

Nebraska Commission for the Blind
Public Meeting, Saturday, January 30, 2021, 9:00 a.m.
Via 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 9:00 a.m. The meeting began with introductions.

Commissioners present: Mark Bulger, Chairperson, Designee of the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska, Omaha; Kimberly Scherbarth, Vice Chairperson, Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, Kearney; Brent Heyen, Executive Secretary, Lincoln; Becky Rieken, Dakota City; Robert Newman, Omaha.

Commission staff present: Carlos Serván, Executive Director; Carol Jenkins, Deputy Director-Services; Kat Carroll, Deputy Director-Finance; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant; Connie Daly, Lincoln District Supervisor; Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor; Greg DeWall, Center Supervisor; Larry Oleson, Technology Specialist; Mike Rains, Center Shop Instructor; Jeff Altman, Center Travel Instructor; Nancy Coffman, Center Communications Instructor; Charli Saltzman, Center Braille Instructor; Nicole Gothier, Center Home Management Instructor, Laurie Jacobsen, Center Apartment Resources staff; Nicole Amen, Accountant I.

Public present: Jim Jirak, Omaha; Donna Faust Amen, Outlook Nebraska, Omaha; Cheryl Livingston, Lincoln; Madeline Brush, Center student; James Stinson, Center student; Eddie Becerra, Center student, and Deanna Douglas, Center student.

The Notice of the Meeting was published in the Lincoln Journal Star, the State Government Calendar, NCBVI Website, and NFB Newslines®. The Notice was also sent to the NCBVI List Serve, Radio Talking Book, ACBN and NFBN.

Approval of the July 30, 2020 and January 9, 2021 public meeting minutes.

Commissioner Scherbarth moved to approve the Minutes of the July 31, 2020 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Newman seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Newman moved to approve the Minutes of the January 9, 2021 Commission Emergency Meeting. Commissioner Rieken seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

Report from the Commissioners

Robert Newman – Robert reported that the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services invited him to do a special presentation on grooming to blind clients. This presentation was

conducted virtually. He continues to serve as the President for the NFB Senior Division and he serves as Secretary of the Omaha Chapter. Robert is also the President of Friends of the Commission and they had their quarterly meeting last week. They are working on getting some grants for kids programs.

Kimberly Scherbarth – Kimberly said that she serves as Secretary for the NFB Board State Affiliate. She is also the NFB Newsline Coordinator. She is currently reviewing active members on the list of Nebraska subscribers and she is reaching out to new subscribers to introduce herself and answer any questions they may have. Kimberly is a mentor and she currently has one mentee assigned to her. She also facilitates at-large meetings for Disability Services at the University of Nebraska Kearney.

Brent Heyen – Brent serves the community by continuing to demonstrate the capabilities of blind people while assisting to operate two hotels in Lincoln. Brent also serves as a mentor.

Becky Rieken – Becky continues to work as a teacher for students with visual impairments. She currently has a student doing the Braille Challenge. This student is working with a former student, who is the President of the Nebraska Association of Blind Students (NABS). This former student is sharing her experiences and strategies of getting through the competition.

Mark Bulger – Mark is the President for the Omaha Association of the Blind. He has been making contacts to ensure that everyone is doing okay during the pandemic. He is the State President for the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska (ACBN) and they have been holding virtual meetings. Mark also serves as the Chair of the Board for the Walter Roberts Manor where he works with the elderly and disabled. Mark is the Vice Chair of the Omaha Rapid Bus Transit and he serves on the Board for Share a Fare. Mark has also been responding to calls from OAB and ACB and NCBVI staff is helping with individual needs.

Focus Topic: NCBVI Training Center, Center Training with COVID-19

For the better part of the past 10 months, Center staff and students have been participating in either remote learning, in person training, or a hybrid of both. Center staff recognize that even during these difficult times, it is important to keep providing training and services. The students also understand that even during these unordinary times, there are skills to learn that will benefit them in their path to independence and employment.

Flexibility with staff and students has been critical. Although we had returned to in person training for a couple months, due to a spike in local COVID-19 cases going into the holidays, Center staff have worked out a hybrid schedule.

Currently Center staff are rotating which days they work with students in the apartments. When staff are not working in-person, they are working remotely with students. For example; Mondays and Wednesdays, travel and technology take place in-person at the apartments. Braille and home-management are remote. Of course, this switches on Tuesdays and Thursdays, when braille and home-management is in-person, and travel and technology are remote classes.

Shop is not forgotten. The current schedule allows Mike to bring in one student each day to the Center. Mike spends the day with each student, one-on-one. This allows for Mike to continue

teaching students the basic home-maintenance or to oversee students working on their projects. When necessary, Mike has also been able to teach remotely, by going over different household items and safety procedures.

