

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Public Meeting, Saturday, November 6, 2021
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, Chair of the Board of Commissioners, called the meeting to order at 9:02 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.

Staff present: Carlos Serván, Executive Director; Carol Jenkins, Deputy Director of Services; Connie Daly, Lincoln District Supervisor; Kat Carroll, Deputy Director of Finance; Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Technician.

Public present: Ryan Osentowski, Omaha; Jim Jirak, Omaha

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

Approval of the July 30, 2021 public meeting minutes.

Commissioner Newman moved to approve the Minutes of the July 30, 2021 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Scherbarth seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. Commissioners Rieken, Newman, Heyen and Scherbarth voted in favor of the motion. Chair Bulger abstained.

Report from the Commissioners

Commissioner Robert Newman – Robert reported that he spent two days attending the NCBVI State Staff meeting in September. He has also been involved in several NFB related activities. Robert noted that he is the President of the Friends of the Commission and they had their quarterly meeting last Tuesday. In attendance at this meeting were members of the Friends of the Commission and the Leadership Team and supervisors from NCBVI. The Friends of the Commission keep working on obtaining grants for NCBVI. At this meeting, they talked about areas that the Friends of the Commission should focus on in obtaining grants. It was agreed that the Friends of the Commission will begin working on obtaining grants for technology needs and such for Independent Living (I.L.) and Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB). The Friends of the Commission did obtain \$71,500 for Project Independence (P.I.) to date.

Commissioner Becky Rieken – Becky reported that she continues working with blind and low vision students. She also noted that some of her past students have been offering mentoring for her current students.

Executive Secretary Brent Heyen – Brent reported that he continues representing blind people in the hospitality industry. He is currently coaching a blind person who is interested in working in the hotel/hospitality industry.

Vice Chair Kimberly Scherbarth – Kimberly reported that she has been participating in NFB activities and working with NFB Newsline. Kimberly noted that at her job is Disability Services, she has been meeting with their Equity and Compliance office along with their I.T. Department in Omaha on a weekly basis and they have been visiting websites that they frequently visit and evaluating accessibility. They are also evaluating forms and such that are being used on Campus to determine what accessibility improvements are needed. Kimberly noted that she is hoping to see some improvements in accessibility.

Chair Mark Bulger – Mark announced that the ACB of Nebraska has scheduled their State Convention for 2022. The convention will be held on Saturday, April 23, 2022 at a location to be determined in Omaha. At this time, it will be an in-person event. Mark also announced that ACB of Nebraska will be the host committee for the ACB National Conference which will be held in Omaha at the Hilton Hotel and the CHI Convention Center. The Conference will be held July 1-8, 2022. Mark noted that there will be individuals from all across the country coming to this Conference so it will be a big event. They have been meeting weekly to prepare. Mark also reported that he has been attending monthly meetings with the Omaha Association of the Blind (OAB).

Focus Topic: Job duties of the Deputy Director of Finance and the Business Office.

Kat Carroll, Deputy Director of Finances, presented the Focus Topic.

Overview

Under the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) Executive Director's supervision, the NCBVI Deputy Director of Finance performs complex administrative, managerial, and supervisory work within a major statewide rehabilitation services program and reports directly to the NCBVI Executive Director. The scope of responsibility for the NCBVI Deputy Director of Finance includes overseeing and directing a statewide full-service support department for all NCBVI programs and services. This includes Federal Reporting Quarterly, Semi-annually and Annually, Accounting, Accounts Receivable, Accounts Payable, Authorization, Budget, Clerical, Client Supply, Contracts, Procurement, Reception, reporting to a variety of constituents, Transportation Scheduling, and other duties as assigned. The NCBVI Deputy Director of Finance is also required to have a knowledge base in the Rehabilitation Act, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Randolph-Sheppard Act, Code of Federal Regulations, Education Department General Accounting Regulations, and IDEA, NCBVI policies, procedures and rules as well as possess excellent organizational, managerial, leadership, and supervisory skills and have the ability to delegate responsibilities for maximum operational efficiency.

General Job Duties

The NCBVI Deputy Director of Finance has, but are not limited to, the following work duties:

