, Kat, and I attended the NCSAB Fall conference in Savannah, Georgia on November 1-3.

Hugh Phan and Mickie Saltzman visited NFB Technology Center in Baltimore to learn more about other available adaptive technologies. They also attended M-Enabling summit and learned about various industries and companies working towards making their software and products more accessible.

In June, Lizzie and Eric had the opportunity to attend the NABM – Mini BLAST in Des Moines, Iowa, which was held in partnership with U-Select-It (USI). It was a very good short conference and the SLA was able to make important connections with Cantaloupe, Three Square Markets, and USI.

III. Field Services

Project Independence was held the last week of July at Calvin Crest Camp and Retreat Center. Several staff helped with the program. We are using funds from the Friends for this program.

The Lincoln district staff have held several GATE teaching programs where clients participated in several activities designed to put blindness alternative techniques into practice.

Staff set up several work-based learning experiences and On-the-Job Trainings for several consumers.

Our field counselors continue to attend IEPs and network with the public and private schools in Nebraska. Some of the schools are: Randolph High School, Madison High School, West Public Schools in Atkinson, Cedar Rapids High School, Fremont Public and Catholic High Schools, Lexington, Pleasanton, Kearney, Greeley, Millard and Omaha Public schools.

Our field staff participated in several presentations and networking events, some are:

Lincoln District:

Gracie visited the Salvation Army in Norfolk, and the Pizza Hut in Madison. Gracie visited the Norfolk Library and the Shopko Optical to talk about our services. In Columbus Gracie went to the Community & Family Partnership and to NDOL to talk to a VA Representative about employment for one of our consumers. She also attended Employ Columbus and the Central Community College Fair and attended individualized service plan (ISP) meetings in person at the DHHS DD Office.

Kathy Navrkal presented at Prairie Village in Columbus and at Golden Oaks in Oakland.

Gracie, Kathy N. and Pam participated with and held a booth for the Project Homeless Connect in Norfolk in early October.

Charli presented at the Senior Center in Firth, the Bennett Senior Center, the Coalition for Older Adult Health Promotion, the Hickman Senior Center and the Legacy and Legacy Terrace.

Jeff Sheer continues building a relationship with the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind and Visually Impaired. He also continues our partnership with Project Search, Lincoln Public Schools, and Embassy Suites Hotel.

Amy Buresh continues to serve on the Disability Pride committee. She also has been asked by Dan Frye, Director of Employment and Professional Development Programs for the NFB Jernigan Institute to be part of a team to create a training program for VR Counselors nationwide.

North Platte District:

The North Platte district staff attended presentations and networking events at: Village Cleaners, Jubilee Center, JCPenney's, Apple Market, Kearney YMCA, volunteer center in Crawford, the Vets Home in Kearney, Good Samaritan Home in Hastings, at UNK for Disabilities, Children's Museum, and the Greater Nebraska Workforce Board meeting.

Angie has been collaborating with ASC Capacitors, to implement technology and tools that enhance a client work capabilities within his workplace.

Fritz continues to do outreach at nursing homes to provide in-services.

Omaha District:

The Omaha district staff attended presentations and networking events at: State of Nebraska's Ombudsman Office, Metropolitan Community College Department of Disability Services, Elkhorn & South campuses, angel Guardians, Loving Home Day Services, Nebraska Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Lakeside hospital, Crown Point Nursing Community, the Millard Central Cross-Country practice, American Job Centers, Ticket to Work Career Fair, Amazon Fulfillment center, and Mutual of Omaha,

Tim participated on a Diversity panel with Nebraska VR and Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for presenting to graduating students at University of Nebraska Omaha.,

Tim and Mickie started a project to provide periodic accessible technology training to the HWS staff.

Client Statistics:

One hundred percent (100%) of our eligibility determinations were within 60 days and 100% of our Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) were within 90 days.

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

OIB clients was 680.

IL clients under 55 was 110.

VR clients was 477.

Total of 1267 clients, which is around a 25% increase from previous years. I want to thank the field services, under the leadership of Erin, for the outstanding job on providing quality services when still being short of staff. Our team members support each other to cover staff when needed.

We had clients obtain jobs as:

Assembler/Fabricator, Automotive Service Technician/Mechanic (2), Business Operations Specialist, Childcare Worker, Community and Social Service Specialist, Food Prep and Serving Worker, Computer Occupations/Other, Dietitian/Nutritionist, Education Administrator-Elementary/Secondary School, Elementary School Teacher, Fitness Trainer/Aerobics, Healthcare Support Worker (2), Heating-Air Conditioning-Refrigeration Mechanic/Installer, Helper-Construction Trade, Janitor/Cleaner, Maids/Housekeeping, Mail Clerk/Mail Machine Operator, Massage Therapist, Mental Health Counselor, Packing-Filling Machine Operator/Tenders, Randolph Vendors (3), Receptionist/Information Clerk, Rehabilitation Counselor, Retail Salesperson and Stock Clerk/Order Filler.

IV. Training Center

The Center has nine participants in training: five VR consumers, one out-of-state VR consumer, and three staff trainees. During this quarter, we had eight tours for consumers as of October 25, and four 3-day stays. Three of the consumers who completed a 3-day stay decided to attend the Center and have either started or are scheduled to start prior to the November 4 board meeting.

Staff trainees received an overview of the Client Assistance Program and training on nonvisual alternatives for diabetes management.

Staff and staff trainees have continued to help with Lincoln GATE as needed.

In July, Center staff worked with 11 O&M students from UNL on structured discovery and cane travel skills.

