

Nebraska Commission for the Blind
Public Meeting, Friday, July 31, 2020
NCBVI, 4600 Valley Road, Room 4A. Fourth Floor, Lincoln, NE

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; Robert Newman, Vice Chairperson, Omaha; Becky Rieken, Executive Secretary, Dakota City; Kimberly Scherbarth, Designee of the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska, Kearney; Brent Heyen, Lincoln.

Commission staff present: Carlos Serván, Executive Director; Carol Jenkins, Deputy Director-Services; Kat Carroll, Deputy Director-Finance; Nancy Flearl, Omaha District Supervisor; Kathy Stephens, Administrative Assistant. The Center supervisor and staff trainees participated in a portion of the meeting. They are: Greg DeWall, Center supervisor. Staff trainees: Nicole Gothier, Julie Gubbels-Thompson, Aaron Sands and Kelly E. Coleman.

Public present: Barbara Loos, Lincoln; Brad Loos, Lincoln; Jim Jirak, Omaha

The Notice of the Meeting was published in the Lincoln Journal Star, the State Government Calendar, NCBVI Website, NFB Newslines® and Radio Talking Book. The Notice was also sent to ACBN and NFBN. The NCBVI List Serve is currently not working.

A. Approval of the May 2, 2020 public meeting minutes.

Commissioner Heyen moved to approve the Minutes of the May 2, 2020 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Rieken seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

B. Approval of the May 30, 2020 Commissioner Orientation Training Meeting minutes

Commissioner Scherbarth moved to approve the Minutes of the May 30, 2020 Commissioner Orientation Training Meeting. Commissioner Newman seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and all commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

The commissioners and executive director noted that they felt the Commissioner Orientation Training meeting was very beneficial and agreed that it should be continued in the future as new commissioners are appointed to the Board.

Focus Topic: A short description of today's special event; the NCBVI's 20th anniversary celebration. After adjournment, taking part in the celebration program

Director Serván reminded everyone that the creation of NCBVI as a separate agency was because consumers were driven. They believe that blind people should be in charge of their destiny. Consumers have remained to be very involved in the agency. As the director, and a consumer, he came to Nebraska in 1998, two years before NCBVI was created and was able to help push NCBVI becoming a separate agency. It is very important for consumers to have NCBVI be a separate agency for the blind. Today is a day to celebrate the work of consumers to create NCBVI and to maintain it as a separate agency. There were a couple of occasions where it was threatened by the Legislature that NCBVI would be eliminated, but consumers were there to offer support. The combination of the good services that NCBVI provides and the support given by consumers and the commissioners is an example of what a great agency can be across the nation and throughout the world.

Kat Carroll noted that the celebration will begin at 1:00 p.m. with a tour of the Center and the other offices. There will be snacks in the Lincoln District Conference room. Everything is prepackaged in order to be assured that it is safe due to COVID-19. The tours will conclude at 1:50 p.m. and everyone will assemble in Room 4A for the celebration. In-person attendance was limited to 18 people due to the size of the room and social distancing. Many other people will be attending the event virtually via Zoom.

The agenda is as follows:

- 2:00 p.m. **Welcome**
Carlos Serván
Executive Director
Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
- 2:05 p.m. **Proclamation from Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts, 20 Years of NCBVI, 30 years of ADA**
Jason Jackson
Director, Department of Administrative Services
Chief HR Officer, Office of Governor Pete Ricketts
- 2:20 p.m. **100 Years of Rehabilitation in the United States**
Mark Schultz
US Department of Education Acting Assistant Secretary/RSA
Commissioner
- 2:40 p.m. **Why an Independent Consumer Driven Agency for the Blind? - World Class Services for the Blind**
Fred Schroeder
Former RSA Commissioner
President of the World Blind Union
- 3:00 p.m. **Why We Became a Separate Independent Commission, and Why We Should be Partnering with consumers**
Barbara Loos
First Chair of the NCBVI Board of Commissioners
Representing the National Federation of the Blind of Nebraska
- 3:15 p.m. **Where We are Now and What to Expect in the Future**

Mark Bulger
Chair, NCBVI Board of Commissioners
Representing the American Council of the Blind of Nebraska

Kat Carroll noted that the planning for this event began about seven months ago and it was hoped that it could be a large public event and then COVID-19 came along. For the past three or four months the Planning Committee was on hold and they did not know what they would be able to do. Finally, Director Servan had to call it and say that NCBVI would do a very small in-person event and then have others participate via Zoom.

Chairperson Bulger thanked everyone who planned so hard for the event.

Public Comment

Jim Jirak – Jim asked if the NCBVI 20th Anniversary Celebration event will be recorded and posted on the NCBVI website.

Kat Carroll noted that it would be.