1. Directs the business office, which includes the supervision of four staff members.

- a. Accountant II who codes all accounts payable to the correct federal, state or private funding source, and approves the payments in E1, coding accounts receivable, enters fixed assets into E1 to ensure the correct inventory can be certified annually, handles all contracts for the Agency, prepares complex purchase orders, Reviews all Federal reports prior to submission, runs reports from E1 and prepares the reports to the intended use/user by arranging the data in an accessible format, and answers questions for Agency staff and external parties.
 - b. Accountant I reviews payment documents to ensure the information is accurate and complete and that the goods/services have been received, reviews coding for payables and receivables and enters into E1, prepares and maintains various spreadsheets for analysis of data, runs reports from E1 for management, board and others as needed, generates purchase orders for goods and services, sorts and files documents both electronically and on paper for future retrieval as needed.
 - c. Two Accountant I's who run the Front Desk, greeting visitors and staff, answering phone calls, scheduling drivers and cars for agency staff and clients, maintains client supply items so they are available as needed, works extensively in AWARE preparing Authorizations, recording payments, scanning and attaching documentation, closing Authos, does most purchasing for Agency staff and clients, logs purchases as received and delivered to the appropriate person, and other duties as assigned. One project that was recently completed was to order new signage for the Lincoln NCBVI office. Signage was placed on the door that goes into the office on the east side and on the wall behind them between the two windows. The signage for the front door contains the new logo for NCBVI along with our address and office hours. The signage on the back wall contains the new logo. The signage was so very well received and they are now ordering signage for the Deterrence Diner at Offutt and for the Omaha office. We will also be putting signage on the door to the West end of the Lincoln offices.
2. Serves on the NCBVI Leadership Team and confers with the Executive Director, Human Resources, Deputy Director of Services, Nebraska Center for the Blind Supervisor and District Supervisors to support the work of the agency and plan future changes
 3. Works closely with the NCBVI Executive Director and NCBVI Deputy Director of Services in the preparation of the annual budget and monitors all fiscal expenditures for the statewide rehabilitation services and the NBE program.
 4. Advises the NCBVI Executive Director on policy making, along with all matters concerning the delivery of services and budget, including the Rehabilitation Act, IDEA, Transition Services, Technology services, Randolph-Sheppard Act, Deaf-Blind program, Independent Living program, and Older Blind program.
 5. Assumes the duties of the NCBVI Executive Director or Deputy Director of Services in his or her absence as requested.
 6. Develops, implements, and trains staff members on policies and procedures for allowability of expenditures and compliance with the Rehabilitation Act, Randolph-Sheppard Act, and other state regulations; as well as training to address staff needs.
 7. Interprets, trains, and advises on financial issues pertaining to the Rehabilitation Act, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Randolph-Sheppard Act, Social Security work incentives, and Medicaid and Medicare rules for counselors, consumers, and other stakeholders statewide.
 8. Interviews, recommends for hire, completes performance evaluations, mentors, and disciplines staff, and serve as a mediator to resolve internal staff conflicts.
 9. Works on the quality assurance of financial reports and information for NCBVI.

10. Works with federal partners to gain Prior Approval as required.
11. Completes various Federal Financial reports quarterly, semi-annually, and annually, including:
 - a. SF-425 for VR semi-annually, and annually for OIB, Supported Employment A, Supported Employment B.
 - b. RSA 17 quarterly for VR FFY 2021 and future. This report replaced the RSA 2 (annual) and the SF-425 (semi-annually) for VR with the last Federal Fiscal Year.
 - c. RSA 7-OB for OIB annually.
 - d. RSA-15 for NBE annually.
 - e. SF-425 for NBE Financial Relief and Restoration Payments (FRRP).
12. Completes the State Biennium Budget Request every two years, prepares information for the Appropriation Committee Hearing, and attends the hearing with the Executive Director and Deputy Director of Services, as well as other staff and clients.
13. Completes Annual budget reports for the State Budget Office, internal reports, and entry into E1, and monitors the budget daily/monthly.
14. Tracks various grants and informs staff of the availability of various sources of funds.
15. Tracks Social Security Reimbursements to ensure that funds are spent before other federal funds are drawn down.
16. Liaison with the State Auditors for the annual Single Audit.
17. Liaison with the State Auditors for the annual Pre-Audit review.
18. Liaison with other Auditors as needed.
19. Liaison with RSA all financial matters and questions, including Prior Approval for expenditures, questions, Monitoring, etc.

Summary

NCBVI's mission statement is, "Empowering blind individuals, promoting opportunities, and building belief in the blind." The Deputy Director of Finance has the honor and privilege to play a major role in taking NCBVI's mission statement to raise expectations through providing maximum opportunities to change the lives of blind Nebraskans.

Chair Bulger thanked Kat for her report and he thanked her for including NCBVI's Mission Statement in her summary. Chair Bulger noted that it is important that we all remember what our role is.

Discussion of maintenance of files on the secure FTP server.

Chair Bulger asked for an update on the purpose of the secure FTP server.

Director Serván noted that the purpose of the secure FTP server was to obtain a means for information among commissioners to be more easily shared. Director Serván noted that Larry Oleson worked with the OCIO to get the secure FTP server set up for the commissioners to use. The site was set up to replace the thumb drive system. Larry had tested the system and he stated that it was accessible.

Chair Bulger stated that since NCBVI will be adding two new board members to the Commission in 2022, it might be good to have an additional orientation to the system so the commissioners can refresh themselves on how to use the system.

Commissioner Newman noted that there are not many updates each month. The main things that need to be updated on a regular basis are the financial/budget reports that they receive from the Business office, the motions that are made at each Commission meeting, and the Commission meeting minutes. There are also other documents that need to be uploaded on a as need be basis. At this time, the commissioners need to determine who will upload documents to the secure FTP server as needed.

Vice Chair Scherbarth volunteered to be the one responsible for uploading documents to the secure FTP server. Vice Chair Scherbarth noted that she might need some additional training on uploading documents. Vice Chair Scherbarth stated that she would reach out to Larry Oleson for additional training if needed.

Commissioner Heyen noted that he had not been accessing the secure FTP server and now his access has been revoked. Commissioner Heyen reported that he is working on getting his access reinstated.

Kathy Stephens noted that after the July 30 Commission meeting she uploaded everything from Commissioner Newman's thumb drive onto the secure FTP server. Therefore, at that time, everything should have been current.

The commissioners thanked Commissioner Scherbarth for volunteering to upload the documents to the secure FTP server.

Public Comment

Ryan Osentowski – Ryan thanked Carlos Serván and Jeff Scheer for coming to Jane Nielson's retirement reception. Ryan noted that Jane will be retiring at the end of the year as the Executive Director of Radio Talking Book and Bekah Jerde will assume her position.

Ryan thanked Commissioner Newman for his many years of service as a NCBVI commissioner. Ryan noted that Commissioner Newman was the first independent blind adult he met and that he was a very positive role model.