Activities this quarter have included a trip to the farmers market and a trip to the Lincoln Children's Zoo for a sensory safari, which allowed the opportunity to interact with live

and stuffed animals and other displays that are typically not available to the general public. Students and staff trainees grilled and students also had the opportunity to carve pumpkins. They will also roast pumpkin seeds during a future Home Management class.

Some changes have been made to the Center policies and procedures to more accurately reflect expectations for independent living and prepare students for future employment. These include no longer requesting that Center students inform the Center Supervisor when they have a daytime visitor, or if they will be away from the apartments overnight or for the weekend. We have also created a separate phone number for students to call in the event of an after-hours maintenance or other type of emergency where immediate assistance is needed. Having a separate phone number will allow staff to share access to the phone number in the event the Center supervisor is not on call due to vacation or illness, and will eliminate possible confusion about who students should call during those times. It is also hoped that it will build in a step that will cause students to contemplate whether the situation is actually an emergency requiring immediate staff assistance. We have set up a Google Voice number for this purpose.

Fire Inspector Chris Crocker visited the Center at our request to provide recommendations regarding evacuating in the event of an emergency. He stated that the main entrance meets the accessible egress requirements for an existing building according to National Fire Protection Association Life Safety Code. The fire doors at the end of the Center hallway will provide adequate protection until an individual can be evacuated out of the north parking lot by emergency responders if they are unable to ascend the stairs. LMEP also tested the fire alarm this quarter.

The Center's AED has a new 5-year battery and two sets of adhesive pads which are good for 2 years.

We will be doing some remodeling in the Center. The tile in the hallway and Home Management classroom will be replaced with a vinyl flooring, the walls and doors will be re-painted, and signs will be replaced to include raised print letters and Unified English Braille. New doorknobs have already been installed. These are lever-style door handles rather than round knobs, and this style of doorknob improves accessibility.

The Center will be on break from November 20-24 for Thanksgiving, and December 18-January 2 for Christmas. This will allow students the opportunity to spend time with loved ones for the holidays and also help staff avoid forfeiting unused vacation leave. Staff trainees who are not taking vacation will spend some time shadowing in the field.

V. Nebraska Business Enterprise

In the coming months three Micro Markets will be going in at DHHS locations in the Omaha/Bellevue area, one Micro Market will be installed at the new Nebraska Department of Education building in Lincoln, new vending locations will be placed at the Lincoln Regional Center, two YRTC facilities, BSDC, and at the York DHHS office. NBE

is also working on a Micro Market to be installed in the STRATCOM building on Offutt Air Force Base. These projects are in process and will hopefully be completed by the end of the year. Currently, we are waiting on the arrival of ordered components; several manufacturers are about 12 weeks out from the time of order to delivery. Early next year a sixth Micro Market is planned for the DHHS office in Hastings.

The addition of so many Micro Markets in one shot has been a challenging task as NBE has very little firsthand experience with operating Micro Markets. We look forward to having the sites up and running and branching into this new avenue of offering services to the facilities the Vendors serve.

There are currently 12 Licensed Vendors in the NBE program. Two individuals are actively training to become Vendors in the program. There are also several others who have expressed interest in the NBE program.

Commissioner Rocha asked if the Micro Markets for the different sites are different sizes. Director Serván stated yes, they are different sizes.

Commissioner Rocha asked if only snack items would be sold in the Micro Markets or if it would be cold food as well. Director Serván reported that it will be mainly cold food items which are sold along with snacks.

Commissioner Rocha asked if there would be security in the Micro Market areas and would they be only credit card friendly, or cash too. Director Serván reported that the Micro Markets will operate only by credit card. Director Serván noted that one requirement of having a Micro Market is having them in a building that is secure and there is secure access to that area meaning that there are cameras in the area that will identify who is buying what in case someone decides not to pay.

Commissioner Rocha asked if the Micro Market at Offutt would conflict with any of the cafeteria sales. Director Serván stated that the Micro Market will be a part of the cafeteria. It will essentially replace the Grab and Go food sales.

Commissioner Rocha noted that he is interested in the 3-D printing. He asked if there are any examples of what NCBVI is thinking about doing with the 3-D printer. Director Serván noted that the main purpose is to give blind people access to more items and knowledge about them.

Commissioner Bulger noted that NCBVI has two openings in the Omaha district and two openings in the North Platte district. Commissioner Bulger asked what NCBVI is doing to get good qualified candidates. Erin Brandyberry reported that the State of Nebraska has recently switched its outreach platform. Because of that, we are pleased to see that a position that had been open for several months has had eight new candidates in just a few weeks. Erin noted that they are all well qualified candidates. Erin also noted that with all of our vacant positions we always try to send them out to all of NCBVI networks.

Commissioner Bulger stated that he likes the Dashboard information that Julie Buren is putting together and sharing with the commissioners. He stated that he likes it mainly because it contains performance indicators.

Chair Heyen stated that he remembers from one year that he was working WAGES that they had someone who was a previous WAGES attendee do a seminar on her experiences in dealing with the mental health issues that come with being blind or visually impaired. Brent asked if NCBVI has anything to help deal with these issues. If NCBVI does have something on these issues, he feels that this would make a good Focus Topic. Director Serván noted that NCBVI is seeing more and more clients with mental health issues. NCBVI trains its staff members on blindness skills and for several years NCBVI staff members have been requesting training on mental health expertise. NCBVI is providing this training when we can. Erin Brandyberry added that NCBVI usually looks at these issues on an individualized basis as all of these services fall into the RSA Regulations; therefore, NCBVI is able to meet people where they are at in dealing with these issues.