Report from the Executive Director

I. Administration

I have continued having conference calls with representative from the Department of Administrative Services (DAS), Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO), Nebraska Technology Commission, and UNL to finalize the process of the new Accessibility Technology Assurance Standards. We have scheduled a meeting for August 24 with the Governor's Policy and Research Office to make sure that we are not talking about going retroactively as it would have State agencies having to expend extra funds.

I also attended a couple of conference calls with the WIOA partners and the WIOA State Board in the last couple of months. RSA approved our portion of the Combined State Plan and the highlight is we are officially off Order of Selection. RSA decided to conduct virtual monitoring and technical assistance with State agencies. These activities will begin in August and may run through the Fall, concluding no later than the end of this calendar year.

I participated in the virtual conferences of the ACB convention, NFB convention, BLAST vendors seminars, and several with the Executive Committee of NCSAB. I work on a sub-committee of NCSAB drafting recommendations on more Pre-Ets flexibilities, which was submitted to RSA at the end of June.

I participated on a panel at the National Association of Blind Rehabilitation Professionals National conference on the future of services for the blind in the USA. I talked about how consumers can partner with State agencies to keep funding to provide quality services for the blind in each State.

I am still working on dealing with COVID-19 issues, making sure that our staff has the flexibility, tools, and information to continue providing services.

We finalized the preparation for the 20th Anniversary of the creation of NCBVI as a separate independent agency, which will take place July 31 from 2:00-4:00 p.m.

Kat has been working on the biennium budget request and I am working on some of the narrative for it. We are not requesting any extra funds other than the cost of living. However, we are requesting to combine the \$40,000 for IL services under 55 with the new senior blind grant for IL. If this request is granted, it would be beneficial to us because we would have flexibility on expending the \$40,000 as it is now hard to expend the exact amount at the end of each fiscal year. This has been the case because we cannot use any Federal dollars to match the \$40,000 State Grant. In addition, the cost of living increases the Unicameral would grant, would also apply to this \$40,000 as an aggregate to the entire Grant.

Kat worked on updating our Cost Allocation Plan and we were asked to send some more documentation by the first week of August. She also continues her work on redesigning financial reports to simplify data entry, ensure better accuracy, and provide the right level of detail for a variety of users. The State Accounting audit was done and they did not find any major issues with our report. This is thanks to the Business Office working diligently on this and the field staff submitting the paperwork.

Kathy has been working on year-end inventory for the technology items that NCBVI has in E1. This is an on-going project that needs to be submitted to DAS in a report. She is also working with TSB to have a GPS system installed on all of our state vehicles. The GPS system will replace the travel logs as we know them. Agencies will only need to keep an internal Purpose of Trip log. We are also working on redesigning our web page to make it more attractive, easier to navigate and more consistent. We are having some information translated into both Spanish and French. Some of this information is already on our web page and other documents are available to be shared with clients whose preferred language is Spanish or French.

Total number of clients served at the end of the period: for OIB was 369, for IL under 55 was 70, for VR was 448.

We had clients get jobs as:

Billing and Posting Clerk, Building Cleaning Worker, Computer Network Support Specialist, Machine Setter/Operator/Tender, Customer Service Representative, Dishwasher, Farmer/Ranchers/Agricultural Manager, Financial Manager, Fine Artist, Food Server-Nonrestaurant, Healthcare Social Worker, Massage Therapists, Media Communicator Worker, Packers and Packagers - Hand, Personal Care Aid, Randolph-Sheppard Operator, Registered Nurse, Rehabilitation Counselor, Special Education Teacher - Kindergarten and Elementary School, and Statistical Assistant.

II. Human Resources

We have one new part time staff who started in June as a Case Aide. Her name is Lori Champion and she is working at the front desk in Lincoln. Five new staff are getting training at the Center. We still have two positions vacant, the orientation counselor in Omaha vacated by Adrienne and the vocational rehabilitation counselor in Lincoln vacated by Eric. State Personnel has declared a hiring freeze, so we have to wait until this is over to advertise and hire for these two positions.

Erin Brandyberry will be on maternity leave through the beginning of October. Julie Thompson, who was hired as an Orientation Counselor I in Wayne, and Kelly E Coleman who has been hired as a Technology Specialist in Lincoln, will finish Center training on July 31. Some staff participated in a teamwork training led by Kris Thaller with My Coaching Dimensions. This training opportunity is available to all agency staff. Field counselors got training on placing clients with multiple disabilities with Bill Santos. Some staff also got diabetic alternatives training with Mary Davis. Some staff took part in a portion of the Deaf Blind Institute training earlier in July. Nancy Flearl attended portion of the National Alliance on Mental Illness virtual conference in July 14 and 15. NBE staff participated on the virtual weekly training provided by the National Association of Blind Entrepreneurs in June.

Field staff provided virtual training to staff trainees and showed their ability to be innovative and it was very impressive. Staff continue to have the opportunity to get some more training remotely on all areas available in the internet and virtual conferences.