Ryan also thanked Commissioner Rieken for her many years of service as a NCBVI commissioner.

Jim Jirak – Jim stated that he feels that NCBVI is becoming complacent by not having today's meeting in person. He would like to see the NCBVI Commission Board meetings be in person going forward.

Chair Bulger noted that he shares the same hopes to have meetings in person. However, with the up-tick of the virus in the community and amongst NCBVI staff they felt it was necessary to have today's meeting virtual.

Jim Jirak thanked Robert Newman and Becky Rieken for their years of service as a NCBVI commissioner.

Nancy Flearl – Nancy thanked Robert and Becky their service as a NCBVI commissioner and for all they have done in helping blind adults and children.

Break – No break was taken.

Report from the Executive Director

I. Administration

As a result of several years of building relationships with the public education system and the Nebraska Department of Education, I was invited to be part of the Statewide Special Education Council and Carol Jenkins will be on the Nebraska Transition Committee. Being active participants in these two groups will help NCBVI to continue building a partnership with the public schools in Nebraska so we can reach out blind students much earlier. LB-527 was passed earlier this year and it mandates that transition services should start at fourteen-years-old rather than sixteen in Nebraska. However, advocates who helped introduce this Bill wrote the incorrect Section of the Rule, the one that governs Developmental Disability Services, rather than Rule 51 which governs Special Education. As a result, some special education districts don't feel like they need to start implementing this new law because of the wrong section. It is expected that advocates will help to introduce an amendment to fix this issue, and; starting August 2022 all special education services in Nebraska need to comply. This will give special education teachers an extra year to get ready to refer students to NCBVI at 14-years-old rather than 16.

The Nguyen, who is a Research Assistant from Texas Tech University and Dr. Laura Bozeman from the School for Global Inclusion and Social Development/University of Massachusetts, came to video Jeff Altman teaching cane travel to students for a research project. This is intended to help them understand how to assist blind students to become successful O&M Instructors.

We continue working with the OCIO on WebEx which is being used by all state employees and not being accessible to the blind. The ADA Task Force is also following this issue with us. We are contracting with Curtis Chong, a blind accessibility technology expert, to work with developers so WebEx and the HHSS portal can be accessible.

I was nominated President Elect of NCSAB and elections will be at the business meeting at the Fall/Winter conference in December.

During the last quarter, I attended virtual meetings with the Statewide Special Education Council, the Nebraska Transition Committee, the WIOA partners, the State WIOA Board, the Olmstead State Steering Committee, the Olmstead Advisory Committee, the Olmstead Education and Employment Committee, the NCSAB Executive Committee monthly meetings, and the CSAVR Fall conference. Several of our staff members, including myself, attended the open house at Radio Talking Book Services on October 29, and the Enrichment Foundation reception on November 3.

The Friends of the Commission received grants totaling \$71,500 for Project Independence (PI). \$21,500 is for this year and \$50,000 will be for the next two years. A NCBVI committee will work on coordinating these programs.

We continue to work on the corrective action plan for RSA. The quarterly report was due on October 29. Kat has been working on writing policies for this section. The Federal reports were also completed.

The Year-End fixed assets inventory was completed and sent to Administrative Services before the August 31, 2021 deadline.

It has been challenging being short of staff in Omaha, Lincoln, the Center and the business office. However, the agency team helps each other when needed in all areas.

Comparing client statistics for the last two fiscal years:

VR: For FFY 2021: 477, FFY 2020: 471

We successfully closed 32 clients in FFY 2021. In FFY 2020, we closed 28 clients

For OIB: FFY 2021: 489, FFY 2020: 437

IL: For FFY 2021: 86, FFY 2020: 77

Pre-ETS: FFY 2021 112 students, FFY 2020 105.

We had clients get jobs as:

Art Teacher (Postsecondary)
Automotive Service Technician/Mechanic
Cartographer/Photogrammetrist
Cashier
Cook (Fast Food)
Customer Service Representative
Dining Room/Cafeteria/Bartender Helper
Educational/Guidance/Vocational Counselor
Elementary School Teacher, Food Prep Worker
Healthcare Social Worker
Human Resource Assistant
Janitor/Cleaner
Library Assistant
Mental Health Counselor (2)
Personal Care Aide
Property/Real Estate Manager
Randolph-Sheppard Vending Operator (5)
Receptionist/Information Clerk
Rehabilitation Counselor
Sales Representative
Secondary School Teacher
Social Worker
Software Developer
Special Education Teacher (secondary school)
Teaching Assistant-Special Education
Veterinarian.

II. Human Resources

Jeff Scheer completed his Center training the week of October 18 and he is now working in the Lincoln District. Julie Thompson gave her notice of resignation and her last day was October 5. We are in the process to rehire for this position.

Jessica Bartenbach started working for us on August 8. Jessica was in training for few weeks and is now supervising the Center. Shane Buresh started to be the Braille instructor at the Training Center on August 15. The Business Office interviewed candidates and the job was offered to Tammie Dunn, who will start working for us on Monday November 8.

We had our State Staff meeting September 21-23 via Zoom. The leadership team and the supervisors had a retreat, in which we got training from Michael Hingson on team building. We read the book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, by Patrick Lencioni. As a result, State Personnel will provide further training in this area and it will be expanded to all staff.

III. Field Services

Field staff continues networking with stakeholders all over the State to build trusting relationships, and thus, find training and placement opportunities. Some of them are being part of Project Search, WIOA Local Boards, NCECBVI Vision Partners meetings, retirement homes, clubs, youth programs, and business to mention a few.