Charli has been able to keep her braille students engaged through different activities. This includes having the students practicing their reading and writing; working on their lessons in the Simply Braille book; practicing electronic braille, and leading group braille classes on Friday mornings. All of these lessons can be provided remotely, via zoom, and in person.

Technology has been at the root of working remotely. With students having different devices, Nancy has had the challenge of making sure students with Android and IOS devices are able to log on to Zoom, as well as effectively communicate with instructors. Students are also utilizing their personal computers, or the computer in the apartments, to work on typing assignments and practice researching information for seminars, housing, or recipes.

Travel is not a class that is ideally executed remotely. Fortunately, the weather has been pleasant enough for students to participate in some independent outside travel lessons. However, when travel is provided remotely, Jeff is able to challenge the students with lessons in route planning, mental mapping, researching destinations and trip planning. The group travel class on Fridays allows for students and staff to share ideas and experiences in regards to travel.

Nicole has been able to keep students flowing in home-management without skipping a beat. Using zoom and other video conferencing options, students are able to perform their home-management lessons remotely. This includes many of the daily living skills, such as cooking, cleaning, and self-care. Students also work with Nicole in areas like qualifying for housing and SSDI paperwork.

Laurie continues to manage the apartments and support instructors how ever she can. If a student is working remotely and has a question that requires someone in person, Laurie is available for assistance. Laurie has also kept the relationship going with the Delta Gamma volunteers, who used to visit the apartments and talk or act as readers for the students. While working remotely, a Wednesday evening Zoom meeting has been established to keep this relationship going with students and Delta Gamma.

We all wish we could be working in person. We look forward to the near future when the COVID-19 situation will be safer, and we can return to full time in the Center. I give credit to the instructors for being flexible and thinking outside the box. They are demonstrating Structured Discovery every day they come to work. I also give credit to the students for being flexible and open to learning under these conditions. The students do recognize, the skills they are learning, while working with COVID-19 conditions, are greatly going to benefit them in the future.

Jeff Altman, Travel Instructor – Jeff noted that teaching cane travel can be challenging when doing it remotely but he is finding the clients are gaining ground. Jeff currently works a few days a week with clients in the downtown in a 10-block radius of the apartments. On days when they do remote learning, clients do mental mapping work as they plan their travel routes. This includes travel routes in other states and making hotel reservations. They currently do simulated drops, talk about how to handle certain situations with the general public, cover cane techniques and do written assignments. On Fridays, the Center has group teachings.

Mike Rains, Shop Instructor – Mike noted that in Shop they are currently picking a subject such as painting and talking about what supplies will be needed to get the job done. They also discuss items such as changing furnace filters, cleaning a showerhead, supplies to put in a tool box and apartment living safety. They talk about obstacles that they may run in to and how to overcome those obstacles. Clients practice social distancing when they are working with tools. He is currently picking up clients at the apartments on a one on one basis and bringing them to the Center for Shop class. Clients practice social distancing when they are working with tools.

Nicole Gothier, Home Management Instructor – Nicole stated that when the clients are at the apartments they do cooking and virtual cooking assignments. The clients also do cleaning assignments such as cleaning behind appliances and organizing cupboards. Other times clients work on doing an inventory of the ingredients they have on hand and creating grocery lists for recipes they wish to make. They also do housing paperwork and social security paperwork. Nicole noted that everything has been running smoothly during the pandemic.

Charli Saltzman, Braille Instructor – Charli stated that teaching Braille virtually is similar to teaching it in person. The clients follow the Simply Braille curriculum and they do readings virtually. Clients work on writing Braille when they are at the apartments. They also work on things such as labeling items. One client is currently working on electronic Braille. On Fridays, they have a group teaching and they sometimes have guest speakers.

Nancy Coffman, Technology Instructor – Nancy stated that she is using the Zoom platform when teaching technology remotely. They use technology that people already have and maximize on that. Nancy is also teaching iPhones and voice over as well as other technology. Clients are using Typeability. They also work with Siri on things such as getting an address, searching for a recipe and finding places to go. She has also taught clients how to run a Zoom meeting. Clients also participate in Group teachings where they learn things such as how to plan a vacation and track their health and fitness. Nancy noted that technology ducktails into all areas of life and the focus of the training has remained the same.

Laurie Jacobsen, Apartment Resources – Laurie noted that they are currently using Apartment 8, which is a two-bedroom apartment, for teaching. This allows for social distancing. They also use the conference room at the apartments for teaching. Laurie noted that she and the clients work hard to keep all common areas at the apartments disinfected.

Center student, Deanna Douglas – Deanna stated that she lost her vision about one year ago and she became very visually dependent and scared. Deanna noted that her experience at the Center has been amazing. She stated that the instructors adjust to everyone's individual needs and she feels that she is making great progress even with remote learning. She noted that the training has been a life changing experience for her. Deanna stated that she is looking forward to being back at the Center for in-person training. Deanna noted that one of her goals is to do some volunteer work such as reading Braille to people in nursing homes.