III. Field Services:

Staff were given the choice to work from home and we have a combination of some staff teleworking, some staff coming to the office, and some staff doing both. Those who come to their offices are require following CDC guidelines. Center Staff are working in their offices with the staff trainees for this last month.

Field counselors continue to telework and get in touch with clients to provide services and any other support they might need during COVID-19-19. For some clients, especially older blind clients, we are able to see them in person if safety precautions are maintained. We have been able to initiate services for many clients during this time and start meeting some of their initial needs by providing training, ordering items, and shipping or doing no-contact deliveries. For students, counselors are providing guidance and ensuring that they have working technology for their distance learning and other training opportunity during the summer.

Several field staff are doing a great job coordinating Zoom trainings for different transition programs during the summer. On July 6-9 we had Blind and Socially Savvy training. We also partnered with Nebraska VR to provide a virtual job fair. We are contracting with Sky's the Limit to provide the College Workshop virtually on Aug. 28 through Aug. 30. The Power Hours for Pre-Ets students have been a success we had an average of 25 participants twice each week. They talk about independent living skills, self-advocacy, note taking skills, social skills and more. The transition students have really appreciated the opportunity to connect with each other. A Virtual Project Independence was also held in July. Participants were mailed out the materials to complete projects virtually.

The Omaha District has had outreach to businesses (Sodexo, First National Bank, AAA, TD Ameritrade, Embassy Suites, U.S. Cellular, and Mama's Pizza). All these businesses are looking to recruit.

Cristal provided a presentation about NCBVI services over Zoom at the Dawson County Interagency Connections Meeting. District supervisors continue to be involved with local WIOA Boards.

IV. Training Center

Currently we have four students in the apartments from which two students are VR and two students are Older Blind. Students have been preparing their own meals in the apartments. There are currently five staff trainees. Due to COVID-19, there have been no Three-Day Stays and tours have not been scheduled.

As our instructors have shifted to a remote and virtual teaching, guest speakers have been used during instruction. This has included other professionals from across the country, as well as blind individuals who are successfully employed and are using techniques taught in the workplace.

V. Nebraska Business Enterprise

The Nebraska State Building Division contract has been fully executed. Carol Jenkins worked with the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) to finalize negotiation of a flat rate of \$35.00 per month, per rest area for interstate utilities; regardless if the rest area is open or closed. This will save blind vendors more money. We will start running the new Omaha Ambulatory Care Center for the Veterans Affairs on August 1. USSTRATCOM personnel went back to work at 50% capacity at the end of May. Of that 50%, only half are in the building at one time. This means that only 25% of the staff are on-site at one time. USSTRATCOM is now only allowing half of the tables be available for customers to dine in the cafeteria. At this time, the cafeteria is providing limited services. Several NCBVI staff members from the Omaha office and NBE staff have been taking turns to provide support to the cafeteria as they work to restart operations.

Carol Jenkins continues to work with Nebraska Risk Management to get the blind vendors under NCBVI's Worker's Compensation policy to lessen the costs once again for blind vendors. The good news is that Building Division wants to support our program. We are working on installing credit card readers on vending machines as this will increase their sales.

Final remarks:

We continue to face many unknowns under these unusual times. It keeps affecting all our staff, stakeholders, and clients. Our staff have been showing their passion and dedication to the services we provide and came with innovated ways to support each other as well as supporting our clients. We are all committed to continue providing high quality services under the circumstances.

Break

A break was taken at 10:10 a.m. and the meeting resumed at 10:25 a.m.

Report from the Commissioners

Commissioner Newman – reported that he is still involved in several organizations. He is the secretary of the Omaha Chapter of NFB, the President of the NFB Senior Division and the Secretary and Vice President at the National level.

Commissioner Newman is also the President of the Friends of the Commission. This group meets one time every quarter. They are currently working on putting together a grant. They are going to look at changing their focus on how to spend the money that they raise.

Commissioner Scherbarth – reported that she facilitates their large Chapter meeting for the NFB and she is the NFB designee on the Commission Board. The NFB has had its Bell Academy at-home version. She has had the opportunity to mentor a couple of Nebraska children who were in the program. She had the opportunity this past week to talk to some young people she knows through NCBVI. She spoke during a Power Hour event and talked to them a little about what disability services is like at the University or college level. She spoke about different things they need to know about advocating for themselves.

She attended the National NFB convention virtually this past month. As a part of UNK she was able to attend a disability related conference called Association of Higher Education and Disability. This was also a virtual conference. She is also a part of the NFB State Board.

Chairperson Bulger – reported that he serves as the ACB State President. They held their National convention virtually the first part of July. Nationally, ACB is doing a lot of virtual meetings to encourage people to not be in isolation during COVID-19.

Locally, ACB has signed on with a couple of other non-profits like ARC of Nebraska, Nebraska Disability Rights and Nebraska Statewide Independent Living to encourage the Governor to make testing more accessible. They continue to be in contact with their membership to make sure everyone is okay. He also serves as the OAB President. They have only had one meeting this year due to COVID-19. He serves as Vice Chair of the Omaha Rapid Bus Transit Stakeholder. They will start rolling out some new buses in October. They have been working on this project for quite some time.