The Lincoln District was finally able to celebrate Cheryl Livingston's retirement. It was well attended. We are contracting with Larry Mackey to assist us in the Norfolk area until we hire someone for that OC position.

Lincoln had two students that had Work Based Learning Experiences this summer be asked back to their jobs this fall at a daycare and at the Lincoln Children's Museum. The Lincoln District team hopes to resume group home teachings and other group activities to help clients continue to reach their goals.

In Omaha, with school back in session, they have been in contact with the Special Ed Directors about scheduling meetings with their transition and teachers of the visually impaired. Many are electing to meet later in the year, as there are so many variables that they are all navigating these days. Several IEPs have been scheduled.

Staff members are visiting some nursing homes recruiting OIB clients and with the idea of creating VIPS support groups. Staff continue to increase services to clients with developmental disabilities.

Aaron Sands provided Mac training to members of the NCBVI team and provided a technology presentation to the Kearney VIPS group. Erin Brandyberry coordinated the final Low Vision Logic programs with Blind Savvy USA which were for OIB, IL, and VR clients. Erin Brandyberry has received training throughout this time from the OIB Technical Assistance Center.

The NCBVI staff members are also looking forward at the Transition Conference in February and planning the topic we will be presenting on to staff that work across the State that provide transition services.

IV. Training Center

The Center currently has seven students. We have five VR clients and two Pre-ETS eligible students. We do not currently have any OIB clients. There are two students on the waiting list. One scheduled to begin in January and the other is waiting for arrangements to be made to accommodate medical conditions.

One staff trainee, Jeff Scheer, completed his training on October 20. The other staff trainee, Nicole Gothier, the Home Management instructor, is participating in some immersion training since she, like several other staff, were hired just before COVID caused a switch to telework. She will resume her teaching responsibilities in December.

Jessica Bartenbach was hired as the Training Center Supervisor on August 16, 2021 and completed four weeks of immersion training. Mike Rains was temporary supervisor from July 2-September 10. He and Carol Jenkins did a wonderful job keeping the Center running in the absence of a permanent supervisor.

Jessica assumed her supervisory responsibilities on September 13. The Center is now fully staffed. We are glad that Jeff Altman is working full-time without additional support. Nancy Coffman went on medical leave on October 18 and is expected to be out for up to six weeks.

On September 14, the Center had a visit from the National Blindness Professional Certification Board. These visits occur every three years and evaluators come to make sure that the Center is continuing to use Structured Discovery methods, have high expectations for students, and a positive philosophy about blindness. The evaluators spend time observing each class, speaking with teachers, students, and administrators, and submit their observations and recommendations in a report. The Center was re-certified for another three years. Nebraska is one of only six centers in the United States approved by the National Blindness Professional Certification Board.

The Center will be working to implement many of the suggestions that Dr. Edward Bell and Mr. Curtis Chong made in their report. These include having staff participate in quarterly conference calls with their counterparts at other Structured Discovery training centers, contracting with Gemini Research and Training to have trainers work individually with staff on continually improving and enhancing their teaching methods, encouraging and supporting staff to obtain and maintain certification through the National Blindness Professional Certification Board, and updating technology. We will also be working on succession planning and hope to be able to hire and train replacements for staff who plan to retire in the next few years.

Jamie Richey is contracting with the agency to teach Home Management class while Nicole is in training.

There have been three tours of the Center.

The cabinets in the Home Management class were replaced with new ones.

Center students also participated in Destination Employment parts 3 and 4, focusing on elevator speeches and disclosing blindness to a future employer. Students continue to lead seminars weekly with staff assistance.

While staff attended the statewide staff meeting in September, Jamie and Jeremy Richey worked with the Center students on a variety of activities. These included a scavenger hunt downtown. Students walked and rode the downtown trolley and located several businesses. Students also learned about accessible card and board games, how to mark their own games, which ones are accessible right out of the box, and sources for games that have been adapted to be accessible.

V. Nebraska Business Enterprise

Federal contracts:

The Drug Enforcement Administration's new office in north Omaha will have three machines spread across two breakrooms. The bidding process for this site has completed; and an Operator has been chosen to service this site. This site is expected to begin operation in the next several weeks.

NBE is waiting to hear about two other possible locations with the GSA opening in 2022.

State Contracts:

The new DHHS office in Columbus is now open. A Crane 186 and a Vend 621 have been installed at this location. NBE currently does not have a Vendor in this area; the site is being subcontracted to Valley Vending Service.

The Omaha State Office Building has decided not to pursue placing vending machines on the first and third floor. Vending will remain on the second floor only.

Due to construction, the second floor vending room in the State Capital building will be closed for the foreseeable future. Vending will remain on the first floor.

COVID-19 UPDATE

All vending sites serviced by NBE Operators are open to some degree. Some sites are completely open and all staff are back working in the building. Some sites are at partial capacity due to work from home options and/or construction. Operators have been encouraged to see their current building numbers as their potential 'new normal.

NBE held a virtual retreat for all licensed vendors and trainees on September 9-11.

Chair Bulger thanked Director Serván for his report. He noted that NCBVI had another productive and meaningful quarter. Chair Bulger noted that approximately 1,000 blind individual's lives are currently being positively impacted by the services that NCBVI provides.

Commissioner Newman inquired about the status of the RSA Commissioner position. He noted that back in May, Director Serván informed the commissioners that he was being considered for the position. Commissioner Newman asked if a person has been chosen yet. Director Serván reported that he and another person are being considered for the position; but President Biden has not yet made his decision.