Center student, James Stinson – James stated that he began losing his vision a little over three years ago. His family and friends led him to the Center. James stated that he was very excited and yet frightened to begin Center training. James noted that the staff has done a wonderful job in giving him confidence and it has been a great feeling to have a sense of accomplishment. James stated that he previously worked at a restaurant in customer service and then when he lost his

vision he retired because he had no skills. He now plans to finish his bachelor's degree. James stated that he feels like he is restarting his life.

Center student, Madeline Brush – Madeline stated that she is thankful for the Center so she can learn blindness skills. Madeline noted that her goal is to move to a big city and work for NFB or a non-profit agency. She stated that she is single and wants to live the life that she wants so she needs to learn blindness skills. Madeline noted that she feels that she is on the right path.

Center student, Eddie Beccera – Eddie stated that this is his second time attending Center training. His first time attending was in the Fall of 2018, but he had to leave the training due to family issues. Eddie stated that he is thankful and grateful to be back at the Center. Eddie noted that this second time has been different in that he is now ready to attend the training. Eddie stated that all the Center staff have been instrumental in helping him reach his goals. Eddie noted that when he first lost his vision he felt sorry for himself, but he is happier now than he has ever been. Eddie stated that his interest is in accessible technology. Eddie noted that you get out of the Center training what you put in to it.

The commissioners thanked everyone for their commitment and comments.

Update and discussion on thumb drive versus other information storage options

Director Serván noted that this issue came up as the commissioners are looking for a more efficient way to update all the commissioner's thumb drives at one time. Larry Oleson was asked to look into the issue and find a long-term solution. Larry worked with the OCIO and came up with using a Secure File Transfer Protocol (SFTP). The SFTP is accessible and secure and files can be stored long term. With SFTP there are four ways to access files and each commissioner can use the way that is best for them.

Director Serván noted that the upfront cost is minimal and the reoccurring cost is \$3 per month/per commissioner. Each commissioner will need an STN account with a user name and password. Director Serván stated that NCBVI will be able to absorb this cost into its budget. Larry Oleson will be available to provide training to the commissioners as needed.

The commissioners agreed to move forward with this storage option.

Public Comment

Nancy Flearl – Nancy thanked the clients for their commitment with Center training and learning blindness skills. Nancy noted that it is very true that clients get out of the training what they put into it.

Break

A break was taken at 10:33 a.m.
The meeting resumed at 10:41 a.m.

Report from the Executive Director

I. Administration

During the last quarter, I attended virtual meetings with the WIOA partners, the WIOA State Board, Olmstead State Steering Committee, the NCSAB Executive Committee, CSAVR region VII, and City of Lincoln Equity and Transportation workgroup for a 2050 forward plan.

We continue addressing accessibility issues with the OCIO, most recently Web Ex being used by all state employees and not being accessible to the blind. The OCIO scheduled a training for January 13 with NCBVI staff. This training did not have success because Web Ex was inaccessible. Future training will be scheduled and we are asking that a blind person to be the trainer.

We also continue having meetings and negotiations on coming up with a new Technology Accessibility Assurance Standard. It has been over a year since we started this process and are still finding resistance from the Purchasing Division under the Department of Administrative Services. Most recently, the DAS Deputy Director requested the head of DAS and the Governor Policy and Research Office to be in the meeting to come up with a resolution.

I have also been attending meetings with the Nebraska Vaccine Task Force. We were able to get our staff to be considered for priority 1-B. Our technology staff was also involved in assisting DHHS to ensure that the on-line registration is accessible to the blind. This will help us to start going back to providing services face-to-face.

During the month of September, RSA conducted their technical assistant and monitoring to NCBVI. Some of the highlights are that NCBVI is one of the few agencies that opens cases very quickly and do not make our applicants wait much longer for eligibility determination. They also looked at our policies and made some suggestions to clarify them and be consistent with RSA's guidance. In addition, RSA looked at our Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) and contracts; and have some general input to again make the language consistent with their guidance. We finished sending all of the documents with the changes they recommended to them by the end of last year. We do not know yet when their final report will come out.

NCBVI and Nebraska VR general were asked by the US Department of Education to participate on a national showcase which took place on November 2 for all VR professionals and special education teachers. Carol Jenkins and Erin Brandyberry did the presentation and RSA Commissioner, Mark Schultz and staff from Senator Ben Sass's office were present. Cristal Dimas did a presentation the first week of December to the NCSAB National Conference on our transition tele-training.

As a result of the increase of COVID-19 cases, the Center and our field services started to go remotely again since October 28.

The biennium budget request was submitted. Our Cost Allocation Plan was approved by the Federal government early in October. We closed out the fiscal year on September 30, 2020. Kat submitted all the Federal Reports. The agency is currently going through the regular state audit.