Commissioner Rieken – reported that the main thing she has done since the last meeting of the Board is to continue to build relationships between her students and NCBVI.

She also recently attended a Zoom webinar on Accessible Technology. As a TBI, she refers to it as Assistive Technology. During the webinar, they discussed changing it to Accessible because the word assistive implies that a person needs assistance.

Brent Heyen – reported that he has been assigned a couple of mentees for the NFB Mentoring Program. A lot of the advocacy that he does regarding blindness is through his daily work with the hotel staff and guests. He is currently unofficially the AGM of two hotels at this time. They had a situation due to COVID-19 where they have had to reduce their staff so they have people strip beds for housekeeping the night before. They had a night auditor who asked his boss if he would be able to do this. Commissioner Heyen stated he then made a video of him stripping a bed while blindfolded. He had also explained that he had been through NCBVI Center training so he knew how to do all of these types of tasks without any vision. Brent noted that when he was promoted to AGM he had to prove himself to others that he worked with.

Newsline® Update

With COVID-19 remaining in the forefront of our lives, NFB Newsline® has continued to find creative ways to provide access to us during this past quarter. The NFB National Convention was

streamed on the NFB Newsline® telephone platform and the convention agenda was also posted to NFB Newsline®. Newsline® also continues to offer breaking news channels, specifically related to COVID-19 news updates. NFB BELL Academy, At-Home Edition lessons are available to BELL families who do not have computer or internet access.

She has left messages with Scott White at the National office regarding some questions. She has noticed that on our March report the total number of subscribers was 2064 and 2068 in April; however, the total number of new subscribers for April was 0. Commissioner Scherbarth stated that Scott White informed her that she should be receiving an email notification each time that we receive a new subscriber that they put on the Newsline® list. In the last few days, we have already had two new applications. Also, if anyone wants to have anyone subscribed to NFB Newsline® and they do not have access to the application on-line, they can contact her and she can add them as long as they have the supporting documentation to show that they qualify for the service. She has ran across some concerns regarding the online application. The application requires an email address and some subscribers do not have email addresses, so the individual who is assisting them with the application must enter an alternate email that does not belong to the subscriber. Additionally, while viewing the subscriber contact information, she noticed, "None found" being entered in the column that lists the local NFB Newsline® call-in number for many subscribers. She is wondering if this may reflect in the percentage of local calls being reported. She was informed that sometimes a subscriber may call the toll free number instead of the local number because they do not have unlimited long distance. Currently, states are being charged a flat rate for long distance calls.

Interestingly, the number of users of the Alexa skill has fluctuated greatly during this past quarter, dropping from 84 in March, to 74 in April, 9 in May, and 21 in June. She stated that there were some technical difficulties in May, but the numbers have not rebounded.

These are some of the highlights from this past quarter. Just a reminder that July's numbers are not available to me until August 1, 2020.

	January	February	March	April	May	June
Number of Subscribers:	2059	2063	2064	2068	2069	2069
New Subscriptions:	5	5	1	0	1	0

Telephone Usage:

Total calls:	869	868	1125	1178	1116	1040
Average call length:	11.21	12.01	11.49	13.6	13.39	14.13
Percent local calls:	34.41	32.31	42.58	49.56	46.29	45.29
Total call minutes:	9744	10424	12922	16023	14944	14698

Online Usage:

Web Sessions:	1327	1009	1115	1322	1222	2845
NFB-NEWSLINE® Mobile Sessions:	300	309	374	401	382	378
NFB-NEWSLINE® Alexa Sessions:	4	22	84	72	9	21
In Your Pocket Deliveries:	1705	1037	1459	1495	1637	1656
NLS DTB Deliveries :	0	0	0	0	0	0
Podable Deliveries:	0	0	0	0	0	0
Email Deliveries:	292	438	520	496	488	474
Total Online Accesses:	3628	2815	3552	3786	3738	5374

Total Content Accesses:

Content Frequency:	10.0 Mins.	10.8 Mins.	8.93 Mins.	8.49 Mins.	8.68 Mins.	8.46 Mins.
Nebraska Newspapers:	3032	3490	5011	3927	4054	3951
Nebraska Local Channels:	43	48	60	53	60	39
Local Weather and Emergency Alerts:	151	165	149	170	171	187
National Newspapers	528	497	639	583	609	775
International Newspapers:	0	0	0	1	0	0
My Newspaper:	48	41	87	69	65	80
Breaking News Online	61	92	66	65	70	73
magazines:	101	63	39	33	45	34
TV Listings				609	528	478

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.

The Client Assistance Program is currently working on one separate case to resolve concerns with the NE Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI). This case is still pending, as CAP has not yet reached resolutions with the client.