Commissioner Bulger noted that NCBVI is getting more and more clients every year and one of the nice things about NCBVI is that we do not have a waiting list. Commissioner Bulger asked if NCBVI is getting close to the point wherein we are going to have to create a waiting list. Director Serván stated that NCBVI is not close to that point at all and we want to keep away from having a waiting list.

Commissioner Mentink asked if NCBVI has knowledge about the Able Program. Erin Brandyberry reported that NCBVI does have knowledge about this program and NCBVI has partnered with them in the past. Erin noted that the National Able program is a great partner for NCBVI. Commissioner Mentink asked if there is a state Able or is it just national. Erin reported that they have a state assigned representative.

Vice Chair Livingston stated that she would like to know more about the Support Service Provider (SSP) program, and specifically, how the program will work. The SSP program will be available for deaf-blind consumers. Director Serván reported that NCBVI is in the beginning planning stages of the program and we will start a Pilot program in Omaha. Erin Brandyberry and Tim Jefferson are working on this.

Erin Brandyberry reported that we have the capacity to have about 25 consumers benefit from the SSP program at any given time in an active status. We already have 15 individuals signed up, so it is off to a good start with the preliminary work that had been done to identify where the need was. They are currently recruiting people to be in the provider role for the different needs that need to be met. They are hoping to hold a two-day training in January. Day one would be for training the providers and day two would be to bring in some people who will be recipients of the services to practice their skills.

Vice Chair Livingston asked if a person wanted to see if they would qualify for a SSP, would they contact NCBVI. Erin Brandyberry stated that they are trying to make it as easy as possible, so the agencies have partnered together. Therefore, they could

contact the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing or NCBVI. For NCBVI, the front line contact is Tim Jefferson. Everyone who has SSP services will have services signed up through NCBVI since NCBVI is the funding source. There is a simple application that can be completed online.

Director Serván stated that he has an announcement to make. As was stated earlier, today is Commissioner Bulger's last meeting as a NCBVI commissioner. In that regard, Director Serván noted that NCBVI has a token of appreciation for Mark. Director Serván stated that he learned from Mark a while back that he likes coins and he likes giving coins to others. Director Serván reported that the U.S. Congress approved to get silver coins with braille about 10 or 15 years ago. Therefore, NCBVI purchased a silver coin in braille for Commissioner Bulger. Director Serván presented Commissioner Bulger with the silver coin.

NCBVI also presented Commissioner Bulger with a certificate. It read as follows and was signed by NCBVI Executive Director, Carlos Serván.

CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

Presented in Gratitude to:

Mark Bulger

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired would like to thank you for your dedication, service and support as a NCBVI Commissioner. We appreciate your outstanding community service and your efforts and participation in helping us support blind Nebraskans.

January 1, 2016 through December 31, 2023

Carlos Serván

Carlos Serván, Executive Director

Newsline® Update by Kimberly Scherbarth, NFB Newsline Coordinator for Nebraska

The information within the Excel Spreadsheet runs through the end of September, as the October data is not available to coordinators until the first day of the following month.

In late September, the NFB-NEWSLINE service encountered an electrical problem, causing a temporary disruption to equipment responsible for delivering content and managing phone calls to Newsline. This led to the deletion of certain content from the system, which Newsline diligently worked to restore. Subscribers might have faced initial difficulty connecting on their first call but were able to connect upon redial.

Additionally, certain publications did not update to the latest issue as expected. These issues have since been resolved. Throughout this outage period, I received only a few inquiries about missing or outdated content.

Throughout the past year, I have maintained my role as the NFB Newsline Coordinator for Nebraska while the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska sought a replacement. However, my service in this volunteer position will conclude on November 30, 2023. The announcement of the new coordinator will follow in due course. I am grateful for the opportunity to have served in this capacity and anticipate that the next coordinator will extend outreach far beyond what I could achieve while balancing full-time work.

NFB Newsline Stats for 2023

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept.
Number of Subscribers:	2170	2171	2172	2174	2175	2178	2179	2183	2183
New Subscriptions:	0	2	1	2	1	3	1	4	0

Telephone Usage:

Total calls:	795	716	783	738	782	716	835	695	657
Average call length: (Minutes)	15.27	15.27	16.76	13.64	16.06	13.97	11.31	15.47	15.62
Percent local calls:	54.3	57.43	62.99	52.71	62.23	50.62	30.7	47.63	53.62
Total call minutes:	12138	10929	13126	10069	12556	10004	9447	10751	10263

Online Usage:

Web Sessions:	6700	5775	7072	7848	4354	3723	3216	2317	3012
NFB-NEWSLINE Mobile Sessions:	549	416	459	572	497	525	648	622	499
In Your Pocket Deliveries:	4086	4020	4067	4014	3196	2928	2388	2232	2176
Email Deliveries:	461	455	491	439	472	433	286	282	255
Total Online Accesses:	11796	10666	12089	12873	8519	7609	6538	5453	5942

Total Content Accesses:

Content Access Frequency(Minutes)	6.41	6.2	6.65	6.48	7.66	7.71	8.61	9.45	9.59
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Nebraska Newspapers:	3250	2811	3110	3777	3495	3261	2614	2654	2622
Nebraska Local Channels:	20	15	28	30	23	37	38	41	52
Local Weather and Emergency Alerts:	169	150	163	198	163	187	186	135	104
National Newspapers	1448	1337	1640	1509	1188	998	1131	927	804
International Newspapers:	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

My Newspaper:	131	100	137	77	126	69	43	77	120
Breaking News Online	366	359	324	215	242	225	285	327	279
Nmagazines:	206	189	109	158	187	139	92	93	90
TV Listings	447	314	302	358	261	308	344	270	327

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.