The total number of clients served for VR at the end of the quarter from October-December was 375, for OIB was 280 and for IL under 55 was 53.

This last quarter we had clients get jobs as: Elementary School Teacher, Randolph-Sheppard Vending Operator and Secondary School Teacher.

II. Human Resources

Michelle Rogers resigned as of October 30, and that accountant I position has been filled by Nicole Amen, who comes from Bryan Health Systems. The second front desk position was also vacated and we just recruited Cathie Guida who will start working on February 1. The VR counselor position for Lincoln and the orientation counselor for Omaha are still pending because we want field staff to have the full training experience at the Center.

Several staff attended the Dare to Be Remarkable Conference the first week of December and the Fall NCSAB National Conference.

III. Field Services

Our staff continue to network with local and statewide stakeholders to build relationships and find training and placement opportunities.

Julie Thompson and Greg DeWall have partnered to launch a support group for the Older Blind over Zoom. They meet on the third Wednesday of the month at 6:00 p.m. In addition, we have held two sessions of Zooming Towards Employment. These meetings are to discuss business contacts that we have made. Resources have been shared such as power point presentations and marketing videos that counselors can use as they contact employers. Counselors share one new contact that they have made and a follow up contact to employers that we already have a relationship with. Each contact is put in a statewide spreadsheet and we are beginning to build a database. We are planning to customize the employer module in AWARE so that we have a tool for counselors to use as we strengthen our placement efforts.

We had Winnerfest on November 13. We are collaborating with the NFB mentoring program. Dale Carnegie provided training on self-advocacy and communication skills. We also had Sky's the Limit provided some training on writing skills and self-advocacy.

Transition Saturdays are once a month over Zoom. Counselors have been very creative in developing programs. They have made no-bake cookies, completed assessments on Virtual Job Shadow and set personal goals for 2021.

We will work with Low Vision Logic to provide training to Pre-Ets clients on how to effectively use low vision and when you may need to use other methods.

We have continued to work with employers to assist clients in their job search and to develop Work Based Learning Experiences. They have valued the monthly calls where they check in and share information on their placement activities. Staff have continued to work with EmployOma and business services with Heartland Workforce Solutions. Several of our staff will be attending the Nebraska Department of Education Transition Conference in February.

Field supervisors continue to be active participants with their local WIOA Boards. Field staff are meeting remotely with public schools doing transition consulting and/or transition services. Field staff are also more active with the NBE program assisting their clients to be successful as well as supporting current vendors when needed.

We also started doing electronic signatures for clients. This is helping us to move quickly on services.

IV. Training Center

We have four students in the apartments from which three students are VR, and one student is Older Blind. Since November, students have been receiving training in their apartments and around down town area. The Center is providing a remote and one-on-one in person training and staff members are being flexible. Due to a spike in local COVID-19 cases, there were no 3-day stays, nor activities this last quarter. However, we had three virtual tours with agency consumers.

Working remotely, students planned and executed a Thanksgiving feast in the apartments, and gathered with each other. Center students also participated on panels at the Dare to be Remarkable National Conference; and listened in on different meetings such as, how to use Braille in around the home and the monthly Blind Seniors of Nebraska.

V. Nebraska Business Enterprise

Federal contracts:

Cafeteria services at STRATCOM continue to be offered in accordance with what is allowed within STRATCOM COVID-19 restrictions and policies. The cafeteria has started adding Daily Specials for breakfast and lunch, which are popular items. Vending machine services continue to be limited due to less staff coming to the building.

The new Veterans Affairs (VA building in Lincoln) is ahead of schedule and will open in March of 2021. NBE will be working to install vending machines and secure a blind vendor for this location. The new location at the VA in Omaha is operating under a subcontract until we find a blind vendor.

State Contracts:

Credit card readers have been installed on the rest areas in the eastern and western part of the state as well as by Kearney. The readers will next be installed on the machines by Grand Island. After this, all Interstate 80 rest areas will have credit card readers on vending machines. In addition, NBE staff and its contractor(s) continue to work on installing credit card readers on machines across the state, where allowed and applicable. It is the goal to have all credit card readers installed within the next few months. There has been some delay in this project due to COVID-19.

We continue to work with the new Nebraska State Patrol building in northeast Lincoln. It is expected that this site will be operational in early May.

Installation for the NBE's first micro market site at a DHHS building in Omaha began last week. This site has been awarded to a blind vendor.

Currently, there are 14 licensed vendors operating vending facilities. There are two trainees in the vending program, both operating facilities.

Carol Jenkins worked with Nebraska Risk Management to have the blind vendors have a NBE group Worker's Compensation policy to once again lessen the costs for blind vendors. There was a presentation on Worker's Compensation during the NBE Meeting on December 4, 2020. The Blind Vendor's Committee voted to have all vendor's Workers Compensation insurance being paid using unassigned funds. The policy is in the process of being finalized and will be implemented in the next few weeks.