New Business

Public Comment

Jim Jirak – Jim asked Commissioner Newman to clarify something he said about the grants for the Commission. Share Fare is experiencing issues with on-going funding because of COVID-19. Many individuals who donated in the past are no longer donating for one reason or another. One of the things that Share Fare learned is that some funders are now providing funding for unique opportunities resulting from COVID-19. Jim noted that perhaps this is something that the Friends of the Commission could look with regards trying to secure funding.

Jim stated that he also wants to clarify a statement made by Chairperson Bulger. He had stated that ACB had signed on over a concern about the Governor making testing accessible. Jim clarified that this is access to COVID-19 testing.

Jim noted that Commissioner Scherbarth stated that there are 2069 subscribers on Newsline®. Jim asked, out of those 2069 how many are active users. Commissioner Scherbarth noted that the information she receives does not show that information; it only shows the total number of subscribers. Commissioner Scherbarth stated that she could find the information if she goes through the entire list and counts the active users, but she has not yet done this.

Vice Chair Newman asked if the total number of subscribers is the number from day one. Does it take into consideration those individuals who may have passed away or moved to a different state. Commissioner Scherbarth noted that these individuals will be included until we go in and make them inactive. Commissioner Scherbarth stated that she will ask for clarification on this.

Discuss a question that came up in our recent new Commissioner orientation- How we might be able to streamline some of the logistics related to updating our Commissioner Thumb drives

Chairperson Bulger noted that during the new Commissioner Orientation in May it was discussed how we could streamline how commissioner files and information is stored on the commissioner thumb drives.

Vice Chair Newman stated that this is a duty that he took over from former commissioner Hansen. He stated that trying to update the thumb drives during the meeting takes his attention away from the meeting and he would like to find a solution. These thumb drives are for commissioner

reference to relevant documents. The majority of what is on the thumb drives is public knowledge. There is one separate folder for confidential items.

Commissioner Heyen suggested getting a Drop Box account or a Google Drive or something similar where we can upload everything up there and then each commissioner can download the information themselves. Vice Chair Newman stated that the commissioners did consider this option at the beginning, but he recalls that there was a reason that this could not be pursued.

Director Serván stated that he will contact former Commissioner Hansen to discuss this as he had already done all the research to come up with the current procedure.

Chairperson Bulger noted that this item will be discussed again during the November 7, 2020 Commission Board meeting.

Officer Elections

Commissioner Rieken moved to elect Commissioner Bulger as Chairperson. There were no additional nominations. Commissioner Bulger accepted the nomination. A roll call vote was taken and commissioners Rieken, Newman, Scherbarth and Heyen voted in favor of the motion. Commissioner Bulger abstained.

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

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

Final Announcements

Saturday, November 7, 2020; Omaha. Focus Topic: Tentative – Science Project.

Since the Science Project will not be taking place at this time due to COVID-19, it was decided to have the Focus Topic be: Surviving COVID-19 – What NCBVI Has Learned and What they will Carry Forward.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:13 a.m.

If you have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda of the November 7, 2020 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

NCBVI Staff Reports

Lincoln District Activity Report – Connie Daly

Julie Thompson, who was hired as an Orientation Counselor I in Wayne, NE and Kelly E Coleman who has been hired as a Technology Specialist will finish center training on July 31. We provided instruction remotely to the staff trainees using Face Time and Zoom. Cane travel was provided in the field while maintaining social distance. I want to thank my team for the time they spent working with staff trainees. It was a daily commitment and their ability to be innovative was very impressive. We are very excited to see them graduate and to start working in the field.

Most of the Lincoln District are continuing to work from home. We are able to see clients in person if safety precautions are maintained.

Our District has been involved in the Zoom trainings that we have had for children and youth. We partnered with Nebraska VR to provide a virtual job fair. We had presenters talk about how to fill out applications and how to disclose your disability. We emailed current job leads. We had over 50 attendees. We are looking at doing a Job club virtually. Clients would be able to come in person if they choose but they could also attend remotely.

We have hired Sky's the Limit to provide the College Workshop virtually on Aug. 28 through Aug. 30. There will be a track for Pre-Ets and a track for non-traditional students.

We hosted a Zoom session on requesting accommodations in college and in work. This led to introducing the Power Hours for Pre-Ets students. They meet twice weekly to talk about different aspects of working and independent living. Again, we have the best team in the world at NCBVI. Counselors have been very creative in developing content that students can participate in. The students have really appreciated the opportunity to connect with each other. When the lesson is completed they are allowed to stay on Zoom and visit.

A Virtual Project Independence is also happening the summer. Participants are mailed out the materials to complete projects virtually.

We had clients get jobs as a Veterinarian, Para educator, Case Aide and Dishwasher. I neglected to mention last quarter that we assisted an individual in getting a job as an Assembler. We had one Work Based Learning Experience for a student that worked as a dispatcher for his family's trucking business. The counselor worked with the student by phone to develop their skills.