Commissioner Newman noted that he had a question/critique regarding the Executive Director Report. He stated that some of the information in the Executive Director Report is the same

information that they are getting from the supervisors reports. Therefore, in essence, they are receiving some of the information twice. Commissioner Newman stated that he would like to hear more from the Director on items such as trends across the Nation and some broader National information.

Director Serván stated that in the past, the Director did not submit a separate report, but she highlighted items from the supervisor's reports and reported on them during the meeting. Director Serván stated that at one time he asked the Commissioners what they wanted him to report on during the Executive Director's Report and he was informed that he should highlight activities and summarize what was happening at the Commission and in the field, so that is what he is doing. As far as the National Updates, Director Serván stated that he does mention the updates as they come up. However, National Trends in the blindness field do not change that often. Director Serván noted that he is happy to provide the commissioners with the information that they want, but he will need to know exactly what that is.

Commissioner Rieken stated that she thinks it is important to include information from the supervisors reports in the Public meeting. This could be done by simply reading the supervisor's reports, or summarizing and highlighting the information as is currently being done. Commissioner Rieken noted that while the staff reports are included as a part of the Minutes that are published on the NCBVI website, she feels it is important for the information to be shared during the Public meeting.

Chair Bulger stated that he feels that Director Serván provides an Executive Summary of the supervisor's reports, which is a nice executive level overview and he feels it is valuable. Chair Bulger stated that he feels that the Executive Director is providing the information that the Commissioners had asked him to provide. Chair Bulger stated that he will leave it to the Executive Director to determine how to evolve the Executive Director's report.

Chair Bulger stated that he had a couple of questions/comments. About two years ago when NCBVI was having budget issues, the tough decision of closing some of the physical offices was made and those staff began working from their home offices. Chair Bulger asked if there has been any thought about reopening offices throughout the state.

Director Serván stated that they are looking into it. He noted that this affects the North Platte District. They are evaluating opening some physical offices and the impact it would have on the budget. Carol Jenkins will be talking to the supervisors about this.

Commissioner Rieken stated that she likes the idea of having more offices and more access to the agency.

Chair Bulger stated that he enjoys reading about the NBE Vending Program. He is happy to see it grow and he is glad to see vendors making more money. He noted that he is inspired that NCBVI has still been placing clients in jobs during the pandemic. Even though NCBVI had to do some things differently, they are still getting the job done.

Commissioner Heyen noted that Shane Buresh is now teaching Braille in the Center. He inquired as to if NCBVI would be refilling the Transition Coordinator position. Director Serván noted that NCBVI would not refill this position at this time. NCBVI will have staff committees fill that role.

Newsline® Update

Kimberly Scherbarth

NFB Newsline Coordinator for Nebraska

We had a total of 16 new subscribers since June 2021. Online usage, specifically web sessions, have increased over the past few months. 5765 sessions in October, which is the highest this year. This is over 300 sessions more than September 2021 and over 500 more sessions than June 2021. We also saw a dramatic increase in NFB Newsline Mobile sessions; 32 sessions in April with a jump to over 300 in May and gradually increasing to 459 in October. We also saw a decrease in accesses to Nebraska Newspapers dropping from over 3800 in September to just over 3400 in October 2021. Telephone usage remained somewhat consistent, staying around 900-1100 calls each month.

NFB Newsline Stats

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
Number of Subscribers:	2086	2088	2089	2099	2103	2103	2110	2114	2116	2118
New Subscriptions:	3	2	3	2	4	0	4	5	2	5

Telephone Usage:

Total calls:	1137	1058	1028	947	976	1023	918	1002	1013	919
Average call length:	13.45	12.34	11.38	11.74	13.34	12.34	13.63	14.06	13.84	14.21
Percent local calls:	49.07	42.15	37.81	42.1	43.36	39.36	37.14	46.52	36.1	36.46
Total call minutes:	15287	13060	11702	11113	13019	12622	12514	14091	14023	13062

Online Usage:

Web Sessions:	6258	5284	5719	5422	5454	5247	5381	5426	5441	5765
NFB-NEWSLINE Mobile Sessions:	44	58	44	32	349	399	427	460	438	459
NFB-NEWSLINE Alexa Sessions:										
In Your Pocket Deliveries:	1820	1674	1885	1763	1931	1516	1796	1611	1491	1429
NLS DTB Deliveries :										
Podable Deliveries:										
Email Deliveries:	568	556	602	581	582	551	591	556	503	451
Total Online Accesses:	8690	7572	8250	7798	8316	7713	8195	8053	7873	8104

<u>Total Content Accesses:</u>	5341	4967	5472	4975	5549	4951	5150	5184	5124	4751
Content Frequency:	8.36	8.12	8.16	8.68	8.04	8.73	8.67	8.61	843	9.4
Nebraska Newspapers:	4127	3524	3626	3516	4082	3606	3691	3564	3809	3445
Nebraska Local Channels:	32	15	38	40	24	48	39	28	26	41
Local Weather and Emergency Alerts:	185	243	259	224	268	243	228	210	176	172
National Newspapers:	1280	1142	1272	1210	1229	1063	1131	1218	1145	1085
International Newspapers:	5	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
My Newspaper:	85	66	69	73	76	85	55	74	65	55

Breaking News Online	102	122	211	129	171	120	106	134	211	202
Nmagazines:	31	22	41	43	37	49	40	23	43	18
TV Listings	559	517	508	546	440	523	466	586	515	435

Client Assistance Program (CAP) Complaints or issues – Jerry Bryan

Director Serván reported that there was one CAP case this past quarter. NCBVI had provided a piece of technology equipment to a senior blind client and when the Technology staff person went to this person's home, for the second time, the equipment was not working due to extreme heat. The client wanted new technology to replace it. NCBVI could not justify the additional purchase. The supervisor located donated equipment to replace it and the client was then satisfied.