The U.S. Congress approved to use 20 million from funds that went back to RSA from those states that could not get the required match for Randolph Sheppard. At this point, we need to wait until the new administration is in place at RSA for guidelines. We know, however, that vendors cannot get double Federal support for the same expenses.

Operator Agreements

NBE is working to update licensee Operator Agreements, which will include the newly approved RSA operator agreement. These have been distributed this month and will be completed by the end of February.

Chairperson Bulger noted that on October 7, the National Rehabilitation Association presented Director Serván with the E. B. Whitten Silver Medallion Award for demonstrating leadership on improving the lives of people with disabilities. Chairperson Bulger was present at the ceremony and gave a speech. Director Serván noted that he mentioned that he dedicated the award to the NCBVI staff and consumers, as this award is due to the collective work from all of us.

Chairperson Bulger stated that there have been two things that have really helped NCBVI. The first is the work that was done to get \$500,000 support from the Legislature for the Older Blind. With this additional funding, NCBVI can provide adequate training to older blind Nebraskans and help them remain independent. The second is the legislation that was passed to give priority status to blind individuals to operate vending facilities on state-owned property. This legislation will increase jobs for blind people.

Commissioner Rieken stated that she is appreciative and impressed that NCBVI staff build on each other's skills. She enjoys seeing the different methodology used for the same focus.

Commissioner Newman stated that he is impressed with NCBVI's growth.

Commissioner Heyen congratulated Director Serván on receiving the E. B. Whitten Silver Medallion Award. He noted that great teamwork cannot be successful with a bad leader.

Director Serván thanked the commissioners for their comments.

Newsline® Update – by Kimberly Scherbarth, NFB Newsline® Coordinator

This past quarter, October 2020 - December 2020, it appears that the NFB Mobile sessions have dropped significantly. At the end of September the usage was 271, October 73, November 40, and

December 37. Alexa usage continues to not appear on our usage report. I have emailed Scott White regarding both, the NFB Mobile sessions and Alexa, but have not yet heard back from him. COVID-19 and 2020 Election information continues to be a part of the breaking news section during this quarter. An annual report was given at the NFB of Nebraska state convention toward the end of October.

I have started the process of reviewing active members on the list of Nebraska subscribers. I have reached out to some of our new subscribers as well, to introduce myself and to answer any possible questions.

No other updates at this time.

	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Number of Subscribers:	2059	2063	2064	2068	2069	2069	2073	2075	2075	8073	2077	2080
New Subscriptions:	5	5	1	0	1	0	5	3	0	0	4	3

Telephone Usage:

Total calls:	869	868	1125	1178	1116	1040	1155	1115	977	979	935	996
Average call length:	11.21	12.01	11.49	13.6	13.39	14.13	12.31	11.79	11.85	11.39	12.38	12.2
Percent local calls:	34.41	32.31	42.58	49.56	46.29	45.29	42.53	45.67	45.01	44.4	43.28	42.01
Total call minutes:	9744	10424	12922	16023	14944	14698	14214	13142	11578	11149	11571	12149

Online Usage:

Web Sessions:	1327	1009	1115	1322	1222	2845	5329	5669	5526	6115	6054	6036
NFB-NEWSLINE Mobile Sessions:	300	309	374	401	382	378	308	300	271	73	40	37
NFB-NEWSLINE Alexa Sessions:	4	22	84	72	9	21						
In Your Pocket Deliveries:	1705	1037	1459	1495	1637	1656	1603	2371	2281	2462	2458	1774
NLS DTB Deliveries :	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			
Podable Deliveries:	0	0	0	0	0	0						
Email Deliveries:	292	438	520	496	488	474	406	536	517	525	462	609
Total Online Accesses:	3628	2815	3552	3786	3738	5374	7646	8876	8595	9175	9114	8456

Total Content Accesses:

Content Frequency:	10	10.8	8.93	8.49	8.68	8.46	8.76	7.53	7.93	8.02	7.45	8.19
Nebraska Newspapers:	3032	3490	5011	3927	4054	3951	3649	4153	3797	3566	3709	41.36
Nebraska Local Channels:	43	48	60	53	60	39	34	33	48	32	30	45
Local Weather & Emergency Alerts:	151	165	149	170	171	187	177	168	138	185	183	216
National Newspapers	528	497	639	583	609	775	1306	1364	1334	1306	1379	1312
International Newspapers:	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	5	0	4
My Newspaper:	48	41	87	69	65	80	89	78	54	59	50	74
Breaking News Online	61	92	66	65	70	73	78	79	52	67	82	69
Nmagazines:	101	63	39	33	45	34	37	27	47	25	40	24
TV Listings				609	528	478	482	532	476	432	495	561

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.

Director Serván noted that NCBVI currently has an appeal and a formal hearing is scheduled for April 8. The details of this case are confidential and cannot be discussed at this time.