Omaha District Activity Report – Nancy Flearl

Most of the staff are spending time in the office and have been since July 6.

I was on the committee working with our American Job Center on its recertification. We voted to recertify and move our recommendation to the Board on July 10.

We have had some excellent outreach to businesses (Sodexo, First National Bank, AAA, TD Ameritrade, Embassy Suites, U.S. Cellular, and Mama's Pizza). All looking to recruit employees and willing to do on the job work training experiences as well as hire.

Tim and Cristal have taken a lead with planning the Employment Summit to be August 25-27.

Tim has also continued to attend partner meetings at Heartland Workforce Solution (HWS). In partnership with HWS and Urban League of Omaha and Latino Center of the Midlands, he assisted in planning and implementing a drive thru job fair held July 15. This was held at Urban League and Center Mall here in Omaha. The highest unemployment rate in Omaha is in East Omaha. Northeast and Southeast areas of the city had 8-11% un-employment or under employment rate. Our business partners appreciate the work that went into recruiting for their openings.

Kelly has been on the planning committee and has assisted in facilitating both the NCBVI Power Hour on Thursday and Project Independence on Wednesday. She is also carrying a large caseload as we still are waiting for the hiring freeze to be lifted to fill the open position here in Omaha.

Kathy has been on the planning committee and facilitating the NCBVI-Work-it Hour on Tuesdays. In May, Kathy worked with Julie Buren to do some testing of AWARE. She has done a lot to support new referrals she had that had lost their job with COVID-19 and connecting with unemployment and navigating the site with JAWS.

Tim, Kathy, Adrienne and I each participated in a day of Social Savvy that was July 6-9, 2020.

Kelly, Eric, Adrienne and I have been assisted for several weeks at Offutt as the cafeteria reopened. We have also assisted in helping the vending site get re-established after being closed for several months.

Larry has been working with getting quotes for equipment for students to have what they need to participate with the various summer training opportunities and to be prepared for school this fall. He is doing training with three people on JAWS and/or Zoom Text remotely on their job. He is assisting with technology for the 20th Anniversary.

Staff Development:

- Some staff have been able to join parts of the consumer conventions this month.
- They all participated in a training with Bill Santos on job development and placement for individuals with significant disabilities in June.
- Some took part in a portion of the Deaf Blind Institute earlier in July.
- National Alliance on Mental Illness have a virtual conference July 14 and 15 and I was able to attend portions of it.

We have worked for Vision Resource Coalition to make sure that any individual that is blind or visually impaired that is struggling during this time of COVID-19 that they can access resources.

All staff is continuing to be very committed and dedicated on staying in contact with all their consumers and they support these various agency programs.

We have a couple of clients that we had assisted with placement in employment but had to leave their jobs due to COVID-19. They have returned to work. We have had several referrals from people that have lost their job as a result of the virus and are looking for new positions. We have a couple of transition students that have started employment. We will be starting a couple of On-the-Job Training opportunities at Offutt. Staff have been out making contacts with employers and they are implementing the training received by Bill Santos.

North Platte District Activity Report – Erin Brandyberry

Networking:

Due to COVID-19-19, Angie reached out to past clients to see how they were doing and as a result mailed out seven applications for services directly related to this outreach effort. Cristal and Ashley developed a connection with a new employer, Sub-Conn, and are working with a client on becoming employed with them. Cristal provided a presentation about NCBVI services over zoom at the Dawson County Interagency Connections Meeting. Cristal, Erin, and Fritz used a team approach to develop a job lead for a client at Walmart under tough circumstances related to COVID-19-19. Fritz virtually attended the North Platte Interagency meeting where he provided an update on NCBVI services. Erin attend EmployNP and Cristal attended EmployKARNY meetings. Erin has attended bi-weekly OIB-TAC Program manager meetings as well as monthly Regional OIB Program manager meetings. Erin participated in the Greater Nebraska Workforce Development Board meeting in May. Erin attended a virtual meeting with the employer Sodexo regarding employment opportunities throughout Nebraska.

Projects:

Fritz, Angie, Cristal, and Erin have spent a large portion of time this quarter providing sleep shade training to our new staff members, Aaron and Ashley. The creative ideas that staff came up with for virtual training and the real-life information that they shared with Ashley and Aaron is invaluable. Cristal has played a significant role in planning the virtual Employment Summit that NCBVI will be hosting in August. Angie is on the committee for the Tuesday Work-It Power-Hour Pre-ETS weekly sessions. She is also on the committee for Project Independence which holds weekly sessions throughout the summer, and also on the NCBVI Anniversary celebration committee. Erin has covered the role Shane held for the Tuesday and Thursday Power-Hour sessions while he is out on leave. Erin researched and communicated with website redesign and search engine optimization companies to learn about improving NCBVI's online appearance.