NEW BUSINESS

Date/Time/Location/Focus Topics for 2024 Board meetings

The following dates, locations and Focus Topics were decided upon for 2024.

Saturday, February 3, Lincoln. Focus Topic: IL Services for OIB Clients Dealing with Loosing Vision – Attitudes and Skills for Living a Quality Life

Saturday, May 4, North Platte. Focus Topic: No Focus Topic as the Executive Director evaluation will take place.

Friday, July 26, Lincoln. Focus Topic: AI and Accessible Devices

Saturday, November 2, Omaha. Focus Topic: SSP Program

Vice Chair Livingston moved to approve the above dates, locations and Focus Topics for 2024. Commissioner Rocha seconded the motion.

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

Nays:

Abstained:

Motion Carried

Public Comment

Kristal Platt – Kristal noted that she has a question about the SSP Program that many state agencies are operating. She asked if this is currently funded by a legislative bill or by each agency. Director Serván reported that most states do not have SSPs. The deaf-blind consumers always say that this is the main need that they have. Some stakeholders have been working for years trying to find funding for SSPs. NCBVI decided that, since we currently have good state funding for IL and VR, we could use that money for SSPs. NCBVI is the only agency besides the Friends who is helping with this SSP program.

Kristal asked if NCBVI will ask for legislative support if the SSP Program is a success. Director Serván stated yes, that is the idea.

Kristal stated that Director Serván mention that UNL students come to the Center for structured discovery instruction. Kristal asked what this looks like. Director Serván stated that it is not necessarily the best scenario because they only come for a few days. The students come to the Center and they look at how we run the Center while they are under sleep shades and they use structured discovery. The students work with all the instructors, but mostly the travel instructor. A vision teacher from Lincoln also comes to the training.

Commissioner Rocha asked if UNL is the only college that offers a structured discovery program. Director Serván noted that there is something called traditional training and structured discovery training. The traditional training has more of a medical model and the structured discovery training started in California in the early 1960s, it then moved to Iowa and then Nebraska. It was named structured discovery by a researcher from England who came because they heard blind people were teaching cane travel. Most universities that do orientation and mobility do not use structured discovery, they use the traditional model. It has been shown that blind people who learn structured discovery are generally better travelers. It was pointed out that most states only have one structured discovery program, as it is very expensive to operate such a program. UNL has had a structured discovery program for only about the past five years.

Director Serván thanked everyone for their questions.

Final Announcements

The next NCBVI Commission Board meeting will be held on Saturday, February 3, 2024 in Lincoln. The Focus Topic will be IL Services for OIB Clients Dealing with Losing Vision – Attitudes and Skills for Living a Quality Life.

Executive Session

Vice Chair Livingston moved to go into Executive Session at 12:15 p.m. to discuss NCBVI personnel issues. Commissioner Mentink seconded the motion.

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

Commissioner Bulger moved to come out of Executive Session at 12:30 p.m. Commissioner Mentink seconded the motion.

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

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:31 p.m.

Staff Quarterly Reports for November 4, 2023 Commission Board Meeting

Lincoln District Activity Report – Pam Rademacher

Lincoln District is now fully staffed! Charles Andersen completed Center training on October 26, 2023.

Networking: The Lincoln District staff are continuously engaged and constantly pursuing networking with various employers and agencies in our communities. These relationships are extremely valuable in that they enhance our services and opportunities for our clients.

Gracie went to Salvation Army in Norfolk to check on a consumer completing OJT and she also went to Pizza Hut in Madison to check on consumer completing WBL. Gracie attended Employ Columbus, where Harrah's Casino was an invited guest speaker and East Central Health District was invited to talk about employment opportunities. She went to the Central Community College Fair – Welcoming Students Back to Campus and other services offered in the community as well as going to Concordia University to talk to the Disability Counselors about our services. In Norfolk, Gracie went to NDOL and the Norfolk Library to the Family Collaboration meetings and the Shopko Optical to talk about our services. In Columbus Gracie went to the Community & Family Partnership and to NDOL to talk to a VA Representative about employment for one of our consumers. In the schools, Gracie went to IEPs at Randolph High School, Madison High School, West Public Schools in Atkinson, Cedar Rapids High School and Fremont Public and Catholic High School. She also went to individualized service plan (ISP) meetings in person at DHHS DD office and in home meetings.

Kathy presented in August at Prairie Village, Columbus, to 16 individuals and we received one new client from it. Kathy also presented in Oakland at Golden Oaks for 21 individuals but did not obtain any new clients.

Jeff continues to build his relationship with the (NCECBVI) Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind and Visually Impaired working with transition students on a quarterly basis. Jeff continues to work with Project Search partnering with Lincoln Public Schools and the Embassy Suites as he has a student actively engaged.

Charli gave presentations at the following facilities: the Firth Senior Center, the Bennett Senior Center, the Coalition for Older Adult Health Promotion (COAHP), the Hickman Senior Center and the Legacy and the Legacy Terrace. In all those presentations, she had over eight clients sign up for our services.

Amy continues to serve on the Disability Pride committee. They held the largest and most successful vendor fair/celebration to date on July 22, 2023 in Lincoln at the Auld Pavilion in Antelope Park. Amy has also attended seven IEP meetings so far this school year; four were for current clients and the other three for potential new referrals.

Projects: Gracie, Kathy and Pam participated with and held a booth for the Project Homeless Connect in Norfolk in early October.

Gracie continued work with the Salvation Army Soup Kitchen to help feed community members.