New Business

Date/Time/Location/Focus Topics for 2022 Board meetings

The following dates, times and Focus Topics were decided upon for 2022.

Saturday, February 5 in Lincoln. Focus Topic: The Nebraska Business Enterprise (NBE)
Saturday, May 7 in Kearney. No Focus Topic. The Executive Director Evaluation will be held.
Friday, July 29 in Lincoln. Focus Topic: Transition
Saturday, November 5 in Omaha. Focus Topic: Radio Talking Book

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Final Announcements

Commissioner Newman asked when NCBVI will know who the two new Commission Board members will be.

Director Serván stated that NCBVI has not heard anything yet as the appointments have not yet been made.

Connie Daly thanked Commissioners Newman and Rieken for their service as a commissioner. Connie noted that Robert Newman was her first supervisor at NCBVI and she appreciated the support and mentoring he offered. Connie also noted that she appreciated all the work Becky Rieken did in helping with the NCBVI Summer Programs and she hopes that continues.

Director Serván reported that NCBVI is presenting to Commissioners Newman and Rieken a Certificate of Appreciation for their service. Director Serván stated that he greatly values the support and leadership they provided to him and NCBVI.

Director Serván asked Kathy Stephens to read the Certificates into the record. The original signed Certificates will be mailed to Commissioners Newman and Rieken.

CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

Presented in Gratitude to:

Robert L. Newman

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, 2014 through December 31, 2021

Carlos Servan

Carlos Serván, Executive Director

CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

Presented in Gratitude to:

Becky Rieken

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January 1, 2014 through December 31, 2021

Carlos Servan

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Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:31 a.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the February 5, 2022 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

Staff Quarterly Reports for November 6, 2021 Commission Board Meeting

Lincoln District Activity Report – Connie Daly

We were finally able to celebrate Cheryl Livingston's retirement. It was well attended. Jeff Scheer has finished center training and completed his first few days in the field. Julie Thompson gave her resignation notice. Her last day was October 5th. We wish her well. The position will be rehired in that area. We are contracting with Larry Mackey to assist us in that area.

Lincoln district staff participated in State Staff training. We received some training from Mike Hingson using, "Five Dysfunctions of a Team", by Patrick Lencioni. As a result of that training, the Lincoln District decided to meet weekly to share cases for brainstorming. We found that weekly meetings were too often and we are going to meet weekly. We hope to use the time to build our strength as a team and provide better outcomes for clients.

We had clients become employed as a Groomer, Fund Raising Manager, Janitor, Nursing Assistant and Teacher.

We had two students that had Work Based Learning Experiences this summer be asked back to their jobs this fall at a daycare and at the Lincoln Children's Museum.

Our team hopes to resume group home teachings and other group activities to help clients continue to reach their goals.

Omaha District Activity Report – Nancy Flearl

It has been a busy time for staff as we continue to interview to fill positions for an Orientation Counselor II and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II.

With school back in session, we have been in contact with the Special Ed Directors about scheduling meetings with their transition and teachers of the visually impaired. Many are electing to meet later in the year, as there are so many variables that they are all navigating these days. We have several IEPs on our calendars for October and November.

The schools are starting to hold events for families to learn about transition. Adrienne attended an information night with ESU#3 on October 5.

We have been invited other resource fairs in the upcoming months. I did an interview with RTBN on what is new at NCBVI and shared that we were hiring, but also a wonderful time for people seeking employment as employers are hiring anywhere and if anyone was interested in pursuing employment to contact us.

Kelly has been working with an Elkhorn Retirement Community wanting to start a support group. She has shared the VIPS materials and there is an individual that leads this group. This month Robert Newman and Robert Burns were the guest presenters with that group.

We are busy working with several businesses on job retention cases. Larry has been providing worksite assessments and recommending necessary accommodations. We have several clients' business plans for self-employment.

We have had clients that have gained employment as food service worker, housekeeping. Billing and Accounting Clerk and Customer Service Rep. We have a couple clients with Work based learning sites, and an OJT with an employer.

Tim has continued attending Employ-Oma and other partner meetings working with businesses attending and sharing information about our agency's services.

We have had contact with many of the area service providers of for individuals with developmental disabilities. We have discussed the individuals we are currently working with, but shared that anyone that would want to consider employment in the community that we could work with them. That we would be glad to meet with the individuals their families and/or guardian.

We as an agency are thinking ahead on what our programs will look like for next year and have set up staff to be on the planning committees. Kelly Coleman will be working and assisting with PI and WAGES and Adrienne will be on the committee for Winnerfest.

The NCBVI staff are also looking forward at the Transition Conference in February and planning the topic we will be presenting on to staff that work across the state that provide transition services.

ACB will be holding their National Convention here in Omaha July 1-July 8, 2022. It will be at the downtown Hilton and vendors will have booths in the CHI Convention Center. They have asked with it being in Omaha if NCBVI could be a resource for the planning committee as questions arise.