Training:

All North Platte district staff participated in a teamwork training led by Kris Thaller with My Coaching Dimensions, the Bill Santos Employment training, and the diabetic alternatives training with Mary Davis. Angie has completed the following trainings during this quarter: remote services and training, community outreach/accessible presentations, anatomy and physiology of the eye, how to read the eye report, ethics and self-care, time management-working from home, adult eye conditions, employment outcomes of SSDI beneficiaries, low down on low vision, and children's eye conditions. Fritz completed the following trainings during this quarter: case documentation working with visually impaired, vision & hearing loss, employer attitudes with person with B/VI stats and studies, employment outcomes professional, and soft skills and employability. Cristal attended the Deaf-Blind Summer Institute training. Erin participated in the supervisor's retreat on coaching and teamwork training with Kris Thaller and attended a virtual panel presentation on supported employment workgroups.

Other Information:

All staff have been providing virtual services to clients either via the phone or video conferencing during this time. We have been able to initiate services for many clients during this time and start meeting some of their initial needs by providing training, ordering items, and shipping or doing no-contact deliveries. Aaron Sands will be finishing his sleep shade training experience on July 31,

2020 and Ashley Jackson will be finishing her sleep shade training on August 21, 2020. Erin will be on maternity leave from mid-July through the beginning of October, and gives a special thank you to the supervisor's team and her staff who are covering her duties during this time.

Center Activity Report – Greg DeWall

Currently: Four students in the apartments

Two students are VR

Two Students are Older Blind

There are currently five staff trainees.

Due to COVID-19, there have been no Three Day Stays

Students have been preparing their own meals in the apartments.

Due to COVID-19, there were no commencement meals

One tour with an agency consumer. Due to COVID-19, tours have not been available.

Observations: No observations this quarter.

No volunteer activities due to quarantine and remote learning.

No activities due to quarantine.

Guest Speakers: As our instructors have shifted to a remote and virtual teaching, guest speakers have been used during instruction. This has included other professionals from across the country, as well as blind individuals who are successfully employed and are using techniques taught in the work place.

Center Staff: Due to COVID-19, the Center staff have been challenged with the task of teaching remotely. As expected, each instructor has stepped up, and are keeping students engaged and learning. Center instructors are utilizing resources and being creative in order to keep Center students on a path of learning. By using modern technology and tools, such as zoom and FaceTime, staff are able to meet with students virtually and provide productive lessons. In efforts to keep learning fresh, the Center team has implemented multiple class formats. This involves group teachings, more seminars, long-term assignments, as well as co-teaching and reverse role instruction.

Center Supervisor: Just as the Center instructors have been challenged during the pandemic, so have I. Working purely remotely, for multiple weeks, has caused me to rethink how to motivate staff and keep students engaged. Fortunately, for me, I work with a staff who is as passionate about learning and teaching, so it has made it easier when guidance or direction is necessary. I feel for the most part, morale has remained high with in the Center team. This is also due to the current group of students we have and their commitment to learning. In addition, over the past few months, I have been in regular contact with other Training Center supervisors and directors. These conversations have provided me with ideas for working through the pandemic, as well as keep me motivated with the understanding that NCBVI is working through modern challenges as well as, if not better, than others across the country.

Additional Notes: I noted above that we currently only have four students in the apartments. However, Center staff are reaching out and working with potential students. There are a couple students who would have begun their training by now, had we not been working

remotely. Center staff agreed that it is in the best interest of the consumers who have not yet started center training, to begin acquiring as many skills possible, as well as begin immersing themselves with Center students and staff.

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. We are hoping to be able to invite Nebraska consumers, who are not yet Center students, back into the apartments in the fall.

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 – Carol Jenkins

Vending Sites Update

Nebraska State Building Division

The Nebraska State Building Division contract has been fully executed. Eric Buckwalter conducted a training for relevant NCBVI staff, NBE staff, and the licensees who will be responsible for carrying out the contract. Licensees agreed to a price structure for the machines and it was submitted to the Building Division for review.

Nebraska Department of Transportation

Carol Jenkins worked with the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) to negotiate a flat rate of \$35.00 per month, per rest area for interstate utilities; regardless if the rest area is open or closed. This will save blind vendors more money. Old rates were; \$35.00 for one machine, \$45.00 for two machines, \$65.00 for three machines, and \$80.00 for four machines. The new negotiated rate began in May of 2020.

US StratCom Cafeteria

US StratCom personnel went back to work at 50% capacity at the end of May. Of that 50%, only 50% are in the building at one time. This means that only 25% of the staff are on-site at one time. US StratCom is also not allowing customers to dine in the cafeteria. At this time, the cafeteria is providing limited services. Several NCBVI staff members from the Omaha office and NBE staff have been providing assistance to the cafeteria as they work to restart operations.

Omaha VA Ambulatory Care Center

The new Omaha VA facility is still scheduled to open on August 1, 2020. NBE staff are working to place new vending machines in the building for the grand opening.