GATE commences on the second Thursday of the month, but in September class was moved up instead of being cancelled due to Social Security training for staff. We continue to have full classes for GATE with clients stating their appreciation for the day training.

Amy is involved with the disability Pride Group, and as treasurer of the NFB Blind Rehabilitation Professionals Division. Most recently, she has been asked by Dan Frye, JD., Director of Employment and Professional Development Programs for the NFB Jernigan Institute to be part of a team to create a useful training program for VR counselors nationwide. Shared through the lens of a progressive approach to supporting blind and low-vision consumers of Vocational Rehabilitation, This training material will equip VR professionals to adopt the most innovative strategies for delivering transformative VR services that lead to customers finding the integrated, competitive career-ladder positions of their choosing.

Training: All staff attended the Social Security training held in Kearney in September. Pam attended the National Council of State Agencies conference from November 1-3. Gracie attended an in-person training about Self Talk; Suicide Prevention Norfolk Public Library. She attended webinars of Nano Pac regarding the new AI glasses and Eschenbach Envision Technologies. She also completed webinars on First Responding Officer Duties in Sex Crimes Investigation training, The Changing Face of Probation, Supervising Justice Involved Women-the Pathway in and out of the system, and the webinar on Stress, Trauma, and Resilience Training.

Client Outcomes: Amy had two clients attend the American Job Center Career Fair in October to work on making connections for future employment. Gracie had OJT with Salvation Army and WBL with Pizza Hut and her client Gavin Paulson passed his English Literature GED Final Test.

Charli has had four successful case closures and two clients toured the Center, one of which will tentatively be starting Center training in November.

Jeff has a client in Project Search who is doing really well. He also has a client doing on the job training at the Butler County Health Center and they are doing really well. In addition, he has a client job shadowing with the NBE program.

Amy had two clients get jobs: One at LPS as a special education para and the other as an information and record clerk with ITC Federal. She also had a client with supported employment closed successfully. This client is working as a self-employed contract janitor. A second supported employment client is working a couple hours a week as a janitor at a local school.

Omaha District Activity Report – Timothy Jefferson

It is a pleasure to be back with NCBVI and working as the District Supervisor of the Omaha office. I have spent much of my initial time settling into my new role as supervisor, meeting with my staff to address any issues while maintaining collaborative relationships with external agencies to ultimately help our clients obtain jobs.

The staff in the Omaha office continue working hard to provide quality services to their clients despite high numbers on their caseloads.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work that Cristal Dimas has done to keep the Omaha office running while we were without a supervisor. Cristal still provides her assistance and time to assist me even while managing her own district.

Kelly Coleman was recently honored by the State of Nebraska for 25 years of service with NCBVI.

Alex France recently celebrated his one-year anniversary as an Orientation counselor with NCBVI.

Adrienne Moody left the team to pursue an exciting new job opportunity with the Department of Health & Human Services. Her last day was October 20, 2023. The requisition has been submitted to Shared Services for processing so that Adrienne's position can be posted.

Networking:

Kelly continues to network with the TVI's at Millard and Omaha Public schools. Her attendance at IEP meetings helps to maintain great working relationships between NCBVI and the schools.

Kelly presented information to the State of Nebraska's Ombudsman Office regarding NCBVI services.

Kelly and Tim collaborated with, Metropolitan Community College Department of Disability Services (i.e., Elkhorn & South campuses) to assist students with accommodations to increase their success in school.

Kelly attended an ISP meeting with Angel Guardians, which led to the development of a contract to provide supportive employment to one of our clients.

Kelly attended a team meeting with the Loving Home Day Services for two of our clients.

Kelly collaborated with the Nebraska Commission for Deaf and Hard of hearing to find resources for our deaf blind clients.

Alex and several other NCBVI staff provided presentations to Connect 55 in Elkhorn, Lakeside hospital, Crown Point Nursing Community and the Millard Central Cross-Country practice about NCBVI services and the roles of orientation counselors. Alex also shared his personal experience of blindness with the six grade athletes and coaches.

Mickie and Tim are collaborating with the HWS American Job Center to ensure that its accessible technology is updated.

Tim and Hugh collaborated with the Nebraska Department of Labor (NDOL) to create an accessible method for sharing common intake referral information via Share Point. Tim and Craig participated in the Ticket to Work Career Fair at the Lincoln American Job Center.

Tim provided professional referrals to Pam Rademacher as a result of his collaboration with the employers at the Career Fair.

Tim and Craig conducted business service consultation to the Vice-President of Human Resources at Alter Trading Company. Follow-up will continue.

Tim and Craig attended a tour of the Amazon Fulfillment Center.

Craig collaborated with J'Anna Lee at Mutual of Omaha via quarterly meetings. He discussed accessibility for entry-level positions. Follow-up will continue.

Tim presented information to the Nebraska Department of Labor staff regarding strategies for providing effective business services to employers. He talked about the Dual Customer and Education approaches to working with employers.

Tim participated on a Diversity panel with Nebraska VR and Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for a presentation to graduating students at University of Nebraska at Omaha. These students are preparing to graduate and they had questions about sharing disabilities with employers, promoting positive perceptions on multiple disabilities and successful job searches.

Projects:

The Omaha staff is leading the SSP project with Vancro and Beth Jordan to provide basic independent services to the Deaf Blind community. Examples of these services are reading their mail, providing transportation to medical appointments and grocery stores and assisting them with completing forms and documents for other services.

Kelly served as the lead coordinator for the Project Independence summer camp program. She and Craig are both serving on the Succession Planning committee.

Alex France coordinated a project that consisted of informational presentations being offered to a variety of health and educational providers.