North Platte District Activity Report – Erin Brandyberry

Networking: Aaron Sands worked with Brandy King, TVI at Fullerton public schools. Fritz provided a training to West Central Area Agency on Aging on NCBVI services and to a Stepping On class in Hastings. Fritz and Aaron Sands providing an in-service at Regency retirement center in Hastings. Cristal and Aaron Sands networked with Michella Honas at the Grand Island project search site. Cristal had employer outreach with cash-way and the buckle. Cristal is active in the project search sites for Kearney, Grand Island, and Hastings. Cristal networked with the Kearney Works organization to arrange a mock interview for a client. Angie networked with Dollar General in Alliance and Regional West Medical Center for employment opportunities for clients. Angie has been working closely with the ESU 13 TVI on new student referrals. Angie provided a Low Vision Fall Prevention workshop. Fritz attends interagency meetings in North Platte, Erin Brandyberry attends Employ NP, Ashley attends Dawson County interagency meeting, Angie attends Employ Panhandle, and Cristal attends Employ Krny and Employ GI. Erin Brandyberry has recently started working with school professionals at Brady Public schools. Erin Brandyberry also worked with the employers Kinkaider and Oak Creek Engineering on job retention cases. Ashley networked with the Branding Iron in Palmer and Agape Medical Staffing for employment opportunities for clients.

Projects: Fritz provided a live radio advertisement for NCBVI on the local North Platte radio station. Fritz also completed a mass mailing to our district's nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

Cristal is the co-coordinator for Employ Kearney meetings. Aaron Sands provided Mac training to members of the NCBVI team and provided a technology presentation to the Kearney VIPS group. Erin Brandyberry coordinated the final Low Vision Logic programs with Blind Savvy USA which were for OIB, IL, and VR clients, and Ashley assisted with working one of the programs. Erin Brandyberry coordinated the state staff agenda and has developed updates the OIB program in accordance with changing federal regulations and provided training to NCBVI staff members. Erin Brandyberry has finished the NCBVI brochure and continues to work on the NCBVI website, which should hopefully be completed by the end of the calendar year.

Training: All district staff participated in the Fall state staff meeting, a meeting with the Eschenbach rep, a training on the updates to the OIB program, and a team building session. Aaron Sands received training from Pat Fischer on Orcam devices and sought out training on the upcoming iOS 15. Cristal and Angie attended NCECBVI's Fall Foliage training on Cortical Visual Impairments. Erin Brandyberry has received training throughout this time period from the OIB Technical Assistance Center.

Client Outcomes:

Cristal had one client gain employment at Walmart and one client gain employment as an independent contractor with Casting Words doing audio transcription. Cristal also had a high school student gain employment from Culver's after completed a Pre-ETS WBLE. Erin Brandyberry had one client gain employment at ASC Capacitors in Ogallala, NE and another client who moved from being on-call to regular employment in a new position at Imperial Manor in the dietary department. Angie had a client who had been doing an OJT at Workforce development the past few months who gained full-time employment at Regional West Medical Center. Angie also had another client gain part-time employment as an activity aid at a nursing home.

Center Activity Report – Jessica Bartenbach

Jessica Bartenbach was hired as the Training Center Supervisor on August 16, 2021 and completed four weeks of immersion training. Mike Rains was temporary supervisor from July 2-September 10. He and Carol Jenkins did a wonderful job keeping the Center running in the absence of a permanent supervisor.

On August 16, Shane Buresh transferred from the Transition Coordinator position to the Braille instructor position at the Center. Jessica assumed her supervisory responsibilities on September 13. The Center is now fully staffed. Jeff Altman is working full-time without additional support. Nancy Coffman went on medical leave on October 18 and is expected to be out for up to 6 weeks.

On September 14, the Center had a visit from the National Blindness Professional Certification Board. These visits occur every three years and evaluators come to make sure that the Center is continuing to use Structured Discovery methods, have high expectations for students, and a positive philosophy about blindness. The evaluators spend time observing each class, speaking with teachers, students, and administrators, and submit their observations and recommendations in a report. The Center was re-certified for another three years. Nebraska is one of only three state-run centers, and one of only six centers in the United States approved by the National Blindness Professional Certification Board. Congratulations to the staff and students who worked hard to make this evaluation a success.

The Center will be working to implement many of the suggestions that Dr. Edward Bell and Mr. Curtis Chong made in their report. These include having staff participate in quarterly conference calls with their counterparts at other Structured Discovery training centers, contracting with Gemini Research and Training to have trainers work individually with staff on continually improving and enhancing their teaching methods, encouraging and supporting staff to obtain and maintain certification through the National Blindness Professional Certification Board, and updating technology. We will also be working on succession planning and hope to be able to hire and train replacements for staff who plan to retire in the next few years.

The Center currently has six students. A seventh student is scheduled to begin training on November 1. Once the new student begins, we will have five VR clients and two Pre-ETS eligible students. We do not currently have any OIB clients. There are two students on the waiting list, one scheduled to begin in January and another is waiting for arrangements to be made to accommodate medical conditions.

There is one staff trainee: Nicole Gothier, the Home Management instructor, is participating in some immersion training since she, like several other staff, were hired just before COVID caused a switch to telework. She will resume her teaching responsibilities in December. Jamie Richey is contracting with the agency to teach Home Management class while Nicole is in training.

Jeff Scheer completed his staff training on October 19 and received his certification as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the Blind. He will be working in the Lincoln District.

There have been three tours of the Center (the last one was scheduled for 10/26) and one three-day stay resulting in a new student beginning training on November 1.

The cabinets were replaced in the Home Management class. This project was estimated to take three days but took nine days. Two cabinet doors were damaged during transit and one cabinet was also damaged. These will be re-ordered and installed. Some painting work will also need to be done in Home Management.