NBE Licensee Update

There are currently 14 licensed vendors operating vending facilities in addition to two trainees in the NBE program operating a vending facility. The new trainee will begin training very soon.

Vending Site Complaints

The categories of complaints that have come into NCBVI this quarter have been as follows: vendors not keeping machines clean, having expired products, and having machines not properly

stocked. NBE Vendors were reminded at the quarterly NBE meeting that NCBVI has all of the contracts with the various owners of facilities, and licensees are representing themselves, other licensees, other blind consumers, and NCBVI statewide.

Additional Information

Workers Compensation Group Policy

Carol Jenkins continues to work with Nebraska Risk Management to get the blind vendors under NCBVI's Worker's Compensation policy to once again lessen the costs for blind vendors. The Worker's Comp policy is still in the draft stage of the process where all of the details are being finalized for accuracy. Carol will keep licensees informed as information becomes available.

Operator Agreements and Fixed Assets

NBE staff worked diligently to update the fixed assets statewide for the annual inventory report. Despite difficulties due to COVID-19-19, NBE staff were able to complete the fixed asset inventory report. Dave Robinson will update each licensee's operator agreement, which will include the newly approved Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) operator agreement. These will be distributed for signatures after all new vending machines have been installed.

COVID-19-19 Agency Support

Due to the COVID-19-19 pandemic, NCBVI did not collect set-aside for the months of March, April, May, or June. Beginning with the business month of July 2020, all regular NBE program policies, rules, and guidelines will once again take effect, which includes paying monthly set-aside, NBE group insurance costs, and all other applicable costs/fees. Vendors were informed that all other support needed to be requested through their VR Counselor.

NBE Vendor and NCBVI Staff Training

NCBVI is once again looking at training for blind vendors and some agency staff on vending machines. Eric and Dave were able to spend part of a day in July at Greater America Distributing (GAD) in Omaha receiving training on many of the new vending machines that NBE recently purchased. This training will allow them to make simple repairs, train vendors on preventative maintenance and cleaning, and help them diagnose problems prior to calling for repair service.

Looking Ahead

NCBVI has no plans to expand the NBE Program at this time. However, NCBVI will continue to work on previously agreed to projects for the NBE Program. NCBVI has ordered and/or purchased new vending machines for the NBE Program, many of which have already arrived and are waiting for installation. This installation will occur in mid-July through mid-August. With the purchase of new machines NBE staff will be placing an emphasis on preventative maintenance through having clean machines. Periodic inspections will occur to make sure machines are clean and presentable especially due to COVID-19-19 sanitization requirements. NBE staff will provide training to blind vendors who need trained on proper preventative maintenance and cleaning techniques. NCBVI is in the process of purchasing credit card readers for all new or existing machines where appropriate and allowable. These upgrades are mandatory because research has shown credit card sales account for over half of all sales for vending facilities. NCBVI is also still looking into the accessibility of the Seed Cashless Plus software for inventory management for vending facilities. Two NBE blind vendors have agreed to be part of a pilot project to work with NCBVI to test the Seed Cashless Plus system to see how beneficial it will be for other blind vendors. This pilot project will occur after new vending machines and credit card readers have been installed and training on the software has been provided.

Business Office Activity Report – Kat Carroll

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

- Trained Riley Morton to replace Cheryl Livingston upon her retirement.
- Hired Lori Champion to fill the part time front desk position
- Work on procurement of vending equipment to replace old equipment needing excessive repairs.
- Continue work on redesigning financial reports to simplify data entry, ensure better accuracy, and provide the right level of detail for a variety of users.
- Went through the bid process working with State Building Division to build temporary walls separating Mike and Jeff's offices, and separating another office into an office and a storage room.
- Worked on researching past Program Income balances to determine their origin and use.
- Developed Budget for the Budget Status Report Mid-Biennium SFY 2020.
- Began work on the Budget Request for the Biennium 2021-2023.

Kathy Stephens –

I have working been with Surplus Property to have items from the Lincoln office hauled to State Surplus. I also worked with Surplus Property and NBE to dispose and surplus many vending machines as new ones are being installed.

I have been working on year-end inventory for the technology items that NCBVI has in E1. This is an on-going project. Our year-end inventory report needs to be submitted to DAS Material Division before August 31 each year.

I have been working with USSTRATCOM to get individuals vetted so they can get access to the Offutt base and the STRATCOM building.

I assisted with the NCBVI 20th Anniversary celebration by getting the room location scheduled and getting invitations sent out.

I am working to schedule a Technology Access Assurance Standards meeting in August after the Legislative session adjourns.

I assisted with entering the State Plan into the RSA Portal.

I posted some Spanish and French translations regarding NCBVI services to the NCBVI website.

Working with TSB to have a GPS system installed on all of our state vehicles. The GPS system will replace the travel logs as we know them. Agencies will only need to keep an internal Purpose of Trip log.