Tim is working with Mickie to take the lead on providing periodic accessible technology training to the HWS staff. They are in the initial process of this project.

Play Creative is going to do one more PSA with two clients from the Omaha office.

Training:

Kelly Coleman, Craig Kneifl, Alex France and Timothy Jefferson participated in the Social Security training in Kearney, NE.

Mickie Saltzman went to Baltimore, MD to tour the NFB Technology Center with Hugh Phan. He had an opportunity to obtain information on current AI technology for blind individuals.

Mickie attended the AFB M-Enabling Summit in Washington, DC. The summit brought IT professionals from all over to discuss current technologies and strategies for developing accessible digital experiences in various modes of technology.

Tim Jefferson attended the NCSAB Fall training conference. The conference theme is Celebrating 50 Years of the Rehab Act.

Client Outcomes:

The Omaha office has the following employment outcomes.

One client obtained part-time employment as a Paraprofessional with Omaha Public Schools.

One client gained employment with the Cheesecake factory.

One client gained employment with Taco Bell.

One client gained employment with Burger King. This is a second job (part-time).

Two clients participated in Project Independence Summer camp program.

Three clients participated in the Blind and Social Savvy workshop.

One client worked as a mentor for the Blind and Social Savvy workshop.

Tim recently received information that an individual is interested in becoming a driver for the Omaha office. He will pursue this lead and be prepared to provide a report on the outcome at the Commission meeting.

North Platte District Activity Report – Cristal Dimas

In the North Platte District, we still have vacant positions for the central Nebraska location: vocational rehabilitation counselor and technology specialist. We interviewed and hired Grace Garza, whom is our new vocational rehabilitation counselor serving the Western region. Grace's first day of Center training is October 16. Welcome Grace! I would also like to recognize Angie Hoff, who is one of our recipients in the Excellence in Leadership Award. Congratulations Angie!

Networking:

With the new school year starting, counselors have been busy participating and networking with schools for IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meetings. These schools include: Lexington, Pleasanton, Kearney and Greeley.

Kimberly participates in the Grand Island and Kearney Project Search sites. This is a great networking and partnership opportunity with Kearney and Grand Island Public Schools.

Cristal and Kimberly networked with the new TVI, Bobbi Kirkpatrick from ESU 10. Kimberly reached out to the following employers for work training opportunities: Village Cleaners, Jubilee Center, JCPenney's, Apple Market, Kearney YMCA, and Children's Museum.

Angie has been collaborating closely with ASC Capacitors, an employer, to implement technology and tools that enhance her client's work capabilities within his workplace. Angie is working closely with ILC day services to assist them in preparing for their first blind attendee. Angie met at the volunteer center in Crawford to discuss services and had six attendees, who are interested in services. Fritz conducted a "Stepping On" class

and had six attendees. Fritz continues to do outreach at nursing homes to provide in-services. He reached out to the Vets Home in Kearney and Good Samaritan Home in Hastings.

Projects:

Angie and Fritz represent the North Platte District and collaborate with colleagues from across the state and are on the Succession Planning committee.

Angie continues to attend the monthly OIB Program manager meetings and has initiated the data collection process for the 7OB report.

Kimberly is collaborating with a TVI from Wood River to provide JAWS training instruction to help one of her students. Kimberly assisted and was on the committee for Project Independence. Kimberly participated in a workforce panel at UNK for Disabilities in the Workforce. Kimberly has a client who has expressed interest in the NBE program and she has been assisting this client with the NBE process.

Cristal attended the Greater Nebraska Workforce Board meeting that was held at the Department of Labor office in Norfolk.

Training:

Fritz, Cristal, and Kimberly participated in the Social Security training that was provided by Michael Dalto. This training was held in Kearney at the Holiday Inn.

Angie participated in a webinar on Charles Bonnet Syndrome.

Cristal attended the NCSAB Conference in Savannah, Georgia.

Client Outcomes:

Cristal had a client gain employment in computer occupations. Angie had one client graduate from Center training. Kimberly and Angie each had one student participate in the Blind and Socially Savvy program that was held in Lincoln. Angie had arranged for a short-term Center experience to help a struggling young mother who is expecting her second child and plans to come back for a full Center experience once her health allows for it. Kimberly had two students attend and participate in Project Independence.

Center Activity Report – Jessica Bartenbach

As of November 14, 2023, the Nebraska Center for the Blind anticipates having nine people attending training: five VR consumers, one out-of-state VR consumer, and three staff trainees.

During the last quarter, one OIB consumer graduated after six months of training. A VR consumer decided to leave training on August 25 after three months due to being needed at home by family. A VR consumer attended two weeks of training in September before returning home due to medical concerns. Another VR consumer decided to end Center training on September 15 after six months due to feeling that goals had been achieved but not meeting graduation requirements.

An out-of-state VR client began training on August 14. Three new VR consumers began training on October 10, October 23, and October 30, respectively. A VR consumer

shadowed Shane for a couple of days to determine whether being a braille instructor or transcriber was the best employment goal.

During this quarter, we had eight tours for consumers as of October 25, and four 3-day stays. Three of the consumers who completed a 3-day stay decided to attend the Center and have either started or are scheduled to start prior to the Commission Board meeting.

The staff trainees who completed training this quarter were: Pam Rademacher, Lincoln district supervisor on August 24, and Charles Andersen, Lincoln district technology specialist on October 26.

The staff trainees currently attending the Center are Kaytlyn Hilligas (VR counselor started on August 14), Sarah Vrana (cane travel instructor in the Center started on October 16), and Grace Garza (VR counselor in Western Nebraska also started on October 16). Tammie Dunn accepted the deputy director of finance position and she will complete additional sleep shade training between November 6 and December 15.