NEW BUSINESS

Date/Time/Location/Focus Topics for 2021 Board meetings

The commissioners discussed the dates, times, locations and Focus Topics for the remaining 2021 Commission Board meetings. All of the meetings are scheduled to begin at 9:00 a.m.

The following was decided upon by the commissioners:

Saturday, May 1, Kearney, Nebraska. There will be a 15-minute Focus Topic on the Role of the Deputy Director of Services. The Annual Evaluation of the Executive Director will also be held.

Friday, August 6, Lincoln, Nebraska. The Focus Topic will be the Role of the Deputy Director of Finances and the Business Office.

Saturday, November 6, Omaha, Nebraska. The Focus Topic will be The Nebraska Business Enterprise Program (NBE).

Public Comment

Jim Jirak – Jim reported that the website for the vaccination sign up is accessible as he was able to sign up with no issues.

Cheryl Livingston – Cheryl asked if the public will be able to continue to participate in NCBVI Commission meetings from home when the meetings so back to in-person attendance.

Director Serván stated that NCBVI will need to comply with the Nebraska Open Meeting Act when the Governor's Executive Order for holding virtual meetings expires. Director Serván noted that there is currently legislation for a bill relating to virtual conferencing. LB83 would change certain sections of the Nebraska Open Meeting Act as it relates to virtual conferencing.

Donna Faust Amen noted that she would like to know when the hearing on this bill is scheduled.

Final Announcements

Director Serván thanked the commissioners for their support.

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 May 1, 2021 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

Staff Quarterly Reports for January 30, 2021 Commission Board Meeting

Lincoln District Activity Report – Connie Daly

Our district did not fill the Rehabilitation Counselor II position due to COVID-19. We want to make sure that they get the full Center experience. Staff have been carrying larger caseloads to help out.

Julie Thompson and Greg DeWall have partnered to launch a support group for the Older Blind over Zoom. They meet on the third Wednesday of the month at 6:00 p.m..

We have held two sessions of Zooming Towards Employment. This is a Zoom meeting to discuss business contacts that we have made. Resources have been shared such as power points and marketing videos that counselors can use as they contact employers. Counselors share one new contact that they have made and a follow up contact to employers that we already have a relationship with. Each contact is put in a statewide spreadsheet to start to build a database. We are planning to customize the employer module in AWARE so that we have a tool for counselors to use as we strengthen our placement efforts.

We had two clients get jobs as cashiers and one client get a job as a teacher.

Transition Programs

We had Winnerfest in November. The focus was on self-advocacy and communication from Dale Carnegie. Sky's the Limit provided training on writing skills and self-advocacy.

Transition Saturdays are once a month over Zoom. It is so exciting to be able to offer this statewide. Counselors have been very creative in developing programs. They have made no bake cookies, completed assessments on Virtual Job Shadow and set personal goals for 2021.

We will work with Low Vision Logic to provide training to Pre-Ets clients on how to effectively use low vision and when you may need to use other methods.

Omaha District Activity Report – Nancy Flearl

We have been short of staff in the Omaha Office, but the team has been working hard to support one another. I also appreciate that the Lincoln District has assisted with some training and referrals.

We have several individuals anxious to start the center and the center is doing remote training with these individuals. We have several other consumers planning 3-day stays. I also want to acknowledge the support of the Center staff as well.

We have continued to work with employers to assist clients in their job search and to develop Work based Learning Experiences. They have valued the month calls where they check in and share information on their placement activities. Staff have continued to work with EmployOma and business services with Heartland Workforce Solutions.

This Quarter we have placed individuals as a software developer and as a para-professional. We have several teenagers doing Work based learning Experiences.

Staff have been working on committees regarding agency programs. Adrienne and Kelly with transition services. Adrienne on the planning committee for Winnerfest and Tim working with the zoom to employment calls with VR counselors statewide. Larry Oleson continues to work with the OCIO on resolving technology issues that staff have encountered.

Several staff attended NCSAB and Dare to be Remarkable training this fall. These were excellent training opportunities for staff.

I have touched base with each of the Consumer Groups: Omaha Council of the Blind, National Federation of the Blind and Omaha Association of the Blind) to keep our resource updated regarding the contact information and how we can work together in partnership. We have continue to work in support of the NBE program as we navigate these difficult times.

North Platte District Activity Report – Erin Brandyberry

Networking: (Include any instances where you networked with employers, service agencies, schools, potential clients, etc.)

Angie has been networking with a vision clinic to arrange an in-service on NCBVI services one in person services resume. Ashley participated in the Dawson County twice monthly Inter-Agency Meetings, as well as networked with school professionals as she establishes relationships in her service area. Fritz has attended the monthly interagency meetings in North Platte, as well as monthly Elder meetings. Cristal is an active member of Employ Kearney and has attended many IEPs during this quarter. Cristal has done employer outreach with CPI-Hastings, Goodwill in Grand Island, YRTC Kearney, and CHI hospital in Kearney. Erin has attended Employ North Platte meetings, OIB-TAC monthly meetings for OIB program managers, and monthly regional meetings for OIB program managers.