One student and one staff trainee completed mini meals. Drops were also scheduled in October and everyone made it back to the Center. Center students also participated in Destination Employment parts 3 and 4, focusing on elevator speeches and disclosing blindness to a future employer. Students continue to lead seminars weekly with staff assistance.

The Center is in the process of contracting with a different grocery store. There have been issues with Russ's Market, mostly caused by staffing shortages, which have resulted in long waits for students needing assistance. We are working on contracting with HyVee at 50th and O.

While staff attended the statewide staff meeting in September, Jamie and Jeremy Richey worked with the Center students on a variety of activities. These included a scavenger hunt downtown. Students walked and rode the downtown trolley and located several businesses. Students also learned about accessible card and board games, how to mark their own games, which ones are accessible right out of the box, and sources for games that have been adapted to be accessible.

For techniques of daily living, students learned to sweep and mop, clean trash cans, and vacuum. At the end of October, students learned to carve pumpkins, roast pumpkin seeds, prepare a variety

of soups in a small group, set up a buffet, serve themselves from a buffet, and practiced nonvisual dining skills.

Nebraska Business Enterprise Activity Report – Eric Buckwalter

VENDING SITE UPDATE

DHHS – Columbus

The new DHHS office in Columbus is now open. A Crane 186 and a Vend 621 have been installed at this location. NBE currently does not have a Vendor in this area; the site is being subcontracted to Valley Vending Service.

Omaha State Office Building

The Omaha State Office Building has decided not to pursue placing vending machines on the first and third floor. Vending will remain on the second floor only.

Drug Enforcement Administration – Omaha

The Drug Enforcement Administration's new office in north Omaha will have three machines spread across two breakrooms. The bidding process for this site has completed; and an Operator has been chosen to service this site. This site is expected to begin operation in the next several weeks.

GSA – Lincoln/Omaha

NBE is waiting to hear about two other possible locations with the GSA opening in 2022.

State Capital Building

Due to construction, the second floor vending room in the State Capital building will be closed for the foreseeable future. Vending will remain on the first floor.

COVID-19 UPDATE

All vending sites serviced by NBE Operators are open to some degree. Some sites are completely open and all staff are back working in the building. Some sites are at partial capacity due to work from home options and/or construction. Operators have been encouraged to see their current building numbers as their potential 'new normal'.

NBE LICENSEE UPDATE

There are currently 13 licensed vendors operating vending facilities. There is one trainee in the vending program who is operating a facility.

VENDING SITE COMPLAINTS

Vending site complaints this past quarter were in relation to machines being understocked or machines being out of order. NBE Operators were reminded at their quarterly meeting that NCBVI holds all contracts with various facilities, and licensees are representing themselves, other licensees, other blind vendors, and NCBVI statewide.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

New Machines

NBE purchased nearly 60 new machines in late summer. The machines were ordered and have started to arrive at our distributor in Omaha; and have started to be installed at sites across the

state. After these machines are installed NBE will have very few machines that are greater than five years old.

Credit Card Readers

NBE is also working to finish the credit card reader installation process. All applicable machines should have credit card readers installed by the end of the year.

NBE Retreat

In September, NBE held a two day retreat for our Operators via Zoom; out of concern for the Delta Variant of COVID-19. The retreat was well attended and Operators engaged in many wonderful sessions. Guest speakers from NABM, RSVA, Coke, and Vistar presented. NBE staff and the NBE Committee Chair presented sessions as well.

LOOKING AHEAD

NBE continues to look for ways to help Operators maximize their potential earnings while dealing with decreased machine use – due to higher numbers of people working from home.

With new machines being installed, NBE will be placing a high emphasis on clean and well-maintained machines – with the goal of increasing the longevity of our investment.

Business Office Activity Report – Kat Carroll

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

- Updating existing policies and writing new policies in response to the Monitoring visit in September 2021.
- Completed the Federal Fiscal Year End.
- Had a resignation of the Accountant I, Nicole Amen.
- Had a failed search for an Accountant I. This position was part of the State Personnel reclassification effective July 1, 2021 and the combined positions resulted in a drop in starting pay of nearly \$3.50, so applicants were mostly clerical in nature or had no experience.
- Reclassified the Accountant I position to an Accountant II. Interviews are on October 19th so by the board meeting I hope to have a new person on board.
- Continue training Cathie Guida on front desk duties.
- Continue training Suzette Casillas on front desk duties.
- Continue to improve the 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. Present this information to Leadership and Supervisors on a monthly basis to ensure we are planning for the best use of our available funds.
- Work on the budget for the new Federal Fiscal Year
- Work on the RSA 17 quarterly report and the SF-425s due in October, updating the policy. I will have Brandy Harper review the reports due this month due to the vacancy in the Accountant II Position.
- Implement improvements to client supply inventory tracking.

- Work on improving communication between the Business Office team as well as communication between the Business Office and the Field Supervisors.
- Work on Team Building with the Business Office Team as well as throughout the Agency.

Kathy Stephens – Highlights

The Year-End fixed assets inventory completed and sent to Administrative Services before the August 31, 2021 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.

Assisting the NBE Program in the destruction of vending machines as new ones are purchased and installed.

Completed staff CVRCB Certificate for new VR counselor as their application was approved.

Order business cards for new staff as they complete Center training.

Completed registrations for some staff for virtual conferences. (NCSAB and CSAVR to name a few.)

I attended the Diner Advisory Board meeting at the Deterrence Diner with Executive Director Carlos Serván.

Attended the September virtual State Staff meeting via Zoom.