Staff trainees received an overview of the Client Assistance Program on October 18, and met with Mary Davis on October 19 to learn nonvisual alternatives for diabetes management.

As mentioned above, Sarah Vrana has been hired as the new cane travel instructor in the Center. She worked most recently as a special education substitute teacher for Lincoln Public Schools. She is also a licensed Occupational Therapy Assistant. In order to receive her National Orientation and Mobility Certification, she will need to complete 480 hours of immersion training under sleep shades, and then she will complete an additional 800 hour apprenticeship under sleep shades. She will then need to pass a written exam in order to earn the NOMC, which is a renewable five-year certification from the National Blindness Professional Certification Board. We are hoping that the majority of her training will be completed in Lincoln under Jeff's supervision since he is a NOMC Trainer. Sarah will also spend some time at another Structured Discovery Center to complete a portion of her apprenticeship hours.

Shane was on the planning committee and worked Project Independence this summer. Center staff and staff trainees have continued to help with Lincoln GATE as needed. Mark and Kaytlyn traveled to Kearney for a Social Security training September 13-14.

On July 24, we worked with 11 O&M students from UNL on structured discovery and cane travel skills. Activities this quarter have included a trip to the farmers market. We had also planned to visit Mahoney State Park but their activity schedule for weekdays was significantly reduced after Labor Day so we will try again next summer. We took a trip to the Lincoln Children's Zoo for a sensory safari, which allowed the opportunity to interact with live and stuffed animals and other displays that are typically not available to the general public. Students and staff trainees grilled on October 5. Students also had the opportunity to carve pumpkins on October 27, and they will also roast pumpkin seeds during a future Home Management class.

Some changes have been made to the Center policies and procedures to more accurately reflect expectations for independent living and prepare students for future employment. These include no longer requesting that Center students inform the Center Supervisor when they have a daytime visitor, or if they will be away from the apartments

overnight or for the weekend. This information was previously requested because it could be useful in the event of an emergency. However, emergencies can occur during daytime hours when students may be running errands, and students were sometimes inconsistent in reporting when they left and had returned from overnight or weekends away. This is also not information that a landlord or employer would request.

We have also created a separate phone number for students to call in the event of an after-hours maintenance or other type of emergency where immediate assistance is needed. Having a separate phone number will allow staff to share access to the phone number in the event that Jessica is not on call due to vacation or illness, and will eliminate possible confusion about who students should call during those times. It is also hoped that it will build in a step that will cause students to contemplate whether the situation is actually an emergency requiring immediate staff assistance. We have set up a Google Voice number for this purpose. Students should still call 911 first if it is appropriate to do so.

Fire Inspector Chris Crocker visited the Center at our request to provide recommendations regarding evacuating in the event of an emergency. He stated that the main entrance meets the accessible egress requirements for an existing building according to National Fire Protection Association Life Safety Code. The fire doors at the end of the Center hallway will provide adequate protection until an individual can be evacuated out of the north parking lot by emergency responders if they are unable to ascend the stairs. LMEP also tested the fire alarm this quarter.

The Center's AED has a new five-year battery and two sets of adhesive pads, which are good for two years.

We will be doing some remodeling in the Center. The tile in the hallway and Home Management classroom will be replaced with a vinyl flooring, the walls and doors will be re-painted, and signs will be replaced to include raised print letters and Unified English Braille. New doorknobs have already been installed. These are lever-style door handles rather than round knobs, and this style of doorknob improves accessibility.

The Center will be on break from November 20-24 for Thanksgiving, and December 18-January 2 for Christmas. This will allow students the opportunity to spend time with loved ones for the holidays, and also help staff avoid forfeiting unused vacation leave. Staff trainees who are not taking vacation will spend some time shadowing in the field.

Nebraska Business Enterprise Activity Report – Eric Buckwalter

VENDING SITE UPDATE

Upcoming Sites

NBE is working on several new sites that will be opening in the coming months. Three Micro Markets will be going in at DHHS locations in the Omaha/Bellevue area, one Micro Market will be installed at the new Nebraska Department of Education building in Lincoln, new vending locations will be placed at the Lincoln Regional Center, two YRTC facilities, BSDC, and at the York DHHS office. NBE is also working on a Micro Market to be installed in the STRATCOM building on Offutt Air Force Base. These projects are in process and will hopefully be completed by the end of the year. Currently, we are waiting on the arrival of ordered components; several manufacturers are about twelve

weeks out from the time of order to delivery. Early next year a sixth Micro Market is planned for the DHHS office in Hastings.

The addition of so many Micro Markets in one shot has been a challenging task as NBE has very little firsthand experience with operating Micro Markets. We look forward to having the sites up and running and branching into this new avenue of offering services to the facilities the Vendors serve.

NBE Licensed Vendors

There are currently 12 Licensed Vendors in the NBE program. Two individuals are actively training to become Vendors in the program. There are also several others who have expressed interest in the NBE program.

Vending Site Complaints

The only significant complaint this past quarter involved low stock in a site's machines.

Other Updates

Des Moines – Mini BLAST

In June Lizzie and Eric had the opportunity to attend the NABM – Mini BLAST in Des Moines, Iowa that was held in partnership with U-Select-It (USI). It was a very good short conference and the SLA was able to make important connections with Cantaloupe, Three Square Markets, and USI. In addition to becoming more familiar with USI products we learned of some potential changes coming to Cantaloupe that will better serve BEPs across the country. Other highlights included an update on BEP and SSDI.