Projects: (Include any information on special projects that you worked on that go above the typical work you do each day with your clients.)

Cristal presented at the NCSAB conference with David DeNotarias and Eileen Rivera-Ley regarding the exciting programs NCBVI has held this past year. Aaron has been a part of the team to test the accessibility of WebEx. Ashley was on the committee who put on a very successful Fall 2020 Winterfest. In effort to be creative in providing services to clients during this difficult time, Fritz met with the director of a nursing home to teach about magnifiers and lend a couple of demo items so that she could help while clients are in isolation. Angie is the chair of the Destination Employment virtual training for VR clients, and Erin and Cristal also serve on this committee for our district. Angie is active in the Transition Saturday Committee, and Aaron Sands was a guest presenter at the meeting in January. Angie and Cristal are involved in the committees for job expos in their respective areas. Erin presented with Carol Jenkins and NE VR at the “Commissioner Schultz hosts Best Practices in Nebraska Showcase” to share about the innovative things that have happened at NCBVI in the past year. Erin and Angie have been working closely with the new NBE vendor as she launched her business this past quarter. Erin has been working on the new NCBVI Website and a NCBVI brochure to cover all services. Erin collected data for the 7OB and worked with Kat Carroll in compiling and submitting the report. Erin worked with the business office for AWARE training and reviewing and implement best practices for the agency.

Erin participated in the Greater Nebraska Workforce Development board meeting and serves on the Strategic Planning Committee. Erin developed a tool for counselors to use in getting their clients motivated and setting goals for resuming visits in the hopefully near future. Erin worked with members of NCBVI to create a presentation that will be given live virtually to all participants at the NDE Transition Conference in February.

Training: (Include information on any trainings you attended during the time period.)

Erin, Ashley, Cristal, Fritz, and Angie attended NCSAB. All North Platte district staff attended the Dare to be Remarkable Conference. The North Platte district has been incorporating team building activities monthly as we have a new team dynamic with our new teammates who joined us in 2020. Erin attended CSAVR, the Vision Serve Alliance Excellence in Learning Conference, and several webinars.

Client Outcomes: (Include information about client outcomes such as employment, clients attending programs, clients graduating from school, etc.)

Cristal established a WBLE at Good Samaritan Hospital in Kearney and had two clients take a virtual tour of the Nebraska Center for the Blind. Angie had a client gain employment at Family Dollar.

Center Activity Report – Greg DeWall

Currently: Four Students in the apartments

Three students are VR

One Student is Older Blind

There are currently no staff trainees.

Due to a spike in local COVID-19 cases, there were no 3-day stays this quarter.

There has been no mini meals.

There were no commencement meals.

Three virtual tours with agency consumers.

Observations: There were no observations this quarter.

No volunteer activities this quarter.

Students did participate in their own self-directed Thanksgiving feast. In efforts to minimize the number of people gathered together while working remotely, the students planned and executed a Thanksgiving feast where they gathered with each other in the apartments. This activity was done with the use of the learning shades.

Guest Speakers: Throughout this quarter, students have participated in remote learning activities. This includes employment readiness workshops with Mike Hess, at Blind IT; participating on panels at Dare to be Remarkable; and listening in on different meetings such as, how to use braille in around the home and the monthly Blind Seniors of Nebraska zoom call.

Center Staff: Center staff are currently commuting to the apartments to work with students. Due to a recent spike in COVID-19 cases, in efforts to minimize exposure, we are only having the staff commute. Currently the staff are rotating days of working in the apartments and working with students remotely. Each day, Mike is bringing in a different student to work with one-on-one in the shop. Although the staff prefer to be in the Center and working from their offices, they are happy

to still be providing services and are finding some positive pieces to working with students from the apartments. Staff have also participated in speaking with Master's level students at San Diego State and consultants such as Dr. Fred Schroeder. These conversations revolve around analyzing the efficacy of the Center, as well as result in suggestions for moving forward.

Center Supervisor: I have been trying to find a silver lining during this pandemic. Recognizing that tools and procedures that have surfaced throughout this COVID-19 phase, I see this as an appropriate time for the Center to evolve. With the support of Carlos and Carol, I am looking forward to consulting with others in the Rehabilitation field and implementing ideas to keep the Nebraska Center for the Blind modern. This includes working with respected professionals as Dr. Fred Schroeder, networking and sharing ideas with other centers across the country, and attending trainings and conferences.

Additional Notes: In efforts to minimize exposure, staff have been commuting to the apartments. Since November, students have been receiving training in their apartments and around down town. Due to the staffs flexibility and professionalism, we are effectively providing a high-bread of remote and one-on-one in person training.