NBE Retreat

The NBE Retreat that was originally planned for this week was postponed. The postponement was caused by staff changes within the SLA leading to concerns that SLA would not be able to commit adequate time to preparing a quality program. Plans are in the works to have an NBE Retreat in the Spring of 2024.

NBE Staff

Lizzie Heidenreich has been working in her role as NBE Counselor for almost six months now and has been doing an amazing job! She is to be commended for her efforts to quickly pick up on her role in NBE and taking on additional duties as NBE navigated the departure of other NBE staff.

Business Office Highlights - Kat Carroll

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

- Announced my upcoming retirement on February 29, 2024.
- Hired Tammie Dunn as the new Deputy Director of Finance effective October 10, 2023 so she can complete four weeks of Center training and overlap with me for almost three months.
- Continue to improve the Internal Budget Projection for FFY 2024 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 monthly to ensure we are planning for the best use of our available funds.

- Continue testing new resources for tracking and projecting expenditures for grant funds which were provided to us by VRTAC at the monthly Fiscal Forums.
- Continue improving client supply inventory tracking and the items kept in client supply.
- Continue work on improving communication between the Business Office team as well as communication between the Business Office and the Field. Business Office Staff attend the monthly Supervisor's meetings for the first hour to continue this work.
- Received the Federal VR Fiscal Year 2024 budget total of \$3,762,952, an increase of \$302,829 over the previous Federal Fiscal Year.
- Attended the NCSAB convention in Savannah, GA November 1-3.
- Completed the Federal Fiscal Year End 9/30/2023.

Kathy Stephens – Highlights

The Year-End fixed assets inventory was completed and sent to Administrative Services before the August 31, 2023 deadline.

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

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.

NCBVI made a request to the State Transportation Services Bureau (TSB) to lease a seven-passenger van to be housed at the Lincoln office. This van is needed as NCBVI has recently hired a staff member who will be traveling to provide services in clients' homes approximately four days per week, throughout the Lincoln and northern Nebraska region. This staff member is 6'9" tall, and in addition to the expected leg room issue, he has found that in our current TSB leased vehicles he does not have adequate headspace. He reports that he has been able to safely drive minivans in the past, so we are needing to bring a minivan into our pool for him to use on a regular basis. NCBVI also hosts programs where this van will be used to transport the students who are attending the Nebraska Center for the Blind as well as other group programs that happen throughout the year.

In addition, NCBVI has clients with multiple disabilities who need extra space to also transport wheelchairs, walkers, medical equipment, etc. Also, we need to transport computers, technology items, and other devices for blind people to their homes.

TSB informed us that they could not accommodate this request, as they currently do not have any minivans available for lease. TSB informed NCBVI that they would support us purchasing a minivan as agency owned. NCBVI completed the necessary paperwork and this was approved at all levels. The Business office is working on the purchase of this van.

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

Made updates to NCBVI website as needed.

Julie Buren - RSA Dashboard Highlights

Program Year 2022

Quarter 4: April-June 2023

In the quarter reported, NCBVI served 401 consumers. In comparison to the same period in Program Year 2021, NCBVI served 390 consumers. One hundred percent (100%) of our eligibility determinations were within 60 days and 100% of our Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) were within 90 days. Comparatively, in the previous program year same quarter, we had 100% Eligibility timeliness and 96.2% IPE timeliness. Our rate of employment in this quarter was 82% versus 56% in the same quarter last program year.

NCBVI purchased 410 services for consumers as well as provided 426 services by our staff. The previous year saw 270 purchased and 577 provided services within the same quarter. In addition, 35 students were provided Pre-ETS during this quarter versus 43 last year at the same timeframe. These students received 20 purchased services and 25 provided services by our staff. In comparison from the same quarter last year, we purchased 52 services and provided 42 services via our staff time.

NCBVI closed 11 cases in this quarter versus 30 in Program Year 2021, Quarter 4. We had nine successful closures in this quarter, compared to 14 last year in the same timeframe. Our average earnings per hour was \$25.10 this quarter compared to \$17.57 last year during this same timeframe.

The following sections are a part of our performance measures combined with General VR. NCBVI and General VR worked with RSA to agree on goals for our agencies to achieve. The numbers below are NCBVI data only:

Measurable Skill Gains

We had 116 students eligible for a Measurable Skill Gain (MSG) as they are currently listed on their case as being involved in a school/apprenticeship/On-The-Job Training setting. Of those students, we received documentation on 36 students within this quarter as they achieved a skill gain. In the previous year, same quarter, we had 100 students eligible for an MSG and received documentation on 30 students. This equates

to a rate of 31.0% this quarter versus 30.0% last year. NCBVI's cumulative rate for the program year is 60.9% and our RSA combined goal is 61.5%.

Employment in 2nd and 4th Quarter after Exit

We had 49% of our closures employed in the 2nd quarter after their case closed and 39.5% of our closures employed in the 4th quarter after their case closed. In Program Year 2021 Quarter 4, we had 41% of our closures employed 2 quarters after their case closed and 29.4% of our case closures employed 4 quarters later. Our combined RSA goal is 60.5% for 2nd quarter after closure and 60% for 4th quarter after closure.

Credential Attainments

In Quarter 4 of this current program year, we had 48% of students enrolled in postsecondary education/occupational licensure receive a degree/certificate. The same quarter last year had 35% receive degrees/certificates. Our combined RSA goal is 31.8%

Median Earnings

Out of the wages reported to RSA during this quarter, NCBVI had a median earnings rate of \$7,653.29. The same time last year had a median earning of \$6,435.00. Our combined RSA goal is \$5,058.00.