The Center currently has four 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 in a safe space.

The total number of students attending the Center does not include staff trainees because they do not 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.

Nebraska Business Enterprise Activity Report – Eric Buckwalter

VENDING SITE UPDATE

Nebraska Department of Transportation

Credit card readers have been installed on the rest areas in the eastern and western part of the state. The readers in the central part of the state (Grand Island and Kearney) were scheduled to be installed in mid-January. After this, all Interstate 80 rest areas will have credit card readers on vending machines.

US STRATCOM Cafeteria and Vending

Cafeteria services continue to be offered in accordance with what is allowed within STRATCOM COVID-19 restrictions and policies. The cafeteria has started adding Daily Specials for breakfast and lunch; these are popular items. Vending services continue as well.

Nebraska State Patrol

Work continues to establish vending services at the new Nebraska State Patrol building in northeast Lincoln. It is expected that this site will be operational in early 2021.

DHHS-Omaha

Work continues to develop NBE's first micro market site a DHHS building in Omaha. This site has been awarded to a blind vendor. Installation for this site will begin the third week of January.

VA-Lincoln

The new VA CBOC building in Lincoln is ahead of schedule. The building is scheduled to open in March of 2021. NBE will be working to install vending machines and secure a blind vendor for this location.

NBE LICENSEE UPDATE

Currently, there are 14 licensed vendors operating vending facilities. There are two trainees in the vending program, both operating facilities.

VENDING SITE COMPLAINTS

Vending site complaints that have come into NCBVI this quarter include reports of vendors not returning customer contacts about money lost in machines and complaints about untidy vending areas. NBE Vendors were reminded that NCBVI holds all of the contracts with various facilities, and licensees are representing themselves, other licensees, other blind vendors, and NCBVI statewide.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Credit Card Readers

NBE staff and its contractor(s) continue to work on installing credit card readers on machines across the state; where allowed and applicable. It is the goal to have all credit card readers installed by early 2021. There has been some delay in this project due to COVID-19.

Seed Cashless Plus

NBE continues to explore a possible trial of the Seed Cashless Plus vending management tool. Seed Cashless Plus allows vendors to track inventory and other aspects of their machines remotely. Credit card readers need to be installed before a trial can take place. Two vendors have been identified to run this possible trial.

Worker's Compensation Group Policy

Carol Jenkins worked with Nebraska Risk Management to explore having the blind vendors have a NBE group Worker's Compensation policy to once again lessen the costs for blind vendors. There was a presentation on Worker's Compensation during the NBE Meeting on 12/4/2020. The Blind Vendor's Committee voted to have all vendor's Worker's Compensation insurance paid for through unassigned funds. The policy is in the process of being finalized and will be implemented in January.

NBE VENDOR AND NCBVI STAFF TRAINING

Operator Agreements

NBE is working to update licensee Operator Agreements, which will include the newly approved Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) operator agreement. These will be distributed to vendors for signatures in January and February.

LOOKING AHEAD

With the purchase and installation of new machines, NBE staff will be placing an emphasis on clean, well maintained, and properly faced machines. Training on these items will be provided on an as needed basis.

NBE Staff are also working on creating a NBE Handbook and facility inspection document.

Business Office Activity Report – Kat Carroll

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

- Completed all Federal reports for FFY 2020, including SF-425s for Basic Support for FFY 20 and 19 Supported Employment A & B grants for FFY 19 and 20, and for OIB; RSA 2 for FFY 20; 7-OB for FFY 20; and the RSA 15 is pending an error correction in the calculation of one section by RSA and will be submitted by the deadline this Friday 1/15/2021.
- Closed out the Federal Fiscal Year ended 09/30/2020 and began the new Federal Fiscal Year ending 09/30/2021.
- Hired a new Accountant I. Nicole Amen comes to us from Bryan Health Systems. Training is going well on E1, OnBase and Federal, State and NCBVI policies and procedures.
- Reclassified the second front desk position and recruited for a new full time Accounting Clerk I. An offer is pending. Ensured coverage at the front desk while the position has been vacant since the end of October.
- Designed a new Internal Budget Report for FFY 2021 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.
- Spent down remaining FFY 2019 Basic Support Grant, and filed final reports to close them.
- Continuing training of staff on Period of Performance Federal rules to ensure all expenses are coded to the correct grants.

Kathy Stephens –

The 2020 Annual Report was completed and sent to the Governor and the senators. It is on file with the Unicameral.

Worked on updates to the NCBVI Website.

Worked on and distributed new Business Cards for staff with our new logo.

Sent letters of congratulations to new state senators and re-elected state senators.

I made arrangements for staff to attend the NBE Sagebrush Conference and the Dare to Be Remarkable Conference.

Attended the Emergency NCBVI Commission meeting to appoint additional Impartial Hearing Officers to NCBVI.